

Firemen, City Talks Set

By JUDY DOYLE

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WINTER PARK — Winter Park Fire Fighters Local 1598 agreed to meet with the city one more time this week in an effort to reach agreement

on their contract before taking its demands to arbitration.

A cost of living increase and a revised grievance procedure head the list of union demands rejected by special city labor relations attorney Robin Fawsett.

Eight city firemen recently resigned to work for Seminole County Fire Department for a cut in pay, citing better job opportunities there as their reason for leaving Winter Park. These men also complained of the lack of cooperation by the city in the labor negotiations.

GUS LaGARDE, president of the union's negotiating team, said the union is extremely displeased with the city's attitude on their request for a cost of living increase. LaGarde said the union is "trying not to consider" a drastic measure such as a sick-in.

At one point during the last bargaining session, Fawsett said, "We're hoping none of the employees will go on strike," because cost of living increases were not included in this year's budget.

Charlie Kossuth, a representative of the International Association of Fire Fighters, from Washington, D. C., assisting the local union in their bargaining talks, answered, "I hope so too."

KOSSUTH HAS advised the union to take their demands to arbitration if their negotiations come to an impasse. Contrary to Fawsett, Kossuth's interpretation of a state statute on arbitration considers the outcome binding.

Kossuth said the statute makes a decision by a neutral arbitration board binding on questions of hours and wages, and advisory on all other matters.

On the other hand, Fawsett interprets the law to mean decisions on all matters except grievances are of a non binding advisory nature. "There is no way the city will agree to binding arbitration," Fawsett told the negotiation team.

KOSSUTH NOTED of the 17 bargaining sessions he has followed through arbitration, the city has lost every time.

The firemen maintain they will

not back down on their demand for a cost of living increase. City Manager Bob Proctor said a five per cent cost of living increase this year will be conditional if the revenue is available. There is no way the city will allow itself to become legally bound to the salary increase, said Proctor.

If the revenue exceeds expectations in March, Proctor said, salary adjustments will be made. However, Fawsett said conditions "look worse than the last time we discussed this."

"EVERYONE IS in a financial bind, but everyone is entitled to a cost of living increase," LaGarde said. "The city isn't quite as poor as they would have you believe."

Kossuth echoed, "I can't believe this city has the lack of funds described." The negotiating team has repeated the millage rate should be increased to generate more revenue to provide at least a cost of living increase to city employees.

The fire fighter's union, for the second year, is pressing a revised grievance procedure. LaGarde said the union would like to keep internal grievances within the department rather than filing a report with the city manager as the procedure in the contract that expired Oct. 1, required.

"OUR PROBLEM is filing with the city manager right off the bat," LaGarde said. "If we could just have one prior step before going to the city manager. We want to try to solve the problem within our own department."

Fawsett rejected the proposal on grounds it called for binding arbitrations.

Fawsett wrote the current grievance procedure. He said his procedure is "tried and tested," a modification of many procedures used in collective bargaining sessions.

"I'M NOT the slightest bit interested in your procedure," the attorney told the firemen.

Another bargaining session will be held at 1 p.m. Wednesday in Room 109 at city hall.

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