



Published July 12th, 2017

Orinda employees strike, citing 'bad faith negotiating'

By Sora O'Doherty

City of Orinda workers represented by Teamster Union 856 staged a two-day strike to protest what they see as unfair bargaining by the city.

About 20 out of the city's 38 current employees are members of the Teamster's Union. Negotiations for a new contract broke down, and the contract expired on June 30, although most of its provisions continue in force, according to Orinda Interim City Manager Steve Salomon. With no agreement at the last meeting and no further meetings scheduled, the union filed an unfair labor practices complaint with the Public Employees Relations Board, and notified the city on Thursday June 29 that there would be a strike on Monday and Tuesday, July 3 and 4, with workers returning to work on July 5.

According to the Teamsters, the strike was called to draw attention to the city's bad faith negotiating and to demonstrate that city management isn't above the law. "They've been arbitrarily refusing to negotiate with us over important topics," said Robbie Thompson, a maintenance worker for the City of Orinda. "We want to be treated with respect and the games they play in bargaining are just plain unfair." Workers are hopeful that the city will heed the protest and cease and desist.

Salomon noted that one of the strike days was a holiday and the other was a work day. He estimated that four to five employees did not come in. Salomon expressed the city's wishes that the employees and their union will return to the bargaining table and hopes that they will have a new agreement soon.

Union workers include city administrative staff, parks and recreation employees, workers in the engineering and planning departments, and civilian workers who respond to citizen requests in the City of Orinda Police Department. Although there are only 20 union employees currently, there are 23 positions covered by the union. However two are vacant and one employee is out on medical leave.

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