

DC 37 Contract Wins Ratification With 96% Of Members' Votes

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, August 11, 2014 5:15 pm

Members of the city's second-largest public-employee union overwhelmingly approved a seven-year, four-month wage package that offers 10.41-percent raises over the length of the contract, with about 96 percent of more than 47,000 votes cast in favor of ratification, District Council 37 announced Aug. 5.

About 54 percent of 88,000 eligible members returned ballots which were mailed July 21, according to a tally by the American Arbitration Association. There were fewer voters and a slightly lower "yes" percentage than in 2008, when 98 percent of DC 37's 51,000 voting members opted to approve that contract.

Treated Us With 'Respect'

"This just shows what is possible, even in a difficult economic climate, when you have a union that does its research and finds real savings for the city and an administration willing to listen and treat employees with respect," said Executive Director Lillian Roberts in a statement.

The ratification opens the door to civilian unions seeking to make similar deals

with the city. Communications Workers of America Local 1180 President Arthur Cheliotis, whose union will soon be negotiating with City Hall on its own contract, said the deal, while not great, is a positive step, getting back pay and raises owed to city workers over years of stagnant wages.

"Our big issue, I think, going forward turns out to be dealing with our fellow citizens and telling them that when we get an increase, we don't send it to our accounts in the Bahamas," he said. "We spend it in the neighborhoods."



Roberts_Lillian_Official.jpg

LILLIAN ROBERTS: 'Just shows what can be done.'

Nevertheless, uniformed unions have said the raises, which don't keep up with the inflation rate, aren't acceptable for their members.

As soon as Sept. 3, DC 37 members will see a 4.58-percent raise, with a pay hike of 2.5 percent due next year and one of 3 percent in 2016. In the contract, which extends retroactively from March 3, 2010, to July 2, 2017, the average worker making base pay of \$42,581 in 2010, will earn \$47,011 by Sept. 3, 2016, according to union figures.

1% Retro Raises

Accounting for the pensionable \$1,000 bonus and retroactive pay for three 1-percent raises from 2011 through 2013, that average full-time worker would get a one-time payment of approximately \$3,571. The ratification payout would be pro-rated for part-time employees.

Union officials have said the money is likely to be paid by October, though a City Hall spokesperson said more details would be forthcoming this week.

The contract, announced July 2, was the first introduced during the de Blasio administration for a union that previously got a pair of 4-percent raises at least four years ago. While it lacked the hefty retroactive payments that accumulated and were offered to the United Federation of Teachers, which ratified its contract in June, the members widely accepted the pact.

The contract's ratification will trigger unit bargaining on working conditions, differentials and other terms across approximately 68 units, though it wasn't yet clear how soon that could occur. In March 2017, a 0.52-percent increase will be determined by the units.

The contract also opens the door to gainsharing, which would allow workers to potentially receive bonuses for any work efficiencies agreed upon by bargaining units and the city. The city's most notable instance occurred in the 1980s, when the Koch administration gave Sanitation Workers bonuses for sustaining the same pickup levels while cutting truck staffing from three workers to two.

Sharing the Savings

Before the contract was ratified, DC 37 Research and Negotiations Department Associate Director David Paskin sold the virtues of gainsharing to "Labor Lines" radio host Vic Fusco.

"As the units begin their negotiations, if you can present an idea where you can show productivity savings and the other side thinks it is a reasonable proposal, we're going to walk down the road to see it," he said. "We're going to cost it out to see if it can be done, as opposed to the past, where once you have an agreement like this, you can't talk about economics anymore."

On the merits of the economic terms, Mr. Paskin said he didn't see "sniping" from people on

Facebook.

“What’s more, even though it’s a long contract, 2017’s not so far away, and in fact the wage increases at the end of the contract—the 2½ and the 3 [percent]—those are big numbers, so that people are actually going to see very significant wage increases at the end of the contract,” he said.

Not all of the union’s members are covered by the pact. City University of New York employees represented by the union are still negotiating with the institution, as are uniformed members such as EMS workers, Fire Protection Inspectors, Urban Park Rangers and Traffic Enforcement Agents Levels III and IV. Prevailing-wage workers covered under Section 220 of the Labor Law have their pay largely set by the City Comptroller, but can opt for the terms.

The union and the city will also launch a \$150,000 Joint Recruitment and Promotion Committee to increase equity in promotions and hiring and the city will try to extend due-process rights across other agencies.

With the ratification, approximately 60 percent of the city’s workforce is covered by a contract, according to the Mayor’s Office.