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Firefighters Unhappy With Slow Progress of Labor Talks

By Nick Marnell

Decked out in black "1230 Strong" solidarity T-shirts, nearly 50 firefighters rallied at the Oct. 7 Board of Supervisors meeting to complain about the slow pace of labor negotiations between their union and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. Talks have gone on since May, the latest contract having expired June 30.

"Instead of honest negotiating, you're treating us as a hostile work group," said ConFire engineer and Local 1230 vice president Vito Impastato, addressing the board. "Nothing can be further from the truth. Treat us as though we've done everything you've asked us to do the last six years."

Vince Wells, Local 1230 president, reminded the board that the firefighters have taken a 10 percent pay cut, they contribute a portion of the employer share of the retirement fund and they have struggled with a 25 percent cut in staff. "Provide direction to your negotiating team," he said.

"We're anxious to get back to the bargaining table and restore some of the sacrifices we've made for the community.

"Your negotiating team doesn't care," added Wells. "We are hopeful that you do."

Board president Karen Mitchoff advised the rank and file that the board had just that day given direction to its negotiating team. Mitchoff said later that she would not elaborate on what the direction was.

Wells later explained that 10 labor negotiating sessions have been held since May, with one management proposal presented Oct. 2. "And the negotiator couldn't adequately explain the proposal," he said. "It's offensive to us. We can't even get our questions answered." Wells did note that the tone of the ConFire talks has been less acrimonious than were the negotiations with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

"We continue to negotiate with Local 1230 to reach a fair contract while still ensuring that the district will have adequate funds to continue in operation," said Lisa Driscoll, county finance director and management's lead negotiator.

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[back](#)

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