

Nonunion city workers get 1% raise

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Port council approves pay increase while other local municipalities, county decide to freeze salaries

City of Port Washington department heads and employees not represented by unions will receive a 1% raise for 2010, the Common Council agreed Tuesday.

Last year, Mayor Scott Huebner vetoed the across-the-board raises, but Huebner said he will not take the same action this year.

“A 1% raise, I feel, is fine,” he said. “We cut taxes this last year, and part of the reason we were able to do that is that a lot of our department heads were out and found grant money for projects or found ways to do things at a lower cost, more efficiently.

“Maintaining that talent is a priority for the city.”

Huebner noted that when he vetoed the salary resolution last year, the city had just ended its budget year with a deficit. The city ended 2009 in the black, he added.

Unlike the city, the school district and vocational schools have increased taxes and salaries, Huebner said.

“I don’t hear anything about wage cuts from them,” he said, “and they’re killing us with taxes.”

The raises stand in marked contrast to other area communities, where department heads and nonunion workers generally are not receiving any salary increase this year.

In the villages of Saukville and Grafton, for example, salaries for nonunion employees were frozen this year.

“With the economic hardships that many residents and businesses are experiencing, the Village Board felt it was appropriate that no employees receive increases for 2010,” Grafton Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said when the decision was made earlier this month.

Grafton employees will also pay an additional 1% of their health insurance premium, bringing the worker contribution to 7%.

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Saukville negotiated no-raise contracts with its two unions and held management pay at its current level.

The Village of Fredonia generally did not increase wages this year, Clerk JoAnn Wagner said. However, employees whose salaries were less than the midpoint for their salary range and received a favorable job evaluations were given increases of 1% or less, she said.

Ozaukee County also froze the salaries of nonunion employees. Its elected officials — including the county clerk, treasurer, register of deeds, district attorney, coroner and sheriff, whose salaries are set for the length of their term — agreed to make charitable contributions in the amount of their salary increase, in effect freezing their wages.

The County Board also froze its salaries for the next term, which runs from April 2010 to April 2012.

City Administrator Mark Grams said the increase amounts to raises of between \$400 and \$900, noting the budget included a 1% across-the-board increase for nonunion employees this year.

The Common Council also approved a contract with the last of its unions, the clerical unit of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 108.

These employees will receive a 1-1/2% salary increase effective Jan. 1, 2010, another 1-1/2% increase on Dec. 31 and a 2% raise on Jan. 1, 2011.

Although the structure of the increases is different, the percentage increase over the life of the contract is about the same as the city granted its other union employees, Grams said.

The other contracts took effect last July, and they called for employees to receive no increase for the first six months, 3% on Jan. 1, 2010 and another 2% on Jan. 1, 2011, he said.

"We looked at what other settlements in the area were and comparables," he said, as well as the city's other contract settlements.

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“In these times, I would love to have the unions get the same 1% that nonunion employees are getting,” Huebner said. “It’s tough to have a department head get a 1% raise when other employees are getting a greater increase — it’s wrong.”

But, he said, the unions wouldn’t approve such a small increase and the city stands to lose more if it takes the contract to mediation and arbitration.

The council approved both wage agreements unanimously. Ald. Dave Larson was absent.