

Saratoga Springs City Council approves Police Benevolent Association contract

Published: Wednesday, June 02, 2010

By PATRICK H. DONGES, The Saratogian

SARATOGA SPRINGS — On Tuesday night, the City Council accepted a memorandum of agreement for a new contract between the city and the Saratoga Springs Police Benevolent Association by a vote of 3-2.

The previous contract with the police union was approved in 2006 and expired Jan. 1, 2009. Mayor Scott Johnson indicated that a new contract should be written and in place in a week's time.

Accounts Commissioner John Franck and Finance Commissioner Kenneth Ivins Jr. voted against the agreement, while Johnson, who was bound by collective bargaining law to vote for the agreement, was joined by Public Works Commissioner Anthony "Skip" Scirocco and Public Safety Commissioner Richard Wirth in support of the four-year agreement.

A vote on the contract was tabled by Johnson at a special morning council session on May 24 after concerns regarding the transparency of the vote and the numbers cited by Johnson in his presentation on the contract were raised by Franck and Ivins, respectively.

The contract contains bi-annual increases of 2 percent effective July 1, but no retroactive wage increase. Because the proposed increases would begin mid year, salaries would go up by a net increase of 1 percent for the remainder of this year and 3 percent over the next two years.

Had the contract failed to meet the approval of the council, both the city and the union would've had the option of initiating binding arbitration, a process specific to public safety negotiations that could retroactively set wage increases for two years beginning Jan. 1, 2009, and leave both parties seeking a new contract.

The contract contains measures Johnson said will result in cost savings for the city, including capping the amount of compensation and sick time officers may accumulate, capping annual training hours at 40 per officer and withholding differential payments for educational instruction until the completion of degrees.

The contract will also increase the amount some employees and retirees pay on the department's health insurance premiums, as well as establish a "cafeteria plan" through which employees could retain a portion of their pay before taxes to be used toward health care costs.

Johnson noted Tuesday that if the contract moved to binding arbitration, those measures not concerning wage increases would not be addressed.

"All this means is higher property taxes," said Franck, who went on to say he wasn't sure where the funds for wage increases would come from, especially in light of two other contracts — with City Hall and Public Works employees — that are still being negotiated.

"I had some concerns at the last meeting, and those concerns have not changed," Ivins said. "I think in the long run this is not in the best interest of the taxpayers."

Johnson said he would work with Ivins to address those calculations objected to, some of which he himself was unsure of.

The City Council's next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. June 15 in the council chamber of City Hall.