

Negotiations Update

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Negotiators for AEA and the school district have held six full-day sessions to date. There are fifty-four proposals under consideration. Of that number, 10 have been resolved either through tentative agreement or withdrawal.

Loose Lips Continue at 70 N. Broadway

We reported in the last edition of the **Notes** that we asked the board negotiating team to ask the superintendent to stop speaking to the media about negotiations proposals. It appears the message was delivered, as **David James** made no comments about salaries, fringe benefits and negotiations in last week's Beacon article on budget cuts and the district's Five Year Spending Forecast. Apparently, though, the message wasn't communicated to board members. President **Jason Haas**, assuming reporter **John Higgins** quoted him accurately, suggested the board would like to wait for negotiations to conclude before deciding how many mills the levy should be. "A lot of that (setting the millage) depends on what we get in negotiations, particularly on health care concessions." Haas offered that contracts expire at the end of June and that he doesn't want it (the millage decision), "to drag out much past that." It is frightening that the titular leader of the school district would make such a public announcement. Regardless of the degree to which belt tightening is necessary, Haas' comments are ill-timed, thoughtless and inexcusable. In our opinion, his words hurt the levy effort more than help, as no level of sacrifice will satisfy some voters. He's opened the door for the public to oppose the levy because the millage is too high because employees did not give back enough. No board in our memory has ever delayed setting millage on a levy request until after it saw what it "got" in negotiations, and with good reason. Equally as frightening is Haas' lack of statesmanship as president of the school board; what he hopes to gain by essentially pitting the public against his employees escapes us, particularly when he and other district leaders expect employees to play a critical role in

the levy campaign.

In addition to not getting the message about speaking to the media about negotiations, any thoughts Haas may be harboring about a settlement close to the contract expiration date further demonstrates a lack of communication between the board and its negotiators. Frankly, there is no reason to expect talks to conclude around June 30th or even within the next several weeks. The next negotiating session is scheduled for June 21st, and with over 40 unresolved issues, we're not betting a buck things will be settled by the start of the new school year.

Offensive Wage, Benefit Proposal

Typically, when we negotiate contracts during times of financial stress or uncertainty, and particularly when there are few or no funds available for a compensation package, there has been mutual recognition between the parties that a long-term contract just doesn't make sense. The board's current wage and fringe benefit proposal ignores that history. They have offered a true salary freeze for the next three years...no across the board increases and no step or longevity increases. (The proposal to freeze step increases puzzles us as the cost of such increases is already in the Treasurer's spending plan.) We're not sure if the board has consulted a psychic, has availed itself of a Ouija board or is just trying to use the immediate financial conditions to its advantage, but we have no idea what the landscape will look like six months from now, let alone three years hence. That's why we're reluctant to seriously consider a long-term contract. On the fringe benefit side, they've asked for \$10 million in health care give-backs. That request has at times been firm and at other times not so

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Benefits

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firm. Whether the “not so firm” number is \$9.99 million or \$5 million has yet to be discussed. The Health Benefits Advisory Committee may, as it has in each of the last two contracts, determine levels of health care coverage. Whether the group does or doesn’t depends largely on whether or not there is a common agreement among the employee unions and the board that coverage should be changed and the amount of savings to the board any changes should generate. AEA has yet to submit a wage and fringe benefit proposal. We will do so after we have had an opportunity to review and digest the Five Year Forecast adopted by the board last week and once a decision is made on how the health care coverage will be addressed.

The board has submitted a number of non-cost proposals seeking to modify contract language that has been in place—in some cases—for decades, and that neither party has sought to change over the years. The best example is their proposal to add fifteen minutes to the elementary teacher workday. The board wishes to make this change in the interest, it says, of equity. (The secondary teacher workday is presently 15 minutes longer.) All talk of equity vanishes, however, when we suggest true equity by giving elementary teachers five planning and conference periods per week, a forty minute lunch period and, as applies to a majority of secondary teachers, only three preparations per week to go along with the additional 15 minutes. With the challenges the district faces going forward, we can’t imagine why the board would bother to propose changes to language that is not broken, and that if included in a new Agreement would serve only to alienate the workforce at a time when working together is urgently needed.

We will be publishing Updates as necessary during the summer recess. We urge all members to provide their home email address to their Building Rep. Summer publications will be sent electronically via BR’s.

DON’T FORGET TO JOIN US THIS THURSDAY FOR
A YEAR-END CELEBRATION AT THE FOP LODGE
2610 LEY DRIVE OFF WATERLOO BETWEEN
MANCHESTER AND MAIN – 4: 00 P.M.

MEET THE SUMMIT COUNTY CANDIDATES FOR THE
OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEE YOU THERE!

Negotiations FAQ’s

As we head into the summer recess, negotiations with the board will continue. Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions from members.

Q. When does our contract expire?

A. June 30, 2012.

Q. What happens when the contract expires?

A. We continue working under the old contract.

Q. What happens to my health benefits?

A. They remain the same unless changed through negotiations.

Q. What happens if we do not reach agreement with the board?

A. Unresolved issues will be settled through a process called fact-finding.

Q. What is fact-finding?

A. Fact-finding is a process in which both sides present unresolved issues to a neutral third party. The neutral then recommends a settlement.

Q. Do both sides have to accept the recommendation?

A. No. Either or both sides may reject the fact-finder’s report. If both sides accept the recommendations, they become part of a new contract.

Q. What happens if either side rejects the fact-finder’s recommendations?

A. Mediation will take place.

Q. Is a settlement possible without going to fact-finding?

A. Yes.

Q. Are we going to go on strike?

A. It is premature to talk about going on strike. A work stoppage is possible anytime a contract is being renegotiated. Before a decision to strike would be considered, the parties must fail, fact-finding must fail and mediation must fail.

Q. Who decides whether or not we go on strike?

A. Before any decision to strike or, for that matter, to ratify an Agreement, the Negotiating Team must make a recommendation to the membership. A decision to ratify a contract or to issue a strike notification can only be made by a vote of the membership at a general membership meeting.