

MEMBER UPDATE



TOWN OF PONOKA LOCAL 118 CHAPTER 004 - ALL STAFF

Town of Ponoka employees request a fair contract from council

Negotiating process to go to mediation May 30

Employees at the Town of Ponoka describe the Town's latest contract proposal as "disrespectful".

Following a drawn-out negotiating process, which has dragged on for the past two and a half years, the Town is offering the employees a five-year contract with two years of zero salary increases followed by one per cent per year for three years.

"It's just disrespectful," says Bonnie Gostola, vice president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, which represents workers at the Town of Ponoka. "Many of these workers have been with the Town of Ponoka for a long time. Is this how we thank them?"

Town employees attended the last Town Council meeting, which occurred on May 10, to raise concerns with the Council about bargaining. AUPE Vice-President Bonnie Gostola was also present.

When employees attempted to raise concerns during the scheduled public forum period, the town's mayor refused to allow them to speak, saying that employees needed to respect the bargaining process.

"What's really disappointing, for me, is that members of the public, who are also employees for the Town of Ponoka, did not get the opportunity to address council as a whole to really put their concerns on the table," Gostola told the Ponoka News following the council meeting. "We're really concerned that bargaining is at a standstill."

"These are also members of the community and I think that in public forum they should have the right to speak out to what they think the problem is with the bargaining process in this community."

"They're only asking for a fair deal. They're only asking for reasonable compensation for the work that they've done. It's time to start respecting the employees that have kept this community running."

"The Town has raised taxes and utility costs, which their employees also have to pay, in the midst of runaway inflation driving up the cost of living" says Gostola. "If wages don't keep up, these workers will struggle to make ends meet."

The Town of Ponoka is also refusing increases to benefits, while employees are asking for improvements to put them closer to parity with managers, whose benefits packages sometimes double those of the employees.

"Enough is enough. It's time for the Town to settle a fair contract for their employees," Gostola says. "They have worked hard to keep Ponoka running during the pandemic, and they deserve recognition."

Town of Ponoka employees will be entering into mediation with the Town to break the impasse. The next meeting is scheduled for May 30.

"We do hope with the mediation that they're able to come to an agreement that will work for all the employees," Gostola told the Ponoka News.

"Again, it's about fair benefits and financial compensation that really does meet the standard of what other communities this size are paying their employees and just the respect that I think they've earned over the past two years."