



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 2024

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Willows City Council Authorizes One-Time Performance Compensation for Bargaining Units

In an unprecedented and well-deserved stop gap payment for working out of contract, the new Willows City Council authorized a one-time compensation of \$2500 per member to its UPEC Fire and General Bargaining Units - a total of nine employees.

"Most union positions at the City of Willows are well below market. At a time when our dedicated and hard-working employees could have gone almost anywhere else for higher wages, they stood by the citizens of Willows during one of the city's darkest hours. It's time for us to stand by them," commented Mayor Hansen.

The one-time payment will cost the city just under \$25,000, including all expenses associated with the payout such as Social Security. No management or confidential employees will receive the payout.

When asked to respond to the recent approval, Vice-Mayor Hutson commented, "9-1-1 calls don't answer themselves. Sewage lines don't unplug themselves. Library books don't check themselves out. The bills don't pay themselves. All of these city activities (and many more!) require city employees and contractors receiving fair, market rate wages. The voter approved sales tax measure allows the city to make this "one-time thank you" to our city employees for waiting their turn and sticking by our citizens."

Both City bargaining units have been working without a contract since July 1, 2024, with no Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) or other increases in salary since then. While the City will not start receiving the new 1.5% sales tax until April 1, 2025, it is able to afford this one-time payout during this fiscal year in an effort to alleviate status quo salaries.

"Even with the uncertainty of the City's financial outcome after the November 2024 election, both of the City's bargaining units have continued to work out of contract since July 1, 2024, with diligence and dedication. It's time to show our appreciation - not just as a Council but as a community," added Councilmember Thomas.

While the city is budgeted for 18 full-time employees, currently, there are only 15 – one in Administration, two in Finance, two in Community Development & Services, five in Public Works,



four in the Fire Department, and one in the Library. The three vacancies include one position in Public Works, one in the Library and one in Administration.

Newly elected Councilmember Pride said, "It's easy to forget who responds to our 9-1-1 calls, who picks up our leaves in an effort to prevent flooding, mows our city park lawns, and keeps the sewage system running smoothly. But it's our employees - currently, 15 of them. They keep the City running. Without them, there would be no city. It's time to show our appreciation and support for the work that they do every day."

Most positions in both bargaining units are below market (which explains the high turnover). The City will continue to lose qualified employees and have difficulty attracting new ones if it cannot remain competitive with the surrounding cities and counties.

"The backbone of any organization is its people - not equipment and apparatus. While those things matter, it's human ingenuity and creativity that moves an organization and its services forward in the absence of the other. For example, the recent failure of the city's leaf vacuum truck forced city employees to find another solution to the problem while we waited to see if the sales tax would pass and whether we could afford to fix the truck. As a result, Public Works and the Fire Department staff worked together using two dump trucks, a backhoe, and Fire Department utility truck with a dump trailer to pick up leaves around the city before more and bigger storm events occurred. It has delayed the process, but our city employees are getting the job done. And this is us, saying thank you," stated Councilmember Busby!

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