



NEW CONTRACT FOR FIREFIGHTERS

Firefighters from Wausau and other unions across the state of Wisconsin agreed to contribute to their retirement funds in exchange for wage increases and other job perks on Tuesday of this week. The city council of Wausau voted 9-0 on Tuesday, with zero discussion, to approve a new three-year contract with the Wausau Firefighters Association Local 415. Firefighters, based on the contract, can contribute to their retirement funds by 3 percent in 2012 to 7 percent in 2014. The new provision is believed to be saving the city at least \$100,000 annually, according to Human Resources Director Michael Loy and the Wausau Daily Herald. In 2012, the firefighters will be using \$60 per check for their contributions and \$100 per check in 2013, according to Lt. Jeremy Kopp, Local 415 President. Firefighters will now receive a 2 percent wage increase for 2013 and a 4 percent hike in pay for 2014 in return for the new contract. For firefighters on the job less than one year, an annual salary is an average of \$45,720 while those with 10 years of service have an annual average salary of \$58,513, according to Finance Director Maryanne Groat. Police officers and firefighters are exempt from mandatory contributions to their retirement funds, unlike public employees and teachers. The reason for being exempt is the state's collective bargaining law that was proposed by Governor Scott Walker and then approved by the state legislature. Kopp said that there are other firefighter unions that have negotiated deals close in stature to that of Wausau but, "it's kind of hit or miss depending on where you go." "Some (unions) are standing on the fact that they are exempt, and that's what makes negotiating kind of tough, is that not everybody is doing the same thing," Kopp said. The firefighter union of Green Bay recently approved a new three-year contract that will require firefighters to pay 5.9 percent of their pension plans beginning in 2012. The contract in Green Bay does not have a wage increase for 2012. It has a two percent increase set for 2013 and a four percent increase set for 2014. Jim Palmer, the executive director of the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, said that the "give-and-take on retirement and wages is a good lesson that demonstrates collective bargaining can work." "Police and firefighters, like any other employee group, are sensitive to the economic environment; they have to be," Palmer said. The police union and Wausau are still working on a new contract. The union received an offer from the city last week but will wait until January to vote on a new contract, according to Romey Wagner, the chairman of the Human Resources Committee. "Usually, as one goes, the other follows closely," Wagner said of the city's police and firefighter unions.

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