

TEAMSTERS LOCAL 633 EXPRESSES FRUSTRATION AT LACK OF TOWN INVOLVEMENT IN NEGOTIATIONS

March 5, 2010

Beginning in early March 2009, Teamster negotiators contacted the new Town Manager regarding the fact that the collective bargaining agreement between Teamsters Local 633 and the Town of Plaistow Police Department would be expiring in April 2010, and as such, urged the Town and the new administration to begin the process of negotiating a new contract.

It was not until a full seven (7) months later that Plaistow Town Manager Sean Fitzgerald made his way to the negotiating table. According to Teamsters Lead Negotiator Jeff Padellaro, "After seven (7) months of waiting to negotiate, the Town came to the table dreadfully unprepared." We were told that the Board of Selectmen had not yet prepared what the Town Manager called their "wish list", and quite honestly, we were taken aback because they had all of this time to prepare. The Teamsters were ready to present a full reasonable proposal, but were told the Town needed additional time to prepare a proposal."

That first negotiating session concluded with the Union demanding that the Plaistow Negotiating Committee gather themselves and get prepared to negotiate a new contract. After several weeks of no response from the Town, a second meeting was demanded by the Union, and again, the Town had no proposal, and a lack of urgency in getting the negotiations started. Subsequent negotiating sessions produced the same results, with the Town Manager conveying the fact that the Board of Selectmen would give him the latitude to negotiate what he thought he needed in a new contract with the Police Department.

With this information now in hand, Teamster Negotiators changed strategy in an effort to jump start negotiations, Padellaro stated, "Since the Town Manager conveyed that the Board of Selectmen were bogging down negotiations, we invited them to come to the table to be an active part of the process, and as of this date, and multiple invitations, both written and verbal, they have not even bothered to respond. This is very troubling."

Town Manager Sean Fitzgerald cited fiscal concerns and restraints as the reason that he felt that the parties would not necessarily reach an agreement, yet his reasoning seemed flawed when Town Manager, in cooperation with the Board of Selectmen, retained the services of Divine, Millimet and Branch, and Attorney Mark Broth, to assist them at the negotiating table, when to that point the Town had not even bothered to put a proposal on the table.

TEAMSTERS TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

At the final bargaining session that was held between the parties, Teamster Negotiators put a comprehensive proposal on the table that addressed all of the issues that had been raised as reasons that they could not or would not offer a written proposal. The Union's one year proposal included no hourly wage increase, the ability for retired officers to work as needed by the Town on a part-time basis, a cap on the cost to the Town of not more than eight percent (8%) for health care, a signing bonus for the Officers and a detail rate increase. "As anyone should see, this proposal was pretty much self-funding. We are guaranteeing that the Town's Healthcare costs will be capped at eight percent (8%), at a time when the Town's Insurance costs for its non-Union employees is expected to rise some twenty percent (20%)", said Padellaro. "We're pushing for the increase in the detail rate in addition to the part-time police Officers because the details are a revenue generator for the Town. Currently, when you see a Police Officer from any of the surrounding Towns directing traffic at a construction site or at a road opening, the Town, in theory, is losing much needed revenue, yet we can not even get the Town leaders to respond in a constructive way."

As things currently stand in the Town of Plaistow today, the voters will head to the polls on Tuesday, and the Police Department Employees will not have a contract on the ballot for voter consideration. The Town is citing the very real concern of economics, as is the reality in a lot of neighboring communities, but they have acted in a manner that is contradictory to their spoken word. Town Manager Sean Fitzgerald has stated that the Town has serious fiscal constraints, but would like to purchase an old house for preservation purposes. The Town has missed some significant deadlines, due to unexplained reasons, and in the process incurred some significant fines. Town leaders have hired a high powered law firm to represent them at negotiations, yet they did so before they even attempted to meet with the Union to determine what differences, if any, existed.

Finally, and perhaps the most telling, is that the remainder of Town employees, who over a decade ago voted their Union out, have now signed on for the Teamsters to represent them. "There is a general sense from all corners of the Town that the employees are not being shown the level of consideration and respect they deserve." The bargaining history and labor relations between the Teamsters and the Town of Plaistow has never been problematic; we have always worked out our differences. The difference this time is we do not appear to have a business partner that wants to assume their role at the table. The Teamsters are not going away, and we will stand up for the working families in Plaistow. We have presented a proposal right in line with what the Town told us was their intended direction, and we have been basically ignored. We have indicated our interest in meetings with the Board of Selectmen, but they have refused, through their attorneys, to meet with us. I really do not know how they expect to address these very important issues when they won't meet," said Padellaro. The Teamsters indicate that they stand ready willing and able to meet with Town leadership to try to reach a middle ground, but have not yet been contacted by the Board of Selectmen in response to their requests.