

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

BRAVO! to the Lake Superior School District (August 20, 2021 front page) regarding parents making the decision for their own children regarding masks, testing, and vaccine. THANK YOU for letting parents parent!

Sincerely,
Barbie Tanaka
Two Harbors

"I have lived in Two Harbors close to a one-third of my life and have been working for the City of Two Harbors for my entire working life. During my time of service I have met a lot of good people who work for our city and they work hard and take pride in the work they do providing vital services for the greater good. Every single employee is the reason why Two Harbors continues to prosper and a place where residents, customers, and tourists come to live, work, and play.

"Our Union, AFSCME Local 1123 representing 25 workers in the City of Two Harbors, has filed an intent to strike in order to preserve our health insurance and ensure we have a properly respected workforce that will continue to deliver excellent public services that our residents deserve and expect. The city administration and City Council's plan would give less stability for families doing yearly budgets, increase uncertainty with rising cost of healthcare, and making future contract negotiations more one-sided against the working-class. We do not ask for much; We ask that we are respected as hard-working public service workers and to not place an undue burden of health insurance costs onto us during the ongoing pandemic we are experiencing.

"As a proud working-class town and region, keeping existing contract language is very important for all workers and our community. We want to ensure that working for the city remains a career and not just a job. We call on the city to negotiate with us in good faith and give us the same respect we get from residents, tourists and businesses that use the essential services we proudly provide. We stand ready to continue negotiating in good faith and we are disappointed to see the city has contracted with an outside attorney from the Twin Cities rather than work collaboratively with us workers to reach a deal we can all be happy with. Our city workers are proud and grateful to have the support of dozens of our community members, residents and business owners who have attended our informational pickets to save our health insurance."

Aaron Heim
Light Equipment Operator
AFSCME Council 5 Local 1123,
City of Two Harbors, Minnesota

Dear Editor,

With respect to the article on August 23, 2021 from the office of Brandon M. Fitzsimmons, Labor Attorney for the City of Two Harbors, Flaherty and Hood, P.A. I am writing to you to bring to the attention our concerns and support for Fair Affordable Health Coverage for all City of Two Harbors employees. The article stated the health insurance plan is consistent with other City bargaining units. However, there has been one (1) bargaining unit in the City that has settled its contract which includes a "Me Too" clause and knowing that there are still three (3) other bargaining units that have not settled their contracts regarding the proposed health insurance plan. Therefore, this leaves the bargaining unit covered under the "Me Too" clause for a fair affordable health coverage plan for all the employees once it is settled.

We encourage the City's bargaining team and their Labor Attorney Brandon M. Fitzsimmons to meet with the employee's bargaining teams "In Person" with a face to face meeting. We feel it is very important that we meet and discuss our concerns in person as opposed to their Zoom meetings (masks can be worn). However, they choose to sit at home or in their offices, which is their comfort zones, by doing

An open letter to the City of Two Harbors councilors

My name is Chad Schultz, I am one of three electrical linemen that work for the City. I am writing this letter to convey my disappointment in how the 2021-2022 contract negotiations are developing. First of all, I feel we are at a disadvantage in the process due to the pandemic and the "zoom style" of the meeting. It feels like the personal connection that is so important in the process is not there. There were many times during the zoom meeting that most of the City's participants did not even have their cameras on, becoming anonymous. Secondly, the hiring of a big city labor lawyer to take on us, the small town employees, was not a very nice thing to do. We are not equipped to take his process on. He is ruthless in his tactics, he is methodically turning each bargaining group against each other. He has drug out this process far too long. It is adding far too much stress to our jobs

Lastly, the most important thing coming out of these negotiations-- the percentage based premiums split. It is so very important to us, it has always been our guarantee that the City will try hard to find us quality, affordable health insurance. With the percentage based premiums split the City's money is proportionally on the line just as much as the workers. With the percentage gone, and the flat rate premiums in place, it just gives us something more to have to fight for at negotiation times. We will have to pay the difference for shortcomings in the premiums. The percentage based premiums have been held sacred for the last 18 years when the City asked the employees to start to help pay into health insurance premiums, when the amount became too large for the City to bear on their own. Since then, there have been hard years for the City where the employees took a zero percent wage increase to keep their health insurance premiums percentage the same. We have made many sacrifices in wages for our health insurance over the last couple decades. Once the percentage based premium split is gone it will never come back.

