

ALBERTA UNION OF PROVINCIAL EMPLOYEES

# BARGAINING UPDATE

**STRATHCONA  
COUNTY**

LOCAL 118  
CHAPTER 009

**ALL AUPE STAFF**

NOVEMBER 29, 2021

## **BARGAINING IS ADVANCING EMPLOYER AGREES TO BENEFITS FOR TEMPS, BUT THERE'S A CATCH. UNION RESPONDS WITH COUNTERBALANCING "FIXES."**

Bargaining continues to advance for AUPE members at Strathcona County.

Over many rounds of bargaining, your negotiations team stressed to the employer that the exclusion of temporary employees from benefits, pensions and other provisions that come with regular employment status is a huge concern—especially since temps make up about one third of our membership and many so-called “temporary” employees have been working for the County for many years.

In this round of bargaining, they have finally heard us and are willing to make improvements for temps—but there's a catch. While our employer is prepared to enroll temporary employees in the health benefits plan, they are also proposing a change that would mean a significant drop in income for many employees, including temps. Plus, they want to end the guarantee of five consecutive days off around Christmas (or overtime if you are scheduled).

The employer believes that the sidewalk machine doesn't warrant an Operator II level of pay, so their proposal would see that drop to a renamed Equipment Operator I position. In fact, they want to revamp a number of classifications, including the rates of pay. The rest of their proposed changes would bring about pay increases, for Truck Drivers, for example. Some Labourer rates of pay would also go up at depending on the step level of current employees.

Other unaffected classifications would stay the same with the same rates of pay.

Our bargaining committee has responded to the County's proposal with a few “fixes” to balance out what would otherwise be a net loss to temporary employees who would gain benefits but could stand to lose as much as 11% in wages during the winter months.

Benefits themselves also come with a cost for monthly premiums, although of course the premiums are relatively small in comparison to the coverage gained for dental, drug, paramedical (physio, counselling, etc) and more. The Employee share of health and dental premiums is 25% (\$29.58/month for single people and \$82.93/month for families), and the Employer covers the other 75%.

To counterbalance the income hit for Equipment Operators in the level I classification, your negotiations team proposed that new classifications (which would apply to all hours worked on the sidewalk machine) be increased five per cent above what the employer is proposing. We have also proposed higher rates for the Labourer classifications (used more in the spring/summer), which would help to offset lost income from the winter months for those affected.

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But of course, we also want to make improvements for regular employees as well. Currently the employer is offering 0.5 per cent lump sum payments for 2020 and 2021 and 0.5% wage increase for 2022. We do not believe this is sufficient, so we are continuing to push for higher increases.

And of course, our negotiations team also proposed other monetary improvements including to shift differentials, paid breaks when in the field, improved weekend standby, reimbursement for proof of illness/medical documentation fees and expanded bereavement leave—all of which are still on the table.

There are also several non-monetary improvements we are seeking, including changes that would allow temporary employees to keep building their seniority when they return year after year. This would help to create a pathway for temporary employees into regular positions as they become available, because the actual service to the County would be taken into account in the hiring process, instead of being viewed as essentially “new hires” when applying for permanent positions.

Under your negotiations team’s proposal, all seniority rights would be extended to temporary employees not only in the job postings process, but whenever seniority is considered, such as for vacation requests, layoff/recall etc. Seniority is a key aspect of a union contract that for too long our temps have been excluded from, regardless of their years of service with this employer.

Other non-monetary improvements we are seeking which would apply to all employees include:

- Retain seniority after the end of a temporary position, if returning within 6 months and expand where the seniority of temps can be considered (eg. job postings)
- Improved job posting language
- Improved grievance procedure
- Scheduling improvements, including how many days the employer can require you to work continuously (could still accept OT if you want)

Here are other non-monetary improvements which have already been agreed to in bargaining:

- Improved occupational health and safety provisions
- Limitations on how the County can take back money if they overpay in error
- Requirement for the County to provide more information on a monthly basis so AUPE can be in better contact with members

Finally, a note about Utilities employees. The employer has proposed, and we are generally agreed, on converting the Utility Operator classifications into different step levels, so that employees could move up once they achieved the qualifications without going through the job posting process. However, we need to finalize expectations around those qualifications. They have also proposed hours needed for the Water & Wastewater Operator step progression (step 3,4,5, and 6) is going from 1500 to 1864.

We are also agreed in principle to convert the working alone premium to five per cent of an employee’s base salary (not for the purpose of calculating overtime payments, other premium payments, or any Employee benefits), instead of being paid at the Water and Wastewater Project Foreman rate, and rename it “Direct Responsible Pay.

Our next bargaining dates are Dec. 13 and 14 and we hope to be able to reach a negotiated settlement with the County. If that happens, we will conduct a ratification vote as soon as possible and all members would have the chance to see the full document that they are voting on, as well as have opportunities to ask questions and better understand the proposed changes.

If we are not able to reach a settlement, our next step would likely be mediation, where we would work with a neutral, third-party mediator to help us reach a settlement in the new year.

We will keep you posted on our progress. We thank all members for their patience and support as we continue to move through the bargaining process. If you have any questions, concerns, or feedback, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

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