

Committee asks LTD Board for straight answers

The committee voiced concerns after the meeting, saying LTD did not provide concrete information

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The LTD/ATU Community Committee got its first chance to question the Lane Transit District Board about the ongoing controversial contract negotiations between LTD and the Amalgamated Transit Union at a meeting at the Woodleaf Village Community Center on Tuesday night.

The LTD Board agreed to the meeting out of its concern for the community and desire to avert a driver strike, board member Gerry Gaydos said.

"We're hear to listen," Gaydos said.

The meeting lasted about an hour, and the committee members met afterward to voice their concerns over what they said was a serious lack of information and adequate answers from the board.

"I was expecting them to give us at least some more concrete answers than 'It's on the Web site,'" committee co-organizer Claire Syrett said, referring to the board's suggestion that anyone with negotiation questions visit the LTD Web site.

Negotiations between LTD and ATU have been going on since May, and ATU was hours away from striking on Feb. 1 before agreeing to adhere to a 35-day cooling-off period to allow the committee time to review the negotiations.

LTD did not accept the cooling-off period and implemented its final contract on Feb. 1, subsequently causing ATU to declare a strike effective March 7, the first day after the cooling-off period ends.

"This is a slap in the face," ATU Vice President Jonathan Hunt said in a phone interview.

Committee members questioned the LTD Board about its reason for implementing the contract and expressed their concerns that a body set up to serve the public was not allowing the public to intervene in something as important to the community as the LTD negotiations.

"You are engaged in a public service, and we feel it's important the public understand what is going on at the bargaining table," committee member Margaret Hallock said.

Gaydos said the board members would not have been there that night if they didn't care about the public, and he stressed that LTD has the public in mind during the negotiation process.

"There's nobody on the board that has an agenda," Gaydos said. "We're here to serve the public."

Tensions rose during the meeting as committee members became frustrated with what committee member Michael Regan said was the board's lack of real answers to easy questions.

"We know the union isn't going to get all they want, but you have to know that you aren't going to get everything you want

either," Regan said.

Curt Bylund, a committee member and neighborhood activist, told the board he was at the meeting to find answers to questions his neighbors have been asking about the reasons for the negotiation problems and the specific details of what each side is unsatisfied with.

"I want to be able to take back to my constituents a real answer to what the problem is," Bylund said.

Gaydos said the board is not looking to hide anything from the public but said there are many things it must keep in mind when discussing the contract negotiations.

"There's a process in place that has to be followed, and we are following that process as best we can," Gaydos said.

Committee members expressed their concerns over the LTD Board's refusal to allow an outside mediator join the negotiations and demanded to know why their offer was refused and a contract implemented after the union had already agreed to enter the cooling-off period.

Gaydos did not elaborate on a specific reason why but said: "The short answer is we don't think there's a need for it."

Board member Susan Ban agreed.

"It is not our job to mediate this contract," Ban said. "That is the job of the mediating team."

The board was answering every question the best they could, Gaydos said.

"Our response has been and always will be: We're as open as we can be," Gaydos said.

Ban emphasized that the board has been deeply concerned about the possibility of a strike for quite some time and takes the public's concerns very seriously.

"I do want to put this in perspective; it isn't anything we take lightly," Ban said.

