
THE CUPE CONNECTION

Official Publication of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 38
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CITY HIRING IN DISARRAY

A number of incidents have given rise to several grievances that indicate that the City needs to review its hiring processes. The following are recent examples of a system in stress.

A grievance was filed on behalf of a member who has been employed by the City for 9 years, 7 of which were at her current position. After applying for a similar position, one pay grade lower than her current position of 7 years, she received a letter from the Director indicating she was the successful applicant. Shortly thereafter she received a phone call to advise her that she was unqualified and therefore could not be given the position. This occurred despite the position qualifications being identical to her current position. Between being hired into the position and the new posting, the City had removed the equivalencies that existed at the time she was hired. This was done to not recognize a series of certifications and 2 years of post secondary education held by the applicant. Local 38 filed two grievances regarding the matter and the employee was then offered the position.

In a related issue, Local 38 has advanced a grievance to arbitration regarding the City establishing qualifications in a discriminatory manner. The facts in this case revolve around an employee applying for a promotion which is consistent with the duties they had been performing for the City of Calgary. The City is refusing to recognize their one year diploma from a private college in Ontario. The college was accredited by the Ontario government at the time, and viewed the grievors subsequent post secondary courses as being equivalent to a tech diploma. This case may have significant impact on our members and the City. We will keep you advised as it progresses.

In another incident, an employee failed to pass their probationary period after they had been given a position without applying on the posting. Local 38 is addressing the trust issues this incident has created.

The final issue is an under fill situation where the City posted a position numerous times without being able to attract a qualified applicant. The most recent posting resulted in the City approaching Local 38 about appointing someone who didn't meet the qualifications. The individual was only minimally short of the qualifications and would be able to qualify in relatively short order. In reviewing the posting and noting it was limited term Local 38 allowed the City to offer the job to the applicant. When the applicant found out that they would be restricted to the new hire rate of pay they declined the position.

Clearly the City is unprepared for the current employment environment. They have no system or inclination to assess by what methods a person can acquire certain skills and abilities. It appears the City is more focused on ease of assessment than applications through credentialism which supports e-recruit.

How can the City claim to be an equal opportunity employer when their systems are so rigid and stuck in the educational requirement system?

With retirement of the baby boomers pending how does the City plan to fill vacant positions they require? Their current systems do not work for immigrants nor do they work for their existing workforce. The City has no internal development process for the majority of positions now occupied.



There's no place like home

(The following is an opinion expressed by a CUPE Local 38 member)

Not surprisingly, a report issued recently by the City of Calgary revealed there has been a significant increase in the number of homeless people in the city. On the night of the Homeless Count – May 10 – a total of 3,436 people were “living” either on the streets, in various shelters or in some form of transitional housing program. That figure marked a 32% increase in the number of our fellow citizens who are homeless since the count was last conducted in May 2004. Certainly, there were some methodological differences in what types of residential circumstances were included in the survey (i.e. with the addition of transitional housing in the 2006 count), and that accounted for some of the increase. Nevertheless, even when this sampling change was factored in, there has been an appalling increase in the absolute numbers of people both literally on the streets and living in shelters.

And, as daunting as the figures from the Homeless Count are, they by no means portray the full extent of the housing crisis in Calgary. The count fails to capture the fragile housing circumstances of many other people, who if not absolutely homeless are in precarious residential situations. People are seeing their rents increasing substantially as landlords are grabbing the opportunity for profits with alacrity. Along the same lines – as landlords opt for conversion to gentrified condominiums as opposed to apartments - there has been a decrease in available rental stock in the city. In fact, there was a 2.2% decrease in rental units between 2004 and 2005. The waiting list for social housing through Calgary Housing is in the thousands, and the idea of affordable housing in the city is a modest 3-bedroom bungalow priced at the average cost of \$345,000! In a tight housing market, landlords can also, under the table of course, discriminate against who they will rent units to – the experiences of many young families, people on social assistance, new Canadians and aboriginal families can readily attest to that.

