

# City of Portland workers vote on tentative contract agreement

## Some members object to changes on contracting out and comp time

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

After nearly a year of contentious negotiations, about 1,300 City of Portland workers had a chance to vote on a new union contract this week and last. They are members of the seven-union coalition known as the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU). DCTU represents 1,583 City workers, but a little over 300 of those are “fair share” employees who chose not to join the union and therefore don’t get to vote on the contract.

The tentative four-year deal was reached just as DCTU representatives and city managers prepared to submit their final offers to the state Employment Relations Board.

If ratified, the agreement would cover the period from July 1, 2013

(when the previous contract expired) through June 30, 2017. It provides for wage increases of 0.9 percent retroactive to Aug. 29, followed by annual increases equal to the rise in the Consumer Price Index each July 1 (with a minimum of 1 percent and a maximum of 5 percent).

Retirement and health insurance are unchanged in the tentative agreement. But the agreement completely rewrites a contract article that has limited the City’s ability to contract out members’ work, and it changes rules on “comp time.” Those two items came under fire at a rowdy contract forum Jan. 23 in the Benson High School auditorium. Most of the roughly 80 members who turned out were unhappy with what they characterized as concessions in the proposed contract.

The new contracting out clause is less restrictive to the City. The old language said the City may not contract out work done by bargaining unit members unless it shows that doing so will

save money, and the savings can’t come from lower wages and benefits. The new language says the City *can* contract out for a variety of specified reasons, but that no employee will lose employment because of contracting out.

Comp time, meanwhile, is a feature of the union contract that is highly prized by certain categories of City workers. The current contract gives workers options when they work overtime. For each hour of overtime they work, they can be paid time-and-a-half, or they can get 1.5 hours of compensatory (comp) time — paid time off that they can use later, similar to vacation time. And under the current contract, there’s no limit to the amount of comp time workers can use, except that they can only accrue up to 80 hours of comp time at any given time. Unused comp time can be cashed out at the end of the fiscal year or carried over to the next year.

By contrast, the contract up for ratification would impose a limit of 120 hours of comp time that could be taken in a year, starting calendar year 2015. At the end of the year, employees could retain any comp time they accrued, but would still only be able to use 120 hours in a year. Meanwhile, employees who agree to be on “standby” (off hours that they’re available to work within 30 minutes in the event of an

emergency) would have a separate comp time bank of up to 80 hours at a time for any hours they are called in to work. The City estimated that 84 workers would have been affected if the 120-hour rule had been in place in 2012.

The agreement also contains a provision reacting to a proposed initiative aimed at the 2014 ballot. The proposed initiative would allow union-represented public employees who are not members of the union to refuse to share representation costs. Article 2 in the

proposed DCTU agreement restricts employees from dropping their union membership except for a five-day period in March each year.

Members of the bargaining team recommended ratification, and said it was the best deal likely to be achieved without a strike. AFSCME Local 189 held votes at roughly 50 work sites around the City, while members of Laborers Local 483 voted by mail ballot.

Officials from all seven unions in the DCTU coalition will meet at 5:30 p.m. Feb. 7 to tabulate the results.

## SEIU Local 503 votes not to merge with SEIU Local 49

At a Feb. 1 meeting of the General Council of 47,000-member Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503, delegates voted 118 to 75 not to pursue a merger with 10,000-member SEIU Local 49.

Local 503 represents state workers, home care workers and nursing home workers statewide, while Local 49 represents janitors, security guards and hospital support workers mostly in the Portland area.

Leaders of the two unions had been discussing a merger since 2012, and members of both unions engaged in a process of internal and joint discussions about the benefits and mechanics of merger, or “unification” as it was termed.

Local 503’s Executive Board recommended moving forward with the merger, but did not find majority support for it on the General Council. Local 49 was preparing to take the issue to members, but the General Council vote ends discussion of a merger for now.

## ...TriMet audit not to ATU’s liking

(From Page 1)

safety, service and sustainability.

“There was no followup, and not one of those issues is addressed in the audit report.”

Hansen said the audit report conveys TriMet’s official line on the causes of its problems, and highlights many TriMet initiatives, task forces and committees.

“Highly paid managers are constantly attending meetings,” Hansen said. “Yet the people on the front line seldom see any positive outcomes to justify the time and money being spent on going to meetings.”

TriMet’s McFarlane responded to the audit with a pledge to implement all of its recommendations, prioritizing those that enhance safety. TriMet provided details and a timeline for how it will do that in a 10-page response to the audit.

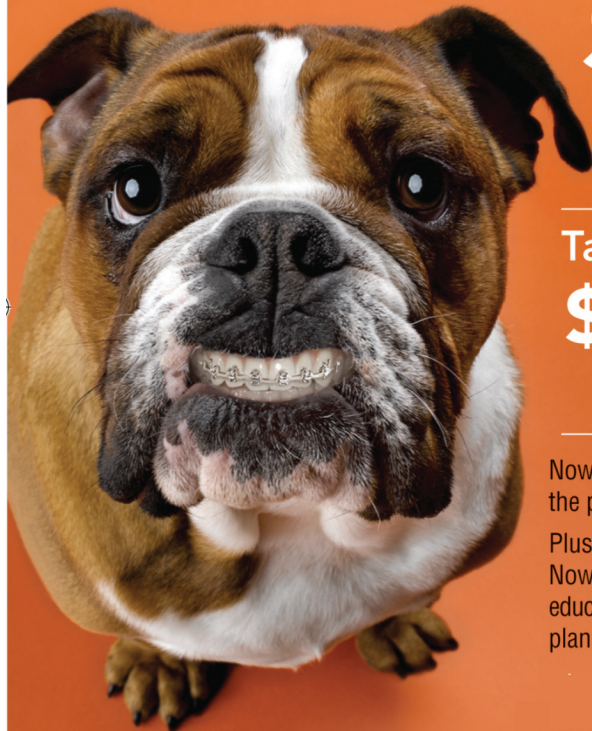
Two days later, TriMet signaled its intent to move to mediation in contract bargaining with the union, closing down face-to-face bargaining after the 150-day minimum the law requires. The previous contract expired Nov. 30, 2012, and bargaining for a new one got off to a much-delayed start September 7. Calculating from then, 150-day period ended Feb. 4.

Under Oregon law public transit workers cannot strike, so if a settlement cannot be reached via negotiations, an arbitrator selects one of the party’s proposals.

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