

WEST PALM BEACH ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS



LOCAL 727 • ESTD 1894

September 13th, 2020

Re: Statement on negotiations

Dear Ms. Matkivich,

During the 2019 mayoral election the West Palm Beach Firefighter/Paramedics aggressively supported Keith James for mayor with the hopes that his platform of public safety would finally garner the resources that a “big city” fire department needs and the residents deserve. The support we thought we’d find in Mayor James seems to have been a farce. There are many disparities within the Fire Department but with the city’s recent decision to declare a negotiation impasse our members' wages have been thrust to the forefront. Wages which currently rank 18th in South Florida and are on track to be further overshadowed by surrounding municipalities as they successfully complete their contract negotiations.

Shortly after the city requested to begin negotiations with IAFF Local 727, a request for IAFF Local 727 to provide the city with an economic proposal was made. Although this burden typically falls on the city, IAFF Local 727 was willing and prepared to present data showing the wage disparity. This data was agreed upon to be accurate by both parties. A formal proposal to correct the disparity was provided to the city in February of this year. This proposal consisted of a 15% across the board adjustment, minor increases to Professional Qualification incentives, and Future Retiree Healthcare assistance all spread across a three-year contract. The total cost of this proposal over three years was \$5.6M (including payroll tax and retirement implications). In addition to this proposal IAFF Local 727 also presented cost saving measures of \$6.9M over the same three years (including \$1.9M in recurring annual savings), completely offsetting the city’s cost of a market adjustment without the need for layoffs, furloughs, or pay cuts.

As the year progressed we had several discussions with the city’s Chief Human Resource Officer but Ms. Johnson rarely attended. Furthermore, she cancelled multiple times and only attended three total meetings. Of those three meetings she was only willing to discuss finances on August 27th, one week prior to declaring impasse. No discussion or response was given from Ms. Johnson regarding the proposal made 7 months earlier. Instead, she offered a one year contract that included 5.25% increase for only the lowest ranking Firefighter/Paramedics. This offer excludes Driver/Engineers, Lieutenants, Captains, and Battalion Chiefs which comprises over half the Fire Department workforce. When Mayor James claims the city offered a 10% raise to IAFF there is a substantial amount of detail that is left out. His claim is based on the current pay plan structure that has a standard progression rate (5%) within a negotiated pay range for each rank. The part that gets left out is that approx. 40% of the West Palm Beach Firefighter/Paramedic have already reached the top of their pay scale and are still ranked 18th in South Florida, over 100 of whom will be excluded from the city’s initial offer based on rank. This offer

was rejected and a request was made to have the city review the original proposal and use that as the basis for our negotiations. This was apparently grounds for impasse according to Ms. Johnson.

Despite the proposal including over \$6M in savings and Ms. Johnson revealing that the city has \$12M in reserves and \$16M in emergency funds, she claims the city's only mechanism for providing any sort of a market adjustment is to implement furloughs, layoffs, and pay cuts to other city employees. This claim has been made multiple times in several public meetings and does nothing more than create a divided workforce within the city.

Again, your Firefighter/Paramedics and the residents of West Palm Beach deserve more.