



Sept 19, 2018

Dear Aldermen/School Committee Members:

I write on behalf of the Somerville Municipal Employees Association (SMEA) to update you on the status of Unit A negotiations (bargaining unit that includes school nurses). I do so at this time because the SMEA is concerned that the Alderman understand that SMEA has been bargaining in good faith in Unit A negotiations, but has been stymied by the City having submitted the negotiations to mediation, which, predictably will cause a delay in negotiations, and by the City's relatively uncompromising, staunch bargaining positions.

On May 22, 2018, the Unit A School Nurses and I attended a public hearing regarding the Mayor's executive order to transfer the school nurses under the direction of the school committee. The SMEA was surprised that it was never contacted by the City to discuss this very important matter prior to the hearing, nor was SMEA given an opportunity to even negotiate about the order as required by the state collective bargaining law, Chapter 150E.

During the public meeting the school nurses voiced support SMEA as their bargaining agent and stated that they want to remain part of SMEA-Unit A. During the hearing I stated that SMEA the agreed that the City and SMEA must do all that we can to support our school nurses and prevent a mass exodus. Our union attorney, also in attendance, provided a salary chart to the BOA showing there was, and still is, a stark difference in wages between our school nurses and the wages of school nurses in other communities. As we approach a new school year, I believe it is my responsibility to keep you informed of our past and current negotiations since the public hearing.

The school nurses comprise approximately half of the 38 members of Unit A bargaining unit. The SMEA and City bargaining teams met on several occasions over the summer. SMEA did not take the opportunity to negotiate a Unit A contract lightly. As President, I even came back in middle of my vacation on August 3rd and left my family for a couple days to meet with the City in these negotiations. The SMEA hoped that we may have been able to make a deal happen as we made a very strong counter offer in both economic concessions and language sought by the City to get it done. That did not come to fruition.

There was another meeting scheduled for August 14th so the City could evaluate our offer and make counter proposals. Although based on the history of negotiations to date we were unsure that the City would change its position, the SMEA bargaining committee nonetheless met again with the City. The City's responses to SMEA's August 3rd contract concessions were extremely disappointing, as the SMEA bargaining committee saw very little upward movement in economics and no further flexibility on the language issues sought by the City. To us, the City's responses were not those of an employer that was motivated to close a deal, but rather an employer that is prolonging negotiations unreasonably.

In the above context, SMEA gave the City a very strong message that we would work hard to reach a Unit A contract before the school year began. However, that did not happen and SMEA is very frustrated that we are still without a contract for our Unit A members.

In addition, as suggested in my introduction, the City has exacerbated the delay by now having filed for mediation. Filing for mediation at this juncture has proven counterproductive in the Unit A negotiations and will cause further delay.

As an overarching consideration, I would also direct the BOA's attention to this: Somerville workers received 4 consecutive years of 0% raises from 2004-2007. We are aware of no other community whose workforce endured such wage stagnation. Consequently, over the past decade not only the nurses, but the entire SMEA has seen a sharp decline in our salaries when compared with the salaries of other comparable communities in comparable jobs. This decline has eroded our weekly pay and caused both nurses and other members of Units A and B to leave for work in other communities. Notwithstanding in my statement to the Board at the public hearing, the City is simply doing far too little to stop the flight of nurses and other workers out of Somerville.

The SMEA and City now have mediation scheduled through the Department of Labor Relations for Sept 28th. Between the date of this communication to you and September 28th, SMEA hopes that every member of the Board of Aldermen will telephone or e-mail the Mayor and urge him in the strongest terms to offer compromise rather than confrontation. The public health crisis and the flight of union workers from Somerville were not created by SMEA, but rather by years of wage stagnation. The time to provide a meaningful fix is now.

Please feel free to contact me with and responses, comments or questions.

Thank you,

Edward Halloran
SMEA President

617-335-1294

James Roderick
SMEA Vice President

"In Unity there is Strength"