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Offer employees only cost-of-living increases

Metro councilors vote themselves 16% raises

Union workers at Metro got an eye-opener Sept. 27.

In contract negotiations, Metro told American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3580 that raises of more than 2.7 percent weren't affordable. But then Sept. 27 their bosses — the elected Metro councilors — voted unanimously to give themselves a 16 percent raise while union members carrying signs looked on. For Metro Council President David Bragdon, the raise was \$15,332, bringing his salary to \$111,132. The other six councilors are part time, and make one third that amount.

"We're not too happy about that," said Local 3580 president Amy Wilson.

Union protest pickets went up Sept. 30 at the Oregon Zoo, a Metro facility. Metro is a regional government that oversees the urban growth boundary and owns and operates the Oregon Zoo, Oregon Convention Center, and solid waste transfer stations. About 280 Metro employees belong to AFSCME. Laborers Local 483, which represents some zoo employees, is also in bargaining with Metro and took part in the picket.

AFSCME and Metro disagree over wages, health coverage and long-term disability coverage. Metro's latest proposal would extend the probationary period for new employees to a year from its current six months and eliminate long-term disability coverage and an employee assistance program of mental health coverage for work-related issues.

Metro proposed a 2.7 percent raise in the first year of the four-year contract, followed by annual raises that equal the increase in the Consumer Price Index, but with a maximum of 2.75 percent. And Metro wants to cap its contribution to health insurance (which was \$727 a month last year) at a rate that would rise 10 percent a year; any increase over that amount would be split 50-50 with employees.

As of press time, AFSCME had scheduled an Oct. 2 strike vote; if the two sides declare impasse, the union could strike after a 30-day cooling off period, possibly in early November. A state mediator was scheduled to meet Oct. 4.

"Negotiations are supposed to be about give and take, but Metro seems to believe we should do all of the giving and they get to do all of the taking," said AFSCME spokesman Don Loving.



A contingent of over 60 people demonstrated outside the Oregon Zoo in Portland Sept. 30. Members of AFSCME Local 3580 and Laborers Local 483 are trying to renew contracts that expired July 1.

Conversion to renewable energy generating union jobs

By DON MCINTOSH
Associate Editor

A worldwide shift toward renewable energy is under way, fueled by rising gas prices and growing concern about global warming. And far from the job-killer that people once feared, the conversion is generating good-paying construction, manufacturing and utility jobs. Skilled union workers, in many cases, are part of the cutting edge.

"The Northwest is blessed with a generous endowment of all the renewables," said Rachel Shimshak, director of Renewable Northwest Project, which promotes development of wind, solar, and geothermal for producing electricity.

Those three, plus "wave" energy from the ocean, are the "new renewables." Add them to the old renewables — hydroelectric and biomass — and the region is sure to remain tops in the nation for clean energy.

Oregon, for example, gets about 47 percent of its electricity from renewable sources, compared to six percent



Brian Crise, solar specialist at the NECA-IBEW Electrical Training Center in Portland, has helped train over 400 men and women in how to install photovoltaic panels.

for the United States as a whole. Most of that — 43 percent — is hydroelectric, but about 4 percent is biomass. Just 1 percent is wind and geothermal.

But investment in new renewables is ramping up tremendously now in Oregon, driven for the most part by government mandates and tax incentives.

This year, the Oregon Legislature increased the state's Business Energy Tax Credit from 35 percent to 50 percent, doubled the maximum to \$20 million, and changed the rules to allow companies to take both the state credit and a similar 30 percent federal tax credit. That means when a business installs a renewable energy system in Oregon, the state and federal governments will pay out 80 percent of the cost over a five-year period. Expect to see an explosion of renewables in Oregon. An 80 percent subsidy makes it pretty affordable to put a photovoltaic panel on a roof or a methane digester next to a feedlot.

Multnomah County is about to make creative use of the tax credit. At

the instigation of Commissioner Jeff Cogen, the county is seeking bids for investors to lease a parking lot and four county building rooftops, install photovoltaic panels, and sell the electricity back to the County at the same rate it's currently paying. Proposals are due Nov. 12.

Starting next January, 1.5 percent of the budget of all state or local government construction or remodeling projects in Oregon will have to go toward solar technology, thanks to another bill introduced this year by State Rep. (and union Carpenter) Paul Holvey (D-Eugene.)

There's no guarantee the installation will be done by union workers, but the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) has been working to get ahead of the curve. Since 2002, the NECA-IBEW Electrical Training Center on Northeast Airport Way in Portland has trained over 400 journeymen in how to properly install photovoltaic panels. It's a popular subject at the training center. A class in

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