

ALBERTA UNION OF PROVINCIAL EMPLOYEES

BARGAINING UPDATE

TOWN OF PONOKA

LOCAL: 118
CHAPTER: 004

ALL EMPLOYEES
(except those on IBEW certifications)

APRIL 30, 2021

BARGAINING COMMITTEE URGES MEMBERS TO VOTE NO EMPLOYER IS PROPOSING A BAD DEAL, LET'S GET BACK TO BARGAINING

As we've all heard by now, the Town of Ponoka is forcing a vote on the employer's latest contract proposal. We know that everyone has a lot of questions, so your bargaining committee has put together this document with everything you need to know.

The first thing to understand is that this is not a strike vote. By voting no, you're not voting to go on strike. The only thing you're voting on is the employer's proposal. A strong, united No vote will encourage the employer to get back to negotiations.

The Town's proposal has no significant monetary improvements for us. That's why your bargaining committee is united in urging you to vote No! Voting this proposal down means that we can get back to the bargaining table and secure a deal that is fair for everyone.

SAFETY FOOTWEAR

Now we're voting on a contract whose only monetary improvement is a safety footwear allowance which can be used every year instead of every two years. And while the employer has said that the footwear allowance will be broad, the actual wording of the contract would allow for the employer to interpret it as only applying to the small number of workers who need safety footwear according to Occupational Health and Safety regulations.

BENEFITS

The employer is also proposing to apply for the Employment Insurance (EI) rebate. Your bargaining committee has been encouraging them to do so from the beginning. But the employer is proposing that the savings from the EI rebate go to

individuals, rather than being pooled, where they can be used more effectively—as your bargaining committee has said from the beginning.

The employer has also committed to a review of our benefits. However, they have not committed to actually implementing changes based on the results of the benefits review. Your bargaining committee is aiming for concrete benefit improvements, like parity with out of scope staff on the health spending account!

WAGES

We understand that the past year has been a difficult one—that applies just as much to us as workers as it does to the Town. But in order to avoid further hardships, our wages need to keep up with the rising cost of living. Our wages get spent on buying necessities in our community, and it keeps our local economy strong. Monetary improvements will make sure that the economic downturn from COVID-19 isn't worse than it needs to be.

The Town claims to be in financial distress, but has not provided the documentation to back up their claims. They've claimed that any improvements to our wages and benefits are impossible without laying people off or raising taxes. We believe that there is room for modest improvements without those steps. We believe that responsible financial stewardship should include compensation that keeps pace with inflation for the people who make the Town run.

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Through this entire process, your bargaining team has been open to hearing what the employer has to say, and working out a deal that takes their needs into consideration. In response to financial and pandemic concerns, we even offered to backload our wage improvements to the end of our next contract, so that the employer would have time to prepare. The Town has ignored our proposals, and instead forced a vote on their proposal, without compromise.

TERM OF THE AGREEMENT

The term that the Town is proposing also doesn't make sense. We have been in bargaining for so long now—our first meeting was over a year ago, in February 2020—that the employer's latest proposal would see our contract end almost as soon as it's in place and get us straight back into bargaining after the agreement expires at the end of 2021. We are asking for a **three-year contract**.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

We have already agreed with the employer on some improvements, including paid domestic violence leave. Although you will see those improvements in the Town's proposal, it's important to know that those improvements are not in jeopardy if we vote this proposal down. Reach out to your bargaining committee members for a summary of proposed changes that we have secured so far.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Members will receive a package in the mail from the Alberta Labour Relations Board. We will keep you posted on when the packages have been mailed out. The package will contain the proposal you are voting on [link to document] along with a ballot to mark yes or no and return in a self-addressed stamped envelope before the deadline. If the majority of those voting vote yes, we will be stuck with the Town's proposal as our collective agreement. However, if the majority vote NO, we can return to bargaining.

Many employers, not just at the Town of Ponoka, are claiming that they cannot afford improvements as a result of COVID-19—and many of those employers are also in bargaining right now. At

the Government of Alberta (GOA), the employer is pushing for rollbacks in their ongoing bargaining, and that has led to a lot of pushback from workers. If those workers are successful in fighting the rollbacks and achieving modest improvements, then their success can also influence what is considered "reasonable" at bargaining tables like ours. By voting no, we're giving ourselves some time to see those results come in.

For now though, the main thing that we need to do is defeat this proposal and get back to negotiations and mediation. The employer has needlessly escalated this situation by forcing this vote, when they could have easily kept going through the mediation process. Instead, the employer asked the mediator to leave on the very first day of mediation.

The best way to work out a contract that is fair is for us to vote no to this proposal. There is nothing stronger than a workforce that is united.

You can get a copy of the proposed contract, as well as a separate listing of changes have already been agreed on, by reaching out to your bargaining committee members. If you would like more information, please don't hesitate to reach out to your bargaining committee with any questions, concerns, or feedback you may have.

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