

Woonsocket Budget Commission

Summary of Work on Non-Union Benefits and Contracts

The Budget Commission's task is to bring fiscal stability to the City of Woonsocket. Since Salaries and Fringe Benefits make up the majority of the budget we focused initially on Union Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA). In addition to CBA's, there were Individual Employment Contracts for some Administrative, Administrative Support and Technology positions in the School Department and there were some employees covered by neither.

A review of those contracts showed the following:

- Some contracts had automatic rollovers and some did not.
- With a few exceptions the only contracts in place were those with automatic rollovers. The others had been allowed to expire.
- Most Principals who are required by R.I. General Law to have at least a one-year employment agreement had no contracts at all and those that had them at one time expired in 2007.
- The School Department Attorney had a contract that expired in 2001.
- Not all non-union employees have contracts and there is no policy that defines what positions should have them.
- For all employees with or without employment contracts a policy like the one being proposed should be used to govern and clearly define terms of employment, benefits and the requirements to access and responsibly use those benefits.

Benefits afforded employees were derived in various ways:

- School Committee Policy.
- Benefits mirroring the person that held the job previously.
- Various Benefits in Individual employment contracts.
- Some contracts referring back to specific CBA's but not for all benefits in the employment contract.
- Reference back to CBA's with slight modifications noted etc.
- Memo's from various Superintendents.
- Verbal instructions.

It was our understanding that the Superintendent and the School Committee at the time were working to revise principal's contracts but they were never able to forward a contract to the Budget Commission for approval. The hiring during that time was done pending receipt of proposed contracts from the School Department.

On July 22, 2013, the Budget Commission voted on the following resolution which was forwarded to the Superintendent and the School Committee:

BE IT RESOLVED by the Woonsocket Budget Commission as follows:

Budget Commission Work on Non-Union Employee Benefits Policy

- 1. To ensure compliance with the Fiscal Stability Act, including R.I.G.L §45-9-6(d)(8), the Woonsocket School Committee and the Woonsocket Superintendent of Schools are hereby notified that the Woonsocket Budget Commission has control over Woonsocket personnel matters, including the power to hire, fire and set the terms and conditions of employment of all City employees. Therefore, no employment contract of any City employee including those employees working in the Education Department, may be extended or altered without the express approval of the Woonsocket Budget Commission.*
- 2. A true copy of this Resolution shall be forthwith delivered to the Woonsocket School Committee and Woonsocket Superintendent of Schools.*

Subsequent to the above resolution, the state of the current contracts, the May 1, 2014 notice deadline for some contract rollovers, principals without any contracts, benefit structures needing standardized, and settlement on CBA's which provided some benefits to non-union employees, the Budget Commission sent a letter to all employees who at one time had contracts. The following is an excerpt from that letter:

As you may know, on July 22, 2013, the Woonsocket Budget Commission adopted a Resolution providing that "no employment contract of any City employee, including those employees working in the Education Department, may be extended or altered without the express written approval of the Woonsocket Budget Commission." The purpose of this Resolution was to ensure compliance with the Fiscal Stability Act, which grants to the Budget Commission the power to set the terms and conditions of employment of all City employees, including WED employees. A copy of the Resolution is enclosed for your reference.

The purpose of this letter is to ensure that you understand that the Resolution adopted in July 2013 operated to notify those of you with an employment contract, including those with a contract containing an "automatic renewal" provision, that your contract shall not be renewed or extended unless the Budget Commission or the City/WED takes future action to do so. This notice does not mean that your employment is terminated, but rather that your employment contract (if you are working under one), shall end upon expiration, and will in no event automatically renew or be extended.

As you are aware, the collective bargaining agreements between unionized employees and the WED/City have been negotiated and finalized through Fiscal Year 2018. The Budget Commission shall be reviewing the terms and conditions of WED's non-unionized staff over the coming weeks. Our goal is to work with the City and the School Board to ensure equity and consistency throughout the Department, and to standardize the terms and conditions for non-unionized WED employees, as permitted by law

After that letter, work began to develop a better understanding of each benefit and how it was implemented. A document entitled "Non-Union Employee Benefits Policy" is being submitted to the School Committee and Interim Superintendent for edit, review and approval. In order to make this a useable document it was important to work with the staff members from the Woonsocket Education Department who are charged with the daily implementation, recording the accrual and use of these benefits and conditions of employment. Darin Cooper, Payroll Specialist; Kimberly Blais, Secretary to the Superintendent; and Heather Martino, Municipal Resources Administrator, RI Department of

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Revenue were instrumental in creating the benefits document being proposed to the School Committee for consideration. For specific areas of this policy other members of the Woonsocket Education Department staff were consulted. In addition the Education Department, Legal Council Sara Rapoport has reviewed the policy and prepared the draft contract for principals.

In February 2015, a meeting was held with the Interim Superintendent, School Committee Chairperson, Director of Administration and Finance, Secretary to the Superintendent, Budget Commission Chairperson, and School Legal Counsel. The policy and appendixes were reviewed in detail. Each individual had an opportunity for input. The Payroll Specialist was unable to attend but provided suggestions in writing. Modifications were agreed to at the meeting and with the subsequent review from Legal Counsel and Payroll Specialist changes were made.

In an effort to align the benefits there are some changes for current employees and where appropriate long term employees have been "grandfathered." See details of that "grandfathering" on the appropriate Appendix A. In some instances benefits are slightly improved or impaired but no "grandfathering" is recommended.

It is expected that as these documents are examined by the School Committee and presented to the stakeholders they might require some further modification. The ultimate goal is that the School Committee will move forward and take action to approve a consolidated benefit policy and contracts where appropriate for non-union employees.

Contracts have been approved by the School Committee and Budget Commission for the Assistant Superintendent and Director of Administration and Finance. Those contracts already refer to the Non-Union Employee Benefits Policy to be approved by the School Committee. Your policy once approved will govern the benefits for these executed contract. Since there was no such approved policy at the time specific allocations for vacation and sick time have been inserted in the contract. For future contracts that should not be required.

Included in this package are the following documents:

- Proposed Non-Union Benefits Document Policy Draft;
- Appendix A-1 Vacation Grandfathering;
- Appendix A-2 Personal Day Grandfathering;
- Appendix A-3 Unused Sick Benefit at Retirement Grandfathering;
- Appendix A-4 Bonus Sick Days Grandfathering;
- Appendix B - Direct Purchase of Medical Benefits; and
- Proposed Draft Contract for Principals
- Executed (partially) Assistant Superintendent
- Executed (partially) Contract Director of Finance

These documents are being provided to the School Committee with all closeout work products as of March 19, 2015.