

Coventry Pension Trouble



Kendra Leigh Miller • Daily Times

Coventry School Related Personnel (SRP) picket outside of the town hall prior to Monday night's Coventry Town Council meeting.

SRP picketers greet council

Coventry school employees protest for equal pension attention as police and town workers

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COVENTRY — "If you want to stop the tension, give SRP their pension!" they cried.

More than 100 members and supporters of Coventry's School Related Personnel (SRP) picketed for equal pension outside Coventry Town Hall prior to the start of Monday's Town Council meeting.

"We're waiting to be treated fairly and equally," stated Denise Gibbons, SRP president. "We're here because we've made a very concerted effort to address the fact that there are three pensions in this town — not just two — for police and municipal [employees].

The Coventry Teachers' Association includes teacher's aides, teaching assistants, custodians and secretaries.

Gibbons said all they're asking for is their portion of the 10 percent sur-

plus the town receives in taxes

"As a community, I think we should pull our resources to figure out this underfunded pension," said Councilman Ted Jendzejec, who doesn't want to see things turn into school against town or person against person. "It's going to fall on the taxpayers. We also have two new members on the Town Council who we should allow to review the past meeting minutes."

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Picketers want pension answer

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The crowd erupted into heavy applause following Jendzejec's comments.

The three pensions in town are the police, municipal employees and the SRP personnel. All three are supported by taxpayer money. There SRP pension plan includes 320 people.

"I've sat and listened to everyone's comments and as far as I can see it, the taxpayers have already paid their fair share of this pension and it's up to the Board of Trustees to act in the best interest of its members," said Town Council President Gary Cote.

He clarified that the "surplus" SRP members are referring to is a rainy day fund that has accumulated for many years from an increase in intake through such things as new property. The town wasn't paying 100 percent of the ARC payment, so there really is no "surplus."

Cote used the example of having \$200 in the bank when you have a \$150 bill to pay – you really don't have \$200.

"The town is not liable," stated Cote. "There is a Board of Trustees whose job is to make it work."

Cote also clarified that the pensions for police and municipal were recently renegotiated and the \$24 million deficit is just for the SRP fund, not the other two.

The Council tabled discussion for a future meeting so the two new members,



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A standing-room only crowd takes in Coventry's town council meeting Monday night.

Karen Carlson and Greg Laboissoniere, can get up to speed but comments were heard again during the public comment portion of the meeting.

Gary Moore, a member of the Board of Trustees, said the unfunded liability is a situation that must be addressed.

"I think a lot of the confusion with the pension plan has occurred since the financial crisis," he said. "Things have happened beyond the town's and schools'

control. I hate to see everyone blaming another. We really have to sit down and figure it out."

Kelly Erinakes, president of the Coventry Teachers' Alliance, said those who sit before the Council have gone through great changes to help their pensions.

"It's impacting more residents than you know," she said. "It's going to get really nasty if people don't sit down and put their heads together about this."