

April 2008

Firefighters' Contract Update

Union delaying tactics continue with no progress made

The process to reach a final contract with the Boston firefighters is like the Energizer Bunny[®], it keeps going and going with no end in sight. Even when impasse was reached and the state Joint Labor-Management Committee (JLMC) finally accepted jurisdiction, the process keeps going and going despite its purpose to reach a final resolution in a reasonable time. That is due to delaying tactics of the firefighters' union (Local 718) and an unwillingness of the JLMC to move the process forward to reach timely resolution.

The process with the JLMC began on August 1, 2007 with the City's petition to take jurisdiction of the dispute after over 20 months of unproductive negotiations. The JLMC accepted jurisdiction of the dispute on February 7, 2008, six months later even though its rules require it to make a decision within 30 days of receiving the petition. Since February 7, the JLMC has scheduled only two mediation sessions in a two-month period (February 27 and April 30), neither of which have helped bring the parties closer to agreement. At its next meeting on May 8, the JLMC could take up a motion that would lead to binding arbitration.

It is clear from statements made at JLMC meetings that Local 718 will take whatever steps it can to prevent the JLMC from including drug and alcohol testing in mediation and certainly binding arbitration proceedings. That issue Local 718 officials

want kept outside this process with a hope to negotiate directly with the Mayor for a higher salary increase.

However, drug and alcohol testing is only one of several issues that should be addressed in this contract. The last firefighters' contract in 2004 was an arbitration decision accepted by the union on the night of the DNC delegation parties and it only addressed salary and paid detail compensation issues. Thus, it has been seven years since there have been any language changes to improve Fire Department operations. The environment is much different since 2004 and other changes that should be included in the next contract include:

- Temporary promotion policy (acting out of grade) and the shift swapping practice
- Sick leave control
- Vehicle maintenance civilianization
- Modified (light) duty control
- The City's new health insurance agreement negotiated with other unions
- Fire Review Panel's recommendations

Any contract decision by negotiations or the JLMC must recognize the financial limitations facing Boston and keep salary increases consistent with the 14% for the police contracts if meaningful language changes are included in the contract beyond drug and alcohol testing.