

CITY OF WAUWATOSA

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EMPLOYEE RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, July 29, 2003
Council Chambers

PRESENT: Alds. Casey, Heins, Jenkins, Kopischke, Stepaniak – 5

ALSO PRESENT: Ald. Ecks; Ald. Sullivan; T. Wontorek City Admin.; B. Aldana, Asst. City Atty.; M. Brown, Personnel Dir.; C. Thomas, Payroll and Benefits Mgr.; W. Tarman-Ramcheck, Public Works Prog. Analyst; Sgt. Chris Fox, Police; J. Schwab, Elec. Insp. Bldg.;

Ald. Jenkins as Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Amendments to Ordinance Sections 2.52.070, 2.52.071, 2.58.120 and 2.58.125 pertaining to eligibility for health and dental benefits

Ms. Aldana said the sections that were referenced pertain to 2 groups of non-represented employees. Sections 2.52.070 and 2.52.071 refer to non-represented employees other than police and fire department supervisors. Sections 2.58.120 and 2.58.125 pertain specifically to police and fire department supervisors. She said some of the revisions that would have been made to the portion pertaining to the police and fire department supervisors have not been made. She asked that the committee hold the amendments for adoption so the revisions can be made to those sections.

Moved by Ald. Stepaniak, seconded by Ald. Heins to hold the amendments for adoption until the next meeting – 5

Amendment to Ordinance Section 2.36.060 (E) regarding authorization to hire a health officer with qualifications for a Level II local health department

Ald. Jenkins said the purpose of this amendment was to increase the pool of candidates for this position. Ald. Heins asked if this amendment affected the cooperative agreement with West Allis. Mr. Brown said the amendment was needed to be able to fill the Health Officer position and would not affect the cooperative agreement.

Ms. Aldana said a better way to draft the amendment would be to say the qualifications should be “at least” a Level II Health Officer. This leaves the position open to either a Level II or a Level III candidate, but the lowest requirement would be for a Level II. She said the language regarding the probationary period could be removed because one year is the standard probationary period.

Moved by Ald. Kopischke, seconded by Ald. Casey to recommend adoption of the amendment to Ordinance Section 2.36.060 adding the words “at least” with regard to the requirement for a Level II Health Officer --

Ald. Sullivan said he was speaking as the aldermanic representative to the Board of Health. This issue was discussed at their recent meeting. The members of the board expressed deep concern about the consideration of a Level II Health Officer candidate. He read a letter from Judy Miller, Dean of Nursing at Marquette University. In the letter she stated that she has been a member of the Board of Health since 1994. In that time she has seen an increase in the need for public health department services. She cited the e-coli outbreaks, the reappearance of

Tuberculosis, elder care needs, maternal/child needs, sanitation threats and approximately 30 new disease carrying agents including Monkey Pox, Lyme Disease, Legionnaire's Disease, West Nile Virus, Hepatitis C, AIDS, Ebola, Chronic Wasting Disease, Hantavirus, etc. She expressed deep concern that a Level II Health Officer would not have the knowledge to procure grants and external funding, the leadership, the ability to advocate for the citizens, and the competence in fiscal management that a person with a graduate degree would have. She urged the committee to retain the requirement for a Level III Health Officer and added that lowering standards to fill a position is not the answer. She mentioned that with some flexibility, the current Health Officer could remain in her position and continue to move the health department forward.

Mr. Wontorek said the qualification for the candidate for this position has to do with the number of academic hours and experience. The goal is to try to fill the position with a Level II Health Officer and have that person upgrade to a Level III. He noted that the city's health department has been operating as a Level II health department and has still gained some important achievements. Ald. Sullivan pointed out that the health department has been operating as a Level II, but the accomplishments have come with a Level III Health Officer.

Mr. Brown said that after advertising on two national internet sites and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel they have still had difficulty finding candidates for the position. Ald. Kopsichke asked if contacts through the Board of Health had been utilized. Ald. Sullivan added that this is a specialized position and the city may have more success finding candidates through contact with people who are in those positions. Ald. Kopsichke suggested that the city contact experts in the field as well as advertise for the position.

Ald. Stepaniak said Ald. Sullivan is implying that the city is taking a step back in considered Level II Health Officer candidates, but Mr. Wontorek is saying that the city is at a Level II and would like to make progress to become a Level III health department. He did not see that anyone was rushing to take a step back. He suggested the Board of Health, and the personnel and administration departments discuss a way to identify the desired outcome and to bring this back to the committee.

Ald. Casey said he was intrigued by the sentence regarding the possibility of the current Health Officer's continued work with the department. He said he was not aware that Dr. Kreuser was considering other options other than resignation. Mr. Wontorek said he had some discussions with Dr. Kreuser, in which she indicated that she is still weighing her options.

Ald. Casey said that all the committee is saying is that accepting candidates at Level II and then having them advance to Level III does not seem to be a problem. Dr. Kreuser has done a tremendous job and we hope we can come close to keeping the health department on the level it is tracking.

Moved by Ald. Heins, seconded by Ald. Stepaniak to hold the item until the next meeting for further clarification on the status of the health officer position and joint cooperation with other cities --

Ald. Jenkins said he was not nervous about hiring a person at a Level II, but he was more nervous about only pursuing a Level III and not having enough candidates.

