



MEDIA RELEASE

December 17, 2021

On Monday, December 13th, the Union received a proposal from the Strathcona Regional District (SRD) following the special meeting of the Strathcona Gardens Commission and SRD Staff. The meeting attendees consisted of Brenda Leigh - Councillor, Andy Adams - Campbell River Mayor, Tom Yates, Ron Kerr, Robin Kentrop, Laurie Gage, Dave Leitch - CAO, and a few others, and was held on Friday, December 10th.

Following that meeting, the Strathcona Regional District negotiator emailed an offer stating the Union had until 5 pm that day to get back to them. Their offer, which was very close to their last offer that the USW members had previously voted down, included a signing bonus pending ratification of \$750. That bonus really excluded some of the employees, as it stated that it is to be prorated for part-time members for the year 2021 in which time most of the workers in the world were isolated at home. This offer, which was very similar to the one that the USW members already voted down once and then took a strike vote resulting in a 100% in favour to go out on strike for.

The Union then responded to the SRD with a reasonable counteroffer of the Cost of Living for 2021 which is currently at 3.5% and the subsequent years at 2%, 2%, 2.25% or the cost of living, whichever is greater. The USW has lowered the dollar value to fifty (50) cents for years 2022 and 2023 lowered the value to fifty (50) cents for two departments in order to bridge a gap where some of our members have fallen so far behind that their wage is getting close to the minimum wage.

Instead of continuing to negotiate, the employer responded back saying they do not agree with the Union's offer as it is out of line with municipal settlements. Shelley Siemens the Business Agent for the USW members *stated, "This was very disappointing to our members who thought that the Commissioners and the Corporate Staff at the SRD were going to take them seriously. It is no secret that we are living in an inflated economy as we have never experienced before. COVID-19 and the Cost of Living is at an all-time high and contract negotiations going forward need to change to reflect the current economy that we are living in. Compared to a mandate that was pre- COVID-19, is not a realistic mandate as it does not reflect the current economic crisis we are all facing. Management personnel themselves earned in some cases between 13.53% percent to as high as 48% increases from 2018- 2019. Combined equating from 19.12% to a colossal 50.67% percent from 2018 to 2020 and this is when the Cost of Living was not inflated as it is today. To come out publicly and say that their employees now do not deserve a provision in their contract to protect against inflation when they, themselves, have earned a higher percentage with one increasing by thirty-nine thousand per year, is absolute hypocrisy".*

The Strathcona Regional District has now sent in a letter to Harry Bains - Minister of Labour, requesting the Minister to force the Union to make their members vote on the SRD's offer as a final offer vote which is very close to the one the USW members voted in favour to strike for by 100%.

The Union does not agree that the SRD, or any employer for that matter, should be able to just contact the government when they do not want to continue to bargain a fair contract with the Unions, and

especially not when the Union is already out on an active strike. The SRD needs to get back to the table and find a fair offer that their employees can ratify according to their rights as per the BC Labour Code.

Siemens went on to say, *“Our Local Union is very in tune with our members and in constant communication daily. We know our members, and our members are aware of the SRD’s offer, and they have sent the Union back with a clear mandate that they are not interested in accepting the employer’s last offer that was for sale for a \$750 signing bonus. Our members are serious about exercising their right to fair and free collective bargaining and this type of tactic is just more of the same deflect and stall tactic from these elected officials. Wasting everyone’s time including the communities who should be inside enjoying their recreation facility during the holidays that they pay taxes on”*.

Again, the USW Bargaining Committee is calling on the Strathcona Regional District to come back to the table and Negotiate a Fair and equitable contract for these members.

For further information please contact:

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