

IAFF 2510
And
City of Chehalis
Interest Arbitration
Arbitrator: Robert A. Sutermeister
Date Issued: 05/22/1980

Arbitrator: Sutermeister; Robert A.
Case #: 02396-I-79-00062
Employer: City of Chehalis
Union: IAFF; Local 2510
Date Issued: 05/22/1980

Arbitration
City of Chehalis
and
IAFF 2510

Case Number 2396-I-79-62
Date of Hearing: April 16, 1980
Place of Hearing: Chehalis, Washington
Date Post Hearing-Briefs Received: May 5, 1980

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Arbitration Panel: Mr. Jerry Boes
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Mr. R. A. Sutermeister, Chairman
University of Washington DJ-10

Background

A collective bargaining agreement between the parties was entered into on December 5, 1977 covering the years 1977, 1978, 1979, and 1980. Wages were set for 1977, 1978, and 1979, but the agreement provided for negotiation of wages for 1980. The parties have been unable to agree on wages for 1980, and the Public Employment Relations Commission has determined that an impasse exists between the parties. The matter is now before an arbitration panel for resolution.

The Union has requested a pay increase of 17.75%; or \$62 per month plus 11.4% of the new base. The City has offered an increase of 8.5% as recommended by the President's guidelines.

Issue

What should be the level of compensation for 1980?

Pertinent Provision of the Collective Bargaining Agreement

6. Wages ... The wage rates only for 1980 shall be subject to negotiations in 1979, said negotiations to commence prior to July 1, 1979.

Pertinent Provision of RCW 41.56.460

Require the panel to consider the following features:

- "(a) The constitutional and statutory authority of the employer
- (b) Stipulations of the parties
- (c) Comparison of the wages, hours and conditions of employment of the uniformed personnel of cities and counties involved in the proceedings with the wages, hours, and conditions of employment of uniformed personnel of cities and counties respectively of similar size on the west coast of the United States
- (d) The average consumer prices for goods and services, commonly known as the cost of living.
- (e) Changes in any of the foregoing circumstances during the pendency of the proceedings
- (f) Such other factors, not confined to the foregoing, which are normally or traditionally taken into consideration in the determination of wages, hours, and conditions of employment."

The City's Position

The President's wage price guidelines recommend an average increase in wages for 1980 of 8.5%. Failure to comply with these guidelines will threaten a loss of over \$4,600,000 of federal funds for Chehalis. Moreover, cities are threatened with a loss of federal revenue sharing. If this happens, general revenue funds in Chehalis would have to be used for capital

expenditures and would reduce funds available for salaries.

The Consumers Price Indexes of March 1979, December 1979, and February 1980 (Union Exhibit 7) do not show a composite percentage increase for all items in any major city of Western Washington. The Union has not shown that inflation will consume more than 8.5% increase in wages.

The City compared wages for Chehalis firefighters with those from the nearby cities closest in population to Chehalis, including Shelton, Bothell, Camas, Tumwater, Port Townsend, and Snohomish. A Chehalis firefighter with two years experience received \$1328 per month in 1979. If 8.5% is added to that, the new monthly rate becomes \$1441. If the \$50 per month standby pay is added to that, the new monthly rate becomes \$1491. This is higher than all but two of the comparable cities listed above.

A wage increase in excess of 8.5% is not justified under the criteria set forth by RCW 41.56.460 (listed on the preceding page).

The Union's Position

An increase of 17.75% over 1979 wages is reasonable, appropriate, and mandated by consideration of the factors set forth in RCW 41.56.460. The Presidential Wage Price Guidelines are voluntary and adherence to them is not required by law or by threat of loss of revenue from the federal government.

Wages for Chehalis firefighters may most appropriately be compared with those for Camas, Centralia, Kelso, and Lewis County. The City's offer of 7% would result in wage comparison for 1980 as follows:

Chehalis	1421
Lewis County	1498
Centralia	1539
Kelso	1585
Camas	1691

If Chehalis firefighters are granted an increase of 17.75%, their rate of pay would be 1564.

The arbitration panel would have to award the Chehalis firefighters an increase of 16.8% just to keep up with the consumer price index for 1979.

Among "other factors" for the arbitration panel to consider, are that other government employees in the Chehalis labor market have received increases of 11.3%; the Chief and Assistant Chief of the Chehalis department received increases of 12%; and that other city employees, having received a 7% increase, may receive an additional 2.5% increase, and if they are eligible for a 5% step increase, would get a total increase of 14.5%.

The two most important factors for the arbitration panel to consider are the cost of living increase and the comparison for similar work done in other cities. On this basis, an increase of 17.75% is warranted.

Opinion of Arbitration Panel

The panel, as might be expected, has some reservations about some of the cities designated as comparable cities by the City of Chehalis and by the Union. It is impossible to find other cities with the same population, the same work week, the same assessed valuation, the same number of firefighters etc., as Chehalis.

However, using the comparable cities selected by each of the parties, the midpoints of 1980 monthly salaries are not far apart. The salary for Tumwater firefighters was \$1395 until June 1980 when it becomes \$1445. This results in an average salary over 1980 for Tumwater firefighters of \$1420. The 1980 salaries for firefighters on the City's list follow:

Camas	\$1691
Bothell	\$1666
Shelton	\$1464
Snohomish	\$1455
Tumwater	\$1420
Port Townsend	<u>\$1410</u>
Midpoint	\$1460

On the union's list of comparable cities are Camas, Lewis County, Centralia, and Kelso. Firefighter salaries in Centralia were \$1510 at the start of 1980 but increase to \$1539 on July 1. The average over the year is thus \$1524.50. Included in this amount is \$65 per month for EMT training. For comparison purposes, we have subtracted the \$65 to arrive at a monthly base salary for Centralia firefighters of \$1459.50. The panel was given conflicting figures on 1980 salary for Kelso firefighters. The City submitted \$1585 as the correct amount, and the Union submitted \$1506 as the correct figure. The Washington State Firefighters' Survey for 1980 shows Kelso at 1406. This is the figure we have used in the list below.

Camas	\$1691
Lewis County	\$1498
Centralia	\$1460
Kelso	<u>\$1506</u>
Midpoint	\$1479

An increase of 12% for Chehalis firefighters would set their base pay for 1980 at \$1487. We have excluded the standby pay of \$50 per month for Chehalis firefighters because:

- 1) we excluded the \$65 per month for Centralia's EMT training
- 2) the \$50 per month is not mentioned in Appendix A, Wage

Rates, in the Agreement but is covered in an entirely separate article (#19).

3) the \$50 per month is not included in the budget, page 23, items 522 20 10 labelled "Regular Employee Salaries and Wages" but is shown as a separate item on 522 20 12. This \$1487 amount is close to the midpoint for the City's list (\$1460) and Ivery close to the midpoint for the Union 5 list (\$1479).

A 12% increase would have a further advantage of matching that granted to the Fire Chief and to the Assistant Chief. It would have the further advantage of matching the increases for those city employees who are entitled to a step increase.

Decision

An increase of 12% over 1979 wages should be paid Firefighters for 1980, retroactive to January 1, 1980. If, subsequent to the arbitration hearing on May 5, other city employees receive an additional cost of living increase in 1980, the same percentage additional increase should be granted the firefighters.

**Seattle, Washington
May 22, 1980**

**R.A. Sutermeister, Chairman
Arbitration Panel**

Agree: Jerry Boes

Disagree: F.P. Austin