



Update on the Bargaining with CUPE Local 1505 General Group

For Immediate Release

FORT MCMURRAY, AB, July 8, 2019 – Wood Buffalo Housing (WBH) once again met with the bargaining committee of its CUPE 1505 collective on Friday, July 5 to offer a counter proposal to the one they received from the union on June 24. The union also advised that they had another proposal to put on the table, but they did not bring one forward at the meeting last Friday.

In their June 24 proposal, CUPE suggested allowing members who wished to accept a severance to do so and filling in the gaps with CUPE seasonal and temporary staffing. This would leave 28 out of the original 39 full-time positions, or a reduction of 11. Unfortunately, under their proposed structure, 39% of WBH properties would still need to be covered by part-time, seasonal and temporary CUPE staff in addition to the full-time positions listed above. There was also some confusion around savings tied to positions that are deficit-funded by the province. When the numbers were broken down at the bargaining table they did not add up to even half of the savings that WBH needs to achieve in order to eliminate its \$1.5 million deficit, and they did not consider the cost to maintain 39% of its portfolio.

“At the June 24 meeting we agreed to come back with a counter proposal that takes into consideration some of the ideas they presented in theirs,” says Henry Hunter, President and CEO of WBH. “So we scheduled a follow-up meeting for July 5 and we brought forward a counter proposal that results in a difference of four positions in the bargaining unit.”

WBH’s counter proposal involves moving to a ‘Building Managers/Building Superintendent’ approach. This involves keeping 22 positions in this collective agreement, and we have just agreed to move 2 positions to the Rotary House collective. The net difference between WBH and CUPE is four full time employees. WBH also reiterated their need to soften the language in the current contracting out clause 5.01 to match the language that they have in their Marshall House collective agreement and similar to what other CUPE collectives in the region have in their agreements. Unfortunately, CUPE advised that they are completely unwilling to negotiate on the wording of that clause and bargaining has broken down once again.

“We are not asking to get rid of the clause altogether and are quite happy with the way it is worded in our Marshall House collective agreement,” says Hunter. “We feel we should receive the same fair treatment by the union in the general collective because the current wording of the clause is far too restrictive and does not allow us to manage this organization efficiently during peak times.”

WBH also offered to grandfather the current contracting-out clause for those CUPE members that would be returning to work in the general collective, so the new clause would only apply to any new hires. Their goal in doing so is to give some assurance to those 22 staff that are on the picket lines that WBH does not want to eliminate or contract out their positions.

“I’d like to reiterate that, despite the rhetoric CUPE is putting out in their ads and correspondence, we are not trying to get rid of the union,” says Hunter, “and it’s unfortunate that CUPE seems to be more interested in protecting future CUPE members than the ones who are currently out there on the picket line. We are also not hiring fly-by-night contractors to do the work. These are all local contractors that we’ve been using for a number of years now to address our maintenance backlog.”

Maintained with the most recent proposal is a generous severance package for those employees that would lose their job, in an effort to bridge them to their next employment. WBH also opened up the severance opportunity for any housekeepers and Resident Service Aids in the Rotary House collective that might choose to give up their position in favour of a cleaner/housekeeper in the general group.

“If the goal of the CUPE bargaining committee is truly to get as many of our WBH employees back to work as possible, then we feel this proposal outlines an opportunity to do that,” says Hunter. “Unfortunately, I feel like we are no longer negotiating with the local bargaining group. It is our hope that CUPE will provide our employees with an opportunity to vote on this proposal.”

This is the second proposal that Wood Buffalo Housing has put on the table since the lockout began on May 10.

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