When hard times befall the City, the first place the City looks to cut costs is the personnel. But when the city is in good times making comfortable profits, like now, the last place the City goes to to invest is personnel. We are not a place to go to cut costs, we are the City. As the Council changes, as the Mayor changes, we the personnel are here driving the inner workings of the City. Please let us keep our percentage based premiums split, it is so very important to us.

Thank You,
Chad Schultz

so this makes it very difficult for the employees to express and discuss our concerns.

In reference to "The City has not proposed to change the City's health insurance plan", with that being said if there were no changes then there would be no reason to reject the offer for the health insurance plan the City has proposed. The proposed total package new labor agreement that the City has submitted to the employees consists of contract language that may jeopardize employees future benefit package, this leaves the employees with uncertainty of their future employment with the City of Two Harbors. To retain employees and acquire future employees in the City of Two Harbors it is important to have a benefit package that includes an Affordable Health Coverage Plan.

We are hardworking, dedicated City employees that take our jobs seriously to provide our service to the public 24/7 even if some of the calls are at inopportune times. We stick together to get the job done for the needs of the public. We now ask the public to support us in an Affordable Health Coverage Plan and we thank you for your support.

City of Two Harbors Employee

Superintendent Belcastro:

"Can you please send me detailed information on each of the two proposed Referendum Issues to be presented for vote on November 2, 2021? I really do not fully understand what you are asking for.

Your comment that the proposed Question Number One is "revenue neutral" may be true for the school district's present income stream, but it is not "expense neutral" to the taxpayers. So, a crucial question is, how much money, in total and over what time frame will your bonding proposal "expense continuation" for Question One be seeking?

You refer, in reference to Question One, as your comments seem to indicate, to the school district's desire for continuing the levy amount for the cost of the new High School, when that levy expires. The cost to build the "new" Two Harbors High School, as I recall, was somewhere between \$20 Million and \$30 Million. Approving a "continuation of the current levy", if equal to the sums originally levied for the High School building project, is really asking taxpayers to incur additional tens of millions of dollars in new public debt ...after the "old" levy expires.

In reality, if the continuation of the "old" referendum monies is not approved, many taxpayers in the county could realize substantial reductions in their overall property tax burden.

The second levy approval proposal, regarding improvements in the "quality" of "athletics and activity space", could involve additional millions of dollars in public debt requests for items such as artificial "turf fields" and other such expenses. As you mentioned, if approved, this levy will increase property taxpayers' overall tax burden.

I have not been able to find any detail which outlines the total dollar amounts and total years for payback, associated with each of the referendum questions, and, what specific plans are in place for targeting the expenditure of those monies.

Again, the successful passage of both these two referendum proposals will increase taxpayer liability for a substantial amount of "new" debt (as the "old" debt is retired), potentially in the tens of millions of dollars. Much more transparency is needed, in order for voters to make an informed decision on the cost to them of the school district's two referendum questions.

If each of these referendum questions were to be approved by voters, how would the expenditures of the money associated with each contribute to the ability of the school district to improve overall standardized student assessment scores on the state standardized performance tests? And, how will you provide accountability to the public as to exactly how those referendum dollars did, in fact, improve standardized test scores throughout the student body?

Could you please provide me with financial and information specifics on each of the two referendum questions as expeditiously as possible? And, could you please provide this information to the general public as soon as practicable?

Thank you,
Mark Broin
Two Harbors, MN

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