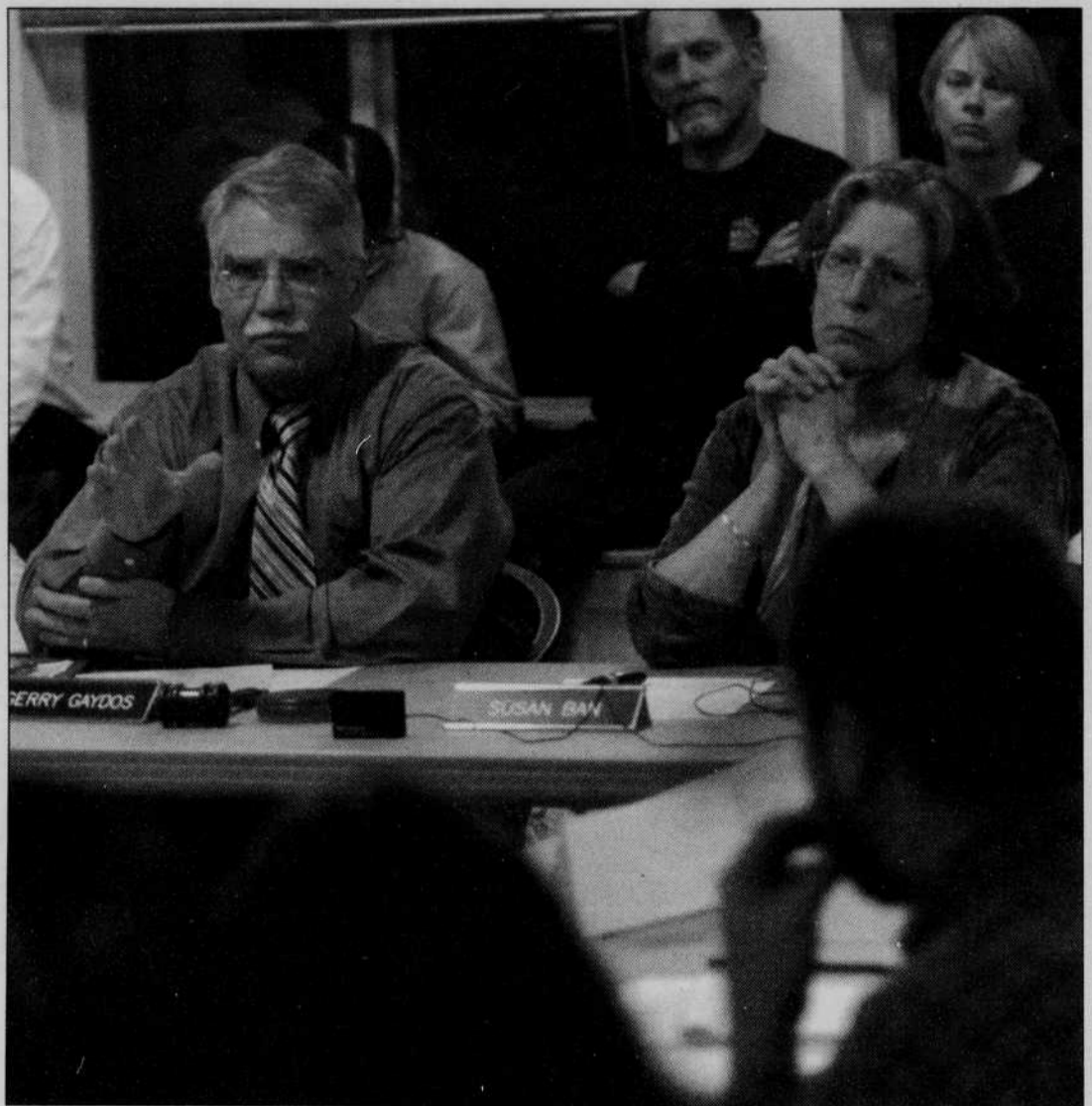
The meeting ended after the committee concluded that further discussion with the board would get nowhere.

LTD Service Planning and Marketing Manager Andy Vobora said after the meeting that the board had done its best to answer questions while still adhering to the mediation process it is mandated to follow. He is confident that when the two parties are able to get back on the negotiation table, an agreement could be reached within 10 days.

The committee decided to meet Saturday to discuss what further action is needed and whether it might need to reevaluate its method of intervention in light of what members see as the board's less-than-informative responses.

"We're not going away until we are sure the buses are going to run and the drivers are going to smile," committee member Joan Pierson said.

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TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

Top: At the Woodleaf Village Community Center Tuesday night, LTD Board Chairman Gerry Gaydos, left, fields questions from LTD/ATU Community Committee members. Middle: Margaret Hallock, left, director of the Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics at the University, and Joan Pierson of Faith in Action, wait for answers at Tuesday night's meeting. Below: Curt Bylund, an LTD/ATU Community Committee member of the Jefferson/Westside neighborhood group, gets agitated with members of the LTD board.