Vote on the motion was Ayes: 5

Employee Council

Mr. Wontorek gave a brief report on the history of the Employee Council which was formed in 1989 by City Administrator Gary Hamburg. He said the enabling directive of the council was to improve communications, minimize misunderstandings, provide feedback, and discuss suggestions and potential problems. He proposed

working with the acting chair of the council to revise the enabling directive and establish a process to legitimize the Employee Council's existence. He hoped that this process could be completed so that new elections could take place in the fall.

It was the consensus of the committee to support the City Administrator's proposal.

Health plan contributions and benefit changes for non-represented employees and newly hired or promoted non-represented employees

Mr. Brown said the City Administrator had originally provided the committee with an update on the proposal regarding health plan contributions and benefit changes for non-represented and newly hired or promoted non-represented employees. The City Administrator's suggestion had been that the non-represented employees pay the difference between the HMO and BSI insurance plans. That plan has been replaced with a proposal for a 5% contribution in 2004 and a 10% contribution in 2005.

Ald. Casey apologized for a misstatement he had made during the July 8th meeting about non-represented employees having been informed about the proposed changes in benefits. He had forgotten that the last time the committee discussed this issue, it was in closed session and not discussed in public.

Mr. Tarman-Ramcheck, Employee Council chair, read a memo to the committee in which he objected to the recommendations made by Mr. Wontorek and expressed his reservations about the nature of the recommendations themselves. He and other employees have had no time or opportunity to analyze or provide input on the recommendations. In a recent letter addressed to the Wauwatosa Peace Officers Association, Mr. Wontorek invited the represented employees to participate in "Health Benefits 101". This would be an information sharing and discussion session proposed for the fall. He said it is the Employee Council's expectation that the "Health Benefits 101" will be assembled and operated as the previous health benefits meetings were from 1996 through 1998. The Employee Council realizes the importance of health care issues in these strenuous budget times, and they stand ready to participate in providing a thorough analysis of options that will offer credible and real savings to the city.

Sgt. Chris Fox, Chair of Police Supervisors Association, concurred with Mr. Tarman-Ramcheck saying he also was not consulted. He wanted to clarify a statement from the minutes of the last meeting regarding former health benefit negotiations. He said it was the city that pulled out of the negotiations at the last minute not the association. He expressed his frustration at getting little or no information back from several open records requests. The employees can't be expected to make recommendations if they can't get any information. They will continue submitting the requests. If there is a fee, the association is willing to pay it. He rebutted some of the statements made by the committee and Mr. Wontorek. The committee made a statement at the last meeting in which they denied that asking non-represented employees to participate in health benefit contributions first was meant to be a bargaining ploy for later union negotiations. He pointed out that Mr. Wontorek indicated in a recent memo that this proposal would have an impact on union negotiations. This conflicting message does not engender any positive feelings from people who are being asked to give up a significant portion of their income. The plan that is being presented should be required of all employees not just the non-represented. He asked why non-represented employees were not being offered a chance to attend "Health Benefits 101" while it is being offered to the represented employees. He said there has been a history of non-represented employees being paid at a different rate from represented employees. He distributed a chart with information from the Carlson Dettman study that illustrated the pay compression analysis. He said in the past, some of the supervisors had been paid the same or even less than some top paid represented employees. The Carlson Dettman study formulated a plan to provide increases in the pay spread until 2005 to alleviate the pay compression. Those increases will diminish if non-represented employees have their wages taken away to go to health care. He said it would not be surprising for the unions to say they will hold off on wage increases in order to hold onto their health benefits. He expressed concern that when the across-the-board pay increases happen, the non-represented

employees will get zero percent if the represented employees get zero percent. In this case the salary levels proposed for 2005 will not be achieved. He said the problem can't be solved on the backs of the non-represented employees.

Sgt. Weiss said it was an unfair burden put on 20% of the employees. Any past settlements made by the unions have been passed onto the non-represented employees.

Mr. Wontorek said Mr. Tarman-Ramcheck's memo indicated that it was a one-way conversation between them. He said if the unions indicated a willingness to participate in "Health Benefits 101" the non-represented employees would certainly be included. With regard to the open records request, he said a lot of the information may be historical and not readily available from BSI. He recommended that he and Mr. Tarman-Ramcheck meet more often.

Ms. Thomas said she gave the people making the open records request all the information she had. She said some of the information they were asking for could only come from BSI.

Ald. Jenkins said something needs to be done. He didn't think that any plan needed to be imposed if the groups could work together. Whether this is 20% of employees or not he felt that people have some options in having control over their health care.

Ald. Kopischke said there seems to be a number of communication issues. The non-represented and represented employees should have been brought into this process earlier. He urged increased communication and a substantive exchange of ideas. He noted that many companies impose health care changes without asking for input from their employees. Another issue that needed to be discussed is that health care contributions are done for many reasons. One is to bring in money; another is to modify behavior. He thought the concept of discouraging the more expensive plan should be kept. He recommended holding the item for more communication.

Moved by Ald. Kopischke, seconded by Ald. Stepaniak to hold the discussion of changes in healthcare benefits until September 9th for more communication and exchange of ideas from all sides --

Ald. Stepaniak said he was in favor of as much constructive input as possible from all sides. He was concerned about the dynamic of the meeting in that there were more accusations than ideas expressed. He encouraged the parties involved to dialog and come back with constructive options.

Ald. Casey agreed with Ald. Stepaniak's comments saying something has to give. He said there are few options in this budget. The city is not going to make up the revenue to keep functioning as in the past. There needs to be more money saved or the city will have to reduce personnel. He said they would like to do this with the minimum amount of pain. The dialog process can start on September 9th.

Vote on the motion was Ayes: 5

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk
City of Wauwatosa

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