



TOWN OF WESTWOOD

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

May 17, 2023

To the Residents of Westwood:

As many of you know, the Westwood Fire Union Local 1994 has been operating on an expired contract since July 1, 2021. Many are asking, “How can the Town let this happen for 650+ days?” To date, the Town has chosen not to issue a statement because the town and Fire Union have been working towards a potential agreement through the state’s mediation process. Over the last two weeks, the Town, through the Joint Labor Management Committee (JLMC) mediators, has exchanged a number of proposals with the Union. At the close of business on Friday, May 5, the Town submitted a comprehensive counteroffer addressing both economic and language changes. As of today, the Town has not heard back from the Union or the JLMC mediator on its proposal. As a result, we believe it is important to share with you some additional information regarding the path that has led us to this point. The Town’s preference is to bargain directly with the union and utilize state mediation to assist the parties. Unfortunately, the union’s insistence on bargaining through the media compels the town to update our community.

In April of 2022, the Town and Union negotiating teams came to a tentative agreement on a deal for FY22 and FY23 (see table below). On April 12, 2022, the Union membership voted not to ratify that agreement. The Union leadership then informed the Town that they were not interested in bargaining until a previously filed unfair labor practice was fully litigated; the hearing date for that wasn’t scheduled for another 17 months (Sept. 2023). Ultimately, Union leadership agreed to resume bargaining after 223 days—on November 22, 2022. The parties met again on December 6, 2022, but after that one meeting, the union canceled the other scheduled negotiations, choosing instead to file for mediation with the JLMC. It took another 125 days before mediation was scheduled by the JLMC on April 24, 2023. The parties met for mediation on April 24th and, based on the positive momentum of that meeting per the state’s assigned mediators, scheduled an additional meeting on April 27th. The Union unilaterally canceled that meeting the night before.

Per the above, since reaching a tentative agreement with the Union in April of 2022, there have been more than 350 days during which the Fire Union has elected either not to negotiate with and/or has canceled scheduled sessions with the Town. This number will continue to grow each day that the parties are not actively negotiating. Because the Fire Union has filed to have the JLMC take jurisdiction of these negotiations the timing of further JLMC process will be subject to its current caseload, and will potentially delay further progress on this matter. The Town has been, and remains, ready and willing to negotiate this matter to a mutually beneficial settlement.

The Union recently told the Boston Herald that “the Town is resisting the process, refusing to come to the table and bargain in good faith.” Counter to their assertion, the Department of Labor Relations recently found that “the Union has failed to bargain in good faith by engaging in surface bargaining” and that “the Union has derivatively interfered with, restrained, and coerced the Employer in the exercise of its rights guaranteed under the law.” We wanted to give you this level of detail to provide the whole picture, and to demonstrate that the Town has, in good faith, attempted to continue negotiating with the Union – and very much wants to reach an equitable agreement on all outstanding matters.

Because the Union recently told the Boston Herald that they want a deal that parallels the one the Town entered into with the Westwood Police Union, we are providing below a chart which outlines the total wage increase we negotiated with the Westwood Police Union:

	Police Contract Settled 4/23/23	Town Offer to Fire Union 4/27/23
FY22	2.03%*	2.87%
FY23	3.42%	3.42%**
FY24	4.11%	
FY25	4.37%	
FY26	4.77%	

*Plus, one-time payments equivalent to \$64,000

**Plus, one-time payments equivalent to \$145,550

The chart illustrates that Westwood's proposal to the Fire Union for FY22 and FY23 is approximately the same as the deal reached with the police union. In its April 27, 2023 proposal (as well as in its April 2022 proposal), the Town offered to pay the Union the same increases as all other Town employees, with no changes to the contractual language for those two years, thereby addressing the days the Fire Union have been without a contract and providing pay increases. The Town also pledged to continue working with the state mediators to negotiate terms for FY24, FY25, and FY26. The Union rejected this offer.

No one benefits from a prolonged and protracted contract negotiation process; not the Town, not our firefighters, and especially not our residents. Our approach to this contract remains consistent with the approach we've taken with each of the other collective bargaining units in town. We want to see our employees receive wage increases and competitive salaries while doing so within the Town's ability to afford such in a sustainable manner. We remain hopeful that we can swiftly reach a fair, equitable, and final agreement with the Union. The Town's negotiating team remains committed to the process.

Respectfully,

The Town of Westwood

Select Board

Marianne C. LeBlanc Cummings, Chair

Robert R. Gotti, Clerk

Joseph E. Previtera, Third Member