



Ipsos Reid - Substantial Wage Increase to Retain and Attract Municipal Workers Supported by Three-Quarters of Lower Mainland Residents

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Vancouver, BC—The results of a new survey conducted by Ipsos Reid on behalf of CUPE BC (Canadian Union of Public Employees) have buoyed Lower Mainland CUPE municipal Locals as they head to their respective bargaining tables. The Locals have been coordinating their efforts for months and are together pursuing significant wage increases and restored benefits for retirees.

When asked, three-quarters (75%) of Lower Mainland residents support a substantial wage increase as one measure to ensure that municipalities can get the employees needed to provide quality service to residents. Prior to responding, municipal employee attraction and retention challenges, including vacant positions due to a lack of qualified or interested applicants, were outlined for participants.

Ipsos-Reid also reports that two-thirds (67%) of Lower Mainland residents feel their local government should restore and protect health benefits for retired municipal workers – who, participants were told, pay more now for medicine and other health and dental services and receive only half of the promised support for basic medical coverage.

This comes as welcome news to the 60 Lower Mainland CUPE municipal leaders and staff gathered today in Burnaby to continue their coordinated bargaining efforts. Throughout the Lower Mainland, most municipal contracts expire on December 31, 2006. All CUPE Locals are in a position to bargain and several have already begun negotiations.

“This is very encouraging news,” says Anne Coupland, CUPE Municipal Coordinator and National Representative, of the survey results. “Our main coordinated bargaining aims are overwhelmingly supported by the very people we serve.”

For months, CUPE Locals have been canvassing their members and preparing them for this coordinated round of negotiations.

From Vancouver to the City of Langley, the answer came back the same, municipal workers are expecting:

- a substantial wage increase to help them afford to live in the communities they work, deal with training and retention problems, and ensure quality service to residents, and;
- an end to the erosion of health benefit coverage for retired workers. In recent years, this erosion has caused retirees to pay more for medicine and other health and dental services, while receiving only half of the promised support for basic medical coverage.

With the average price of a detached house in Greater Vancouver now over \$635,000, and gas prices at historic highs, many municipal workers feel that they have been priced out of the very communities they serve.

Coupland says these are attainable and realistic goals in light of increasing municipal revenues (approximately 5% increase a year in Lower Mainland communities), current and projected population growth (7.3% over the next 5 years), and the need to recruit and retain skilled workers in the face of current and future labour shortages. It is estimated that 10 to 15% of Lower Mainland city workers will retire within the next 4 years.

Lower mainland communities involved in this coordinated bargaining include Vancouver, Burnaby, Coquitlam, Delta, Richmond, Langley (City & Township), Maple Ridge, New Westminister, North Vancouver (City & District), Pitt-Meadows, Surrey and White Rock.

CUPE BC represents over 24,000 municipal (including Library, Police Board, Museum, and other) workers across British Columbia, with approximately half employed in Lower Mainland communities.

These results are based on 500 telephone interviews with Lower Mainland residents, 18 years of age and older from the BC Reid Express omnibus survey. Interviews were conducted between October 10 and October 15, 2006 with residents from throughout the Lower Mainland. The final data are statistically weighted to reflect the actual age and gender of the Lower Mainland population.

With a provincial sample of 500, one can say with 95% certainty that the overall results are within ± 4.4 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire population of the Lower Mainland been surveyed. The margin of error will be larger for sub-groupings of the survey population.