



WBH Responds to Comments by CUPE National President

For Immediate Release

FORT MCMURRAY, AB, May 18, 2019 – Last Friday marked one week since management of Wood Buffalo Housing was forced to lockout the members of its CUPE local 1505 general collective group.

“We were hopeful that we could make some progress in getting back to the table this week with the union bargaining committee, but unfortunately they do not seem to appreciate the reality of the situation we are dealing with,” says Henry Hunter, President and CEO of Wood Buffalo Housing. “We understand the union’s perspective however, we are simply trying to address the operational realities that we face.”

Hunter maintains that this is not an overstaffing issue. WBH needs to change its operating model in order to improve its customer service and to achieve efficiencies in administration and operations. Currently, they have a pool of staff to perform maintenance, grounds-keeping, painting and housekeeping duties, who are staffed full-time to perform the work required. Yet the organization frequently experiences peaks and valleys in terms of workload.

“If we have a more flexible system of dealing with these fluctuations as they occur, rather than incurring an ongoing staffing cost plus overtime and/or added contractor’s costs, we could save the organization money and be more proactive in our approach to customer service.”

In response to the statements made by the CUPE national president today, where he called on Mayor and Council to address this situation and force WBH back to the bargaining table with the union, Hunter says that approach is not going to help anyone in moving this matter forward. Wood Buffalo Housing is an independent corporation with its own Board of Directors and CEO. The union has been at the bargaining table with the people responsible for negotiating a new agreement and this is the group that will continue to work with the union.

“We are hopeful that we can come to a resolution over this issue as our employees and our clients are very important to us,” says Hunter. “We have always been willing to get back to the table with the union to negotiate and have been trying to do that since we initiated bargaining last October. Unfortunately, to date, they haven’t put forward any ideas on how to reduce our deficit and that is why we are here now at the lockout. If they want to get back to the table now and start negotiating and putting forward ideas, then we welcome that opportunity.”

He reiterates that the union needs to accept the reality of the situation though, and that the mandate of the organization as a non-profit is to become financially sustainable and to eliminate the deficit by 2020 in order to continue to provide affordable housing to the people of this community in the future.

“I would also like to clear up the statements made this past week about us replacing union staff with fly-by-night contractors,” says Hunter. “This is completely inaccurate. We are not planning on contracting staff from out of town. We will be using local contractors, many of whom we’ve been working with on numerous occasions in the past few years when we had to address a maintenance backlog. They live and work in this community too.”

- 30 -

Media contact info:

Christina MacKay
Manager of Marketing and Communications
Wood Buffalo Housing
Phone: 780-799-4034
Email: christina@wbhousing.ca