

ALBERTA UNION OF PROVINCIAL EMPLOYEES

# BARGAINING UPDATE

MARCH 31, 2021

**TOWN OF PONOKA**

LOCAL: 118  
CHAPTER: 004

**ALL EMPLOYEES**  
(except those on IBEW certifications)

## EMPLOYER REJECTS MEDIATOR, OPENS DOOR FOR CONFLICT MEDIATION BEGINS AND ENDS ON THE SAME DAY

Following a meeting with a mediator on March 25, our negotiations committee for the Town of Ponoka is reporting that bargaining has broken down.

The employer is refusing to consider any genuine monetary improvements to our collective agreement, and has asked the mediator to write out of the process—in other words, the employer asked the mediator to leave.

The town claims that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are unable to make any monetary improvements beyond a footwear allowance. They are committing to review benefits, including making an application for a potential employment insurance rebate—as we've suggested from the beginning—but they're not willing to reconvene in mediation once that process is completed, nor are they willing to commit to any concrete process to improve benefits for Town employees. They say they just can't afford to improve our salaries and benefits because of the pandemic.

The employer has not provided us the financial numbers that would prove their claim. Instead, they simply assert that any monetary improvements would lead to layoffs, tax increases, or both. They have not provided financial documentation to prove that those are the only choices available.

They say that we should accept zeros for a two-year contract—a period ending at the end of this year—and then get right into the next round of bargaining. It's a deal with no real monetary improvements, and no advantages for us to accept. And after waiting for such a long time for any kind of response, the fact that they are refusing to even consider our offer is not a productive way to reach a deal that is fair for everyone.

### **What happens now**

Now that the employer has asked the mediator to leave, the legal door is open for labour conflict. Because of this move by the employer, the mediator cannot issue recommendations for a middle ground between our position and the employer's.

We received the mediator's formal letter on March 29, 2021, initiating a 14-day cooling off period before either side could initiate a labour dispute. Once that expires, the legal door is open for either a strike vote or a lockout poll. If either of those votes passes in a majority, the other side must be given a 72-hour notice before a strike or lockout begins. Of course, these are the legal steps to initiate a labour conflict, but that doesn't mean a labour conflict will necessarily happen—just that it becomes possible.

What happens now is up to us, as workers. Our bargaining committee won't make any decisions on action without the support of the membership, so we will reach out to discuss the situation with all members in the coming days and weeks.

So we're at a "take it or leave it" stage, and that's a significant escalation from the employer. We are disappointed that our employer has chosen to negotiate this way, rather than working out a fair and reasonable contract at the bargaining table.

No matter what decision we make, it's important that we do so together, and as a united front of workers.

Please feel free to contact your negotiating team and resource staff using the emails below with any questions, concerns, or feedback.

*(See page 2 for contact information)*



**Alberta Union of Provincial Employees**  
10451 - 170 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5P 4S7  
T: 1-800-232-7284 F: (780) 930-3392  
www.aupe.org

C21097  
AULReP

**TOWN OF PONOKA NEGOTIATING TEAM:**

**Willie Jones** willie8075@yahoo.ca

**Lori Matejka** matejkavl@gmail.com

**Tamara Cameron** huzar@live.com

**AUPE RESOURCE STAFF:**

**Merryn Edwards** Negotiator, m.edwards@aupe.org

**Tracy Noble** Organizer, t.noble@aupe.org

**Jon Milton** Communications, j.milton@aupe.org