

Town strikes four-year contract deal with CSEA

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Riverhead Town's largest employee union has reached a four-year, 2.5 percent settlement with the town, RiverheadLOCAL has learned.

The town's Civil Service Employee Association bargaining unit voted 88 to 33 Tuesday night to approve a new collective bargaining agreement with the town, according to CSEA unit president Matt Hattorff.

The deal calls for no salary increases in 2011 and 2012, a 1 percent increase in 2013 and a 1.5 percent increase in 2014, he said.

The union's current contract expired on Jan. 1.

"I'm very happy the union worked with us and we got this done," Supervisor Sean Walter said Wednesday. "They understand the situation the town is in and we cut right to the chase," he said.

"Matt delivered a fair contract. He negotiated in good faith and I have a lot of respect for him," Walter said. "It's a very good contract for the town and it's fair to the employees."

But dissenting members complained that the union "threw some of its members under the bus," according to longtime CSEA member Victoria Vourakis.

She said part of the deal was the town's agreement not to lay off any employees in 2011, but the no-layoffs provision specifically excluded employees in the town's animal control division.

"I didn't cast a vote," Vourakis said. "I don't think this kind of deal should even be put to a vote. How do you do that to your members," she asked.

"If she chose not to vote then she has absolutely no right to complain," Hattorff said.

Vourakis, who has been employed by the town for 34 years, also said there is an issue with absentee ballots being cast by a couple of members after the membership had been informed no absentee balloting was allowed.

"It depends on what your definition of absentee is," Hattorff responded. Two CSEA public safety dispatchers could not get away from their posts to go to the town's human resource center in Aquebogue to vote in person. A union member took their ballots, in sealed envelopes, and delivered them to the ballot location, Hattorff said.

"I'm asking for a written opinion from the union on that," Hattorff said.

"If you're going to make that option available to some, it should be available to everyone," said Vourakis, a police department employee. "I'm not sure the vote was legal because of that," she said. Vourakis said she and other union members were examining their legal options.

The contract deal is subject to approval by the Town Board. The supervisor said he's not sure whether the town's labor counsel would be able to have it ready in time for a vote March 15.

"But I'm very glad to have this behind us," Walter said. He urged town employees not to "focus on" the animal control exclusion from the no-layoffs part of the deal.

"That was negotiated because I knew we'd be having discussions with the Town of Brookhaven on the possibility of a regional shelter," Walter said. After actually initiating those talks, the supervisor said he's confident a regional approach, if pursued, will take some time to implement and would not have any impacts on animal control or shelter staff in the current year anyway.

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