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## Town unions say they can't afford more concessions

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Journal Inquirer

Published: Monday, April 12, 2010 12:19 PM EDT

MANCHESTER — Town union members say they can't afford givebacks this year, and that the Board of Directors should look elsewhere to fill budget gaps.

Two letters were sent to Town Manager Scott Shanley on Friday, one from the local chapter of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and the second from the union representing town supervisory and residual units of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001.

Both said their members were aware that municipal governments are facing tough financial times, but that they've made sacrifices in the past and will not engage in further discussions regarding concessions.

Union members say they didn't make the decision lightly.

"We reached this overwhelming consensus based on many factors," Thomas Stough, president of AFSCME Local 991, said. "We are concerned that absent long-range planning, the town intends to keep coming to us year after year, with no end in sight. And we feel the residents deserve a full accounting of costs not associated with labor contracts, such as contracts for outside goods and services, use of consultants, etc."

Union members and unaffiliated staffers unanimously decided to give up their raises last year to prevent layoffs and cuts to services, saving roughly \$350,000. They note that they've made similar concessions in the past, most recently in 1991 and 2002.

"We made clear that our members understand the challenges facing the administration," James Davis, Manchester zoning enforcement officer and president of the residual unit, said. "All families are all struggling in this economy. We want to be sure the sacrifices we made less than a year ago are considered in any budget plans going forward."

Concessions that have been made over the years include forgoing raises and vacations, staff reductions, higher contributions for insurance premiums, elimination of longevity pay, multiple furlough days on two occasions, and elimination of a pension program in favor of matching funds for Individual Retirement Accounts for employees hired in the last six years.

Over the last month Shanley and the Board of Directors have been in discussions with union officials looking again for concessions to help balance the budget.

Mayor Louis A. Spadaccini said the process continues.

"We understand and we're very grateful for the past sacrifices, but we're trying to balance the budget in a very difficult time," Spadaccini said. "We're very appreciative of what they've done in the past, and we're hopeful we can come to some terms that are agreeable to everybody."

Shanley, who praises town employees for past sacrifices, said this time town officials are looking for the "equivalent" of six months of no pay increase and one furlough day.

"We'll continue to discuss the situation and how we need to meet the budget requirements we have — we have some flexibility in how we get there," Shanley said.

"I know that it's difficult and that there is no master plan — I share that frustration that there is nothing on the state level," he said.

Shanley said that managers and directors work continually to find savings and have saved millions from renegotiated electrical contracts to collections from insurance companies for paramedic service to the suspension of travel.

Shanley, School Superintendent Kathleen Ouellette, and three school department heads also gave up their pay raises last year.

But school administrators — including principals and vice principals — never made concessions last year, and are receiving raises of 2.75 percent under their contract.

Shanley said he is well aware of that, but is grateful to the town's 633 teachers who will not receive a raise this year.

Teachers also won't get a step increase in the 2010-11 school year, but they'll receive pay increases of 2.5 percent in each of the following two years under a contract ratified last fall.

But the "key is sustainability — not just one time or a blip for one year, but to manage for the long term, and our employees have consistently been a part of it," Shanley said. "I don't disagree with their sentiments, but I have a responsibility to balance employee costs with tax increases and service level costs, and I think we're doing a good job of it."

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