In response, some people are staying with friends – “couch surfing” or making deals for overnight accommodation. Others are cutting back on essentials, such as food, to cover rent. Still more turn to temporary programs, such as the church-based Inn From The Cold, where one can see the truly heartbreaking sight of babies, toddlers and young children having to move from church hall to church hall for temporary, overnight shelter. And, tragically so, some women are being forced to stay in unsafe, if not abusive, situations due to the lack of affordable housing. Such circumstances are unacceptable.

In large part, the problem is related to the basic fact that housing has become increasingly, and solely, a market commodity, and the “supply” of housing is increasingly related to ability to pay as opposed to being provided on the basis of need. What ever happened to townhouses for rent? What ever happened to small houses and affordable apartments? The market has completely taken over, and in its pursuit of unparalleled profit has utterly failed to provide low-cost housing. Also a significant cause of the crisis has been the unwillingness of the various orders of governments to act in a timely, comprehensive and integrated manner. Social housing has been sacrificed on the altar of tax cuts. It may seem simplistic to say, but the provision of low-cost and social housing, together with the statutory implementation of rental controls and an expansion of the Private Landlord Rent Supplement Program would go a long way to end the housing crisis.

Obviously, however, housing is only one part of the dimension. We must also do something about income so that government programs and the market provide, at least, a living wage. We also have to look at dimensions of substance abuse and mental health within elements of our homeless population and provide the necessary community-based supports and services. Additionally, we have to challenge sexist, racist and classist assumptions that serve to undermine the dignity and social worth of our fellow citizens. A lot of social justice work is needed. That having been said, though, the various orders of government must intervene to compensate for

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No Place Like Home (con't from Page 2)

the complete and utter failure of the market to provide truly affordable and appropriate housing for all low- and middle-income Calgarians.

But why is this important to CUPE members? Well, unions, and our members, were central to the creation of the welfare state. Historically, organized labour has been a prime mover in terms of the development, and extension of basic human rights in the various manifestations of capitalist society. Certainly, we must continue to look out for our economic interests as workers – the boss class doesn't give us improved wages and benefits out of a sense of kindness and justice - but we are also called to use our collective voice to advocate for our marginalized fellow citizens in the broader social arena. The increasing blight of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing, and the inability of the various orders of government to work together to deal with the expanding housing crisis requires the attention and action of all union members. We need to convey to our municipal, provincial and federal elected officials that safe and permanent housing is a right, that the market has failed, and it's time for government to act on the concrete applications of this basic social right of citizenship.



Thought for the Month

The road to wisdom? Well, it's plain and simple to express: Err and err and err again, but less and less and less.

REMINDER!

Children's Christmas Party, Red & White Club

Saturday, December 9th, 9:30 am–11:00 am

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE

(Deadline for registering November 30th. Application forms are available on our website at www.cupe38.org in the News section if you have not already submitted one.)



If you register, and are unable to attend the party, gifts are available for pickup at 1439—9th Av. S.E. on the following dates and times:

December 11, 13 & 14—7:00 am –2:00 pm

December 12—9:00 am—4:00 pm

All gifts not picked up by December 14th at 2:00 pm will be donated to charity.

REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, NOVEMBER 28, 2006

7:00 p.m.

Union Office (NEW LOCATION)

1439—9th Avenue South East

BUSINESS: Regular

ELECTIONS:

- 1) Two (2) Executive Members—Term until April, 2007**
- 2) Trustee—Term until April, 2007**
- 3) Trustee—Term until April, 2008**
- 4) Committee Elections to fill vacancies**
 - 1) Social Committee—1 Member**
 - 2) PR & Education Committee—1 Member**
 - 3) Equal Opportunities—3 Members**
- 5) Eight (8) Delegates to AFL/CLC Weeklong School**

There will be a motion at this meeting to amend the bylaws. To pass amendments a 2/3 majority vote of those members in attendance is required. These amendments are administrative and deal mainly with the stewards committee.

There will be a steward/alternates meeting at 5:00 p.m. Please call the office to confirm your attendance prior to noon on November 24th, 2006.