

# Transit workers dig in as Town aims to stave off strike

by David Lea  
Oakville Beaver Staff

The Town of Oakville is continuing negotiations with Unifor Local 1256 in an effort to avoid a transit strike, which could take place as early as Feb. 1.

Negotiations with the union, representing 175 Oakville Transit workers including drivers and maintenance staff, began in December 2013.

Earlier this month, the union requested a No Board Report from the provincial conciliator and, as a result, will be in a legal strike position at 12:01 a.m. Feb. 1.

“The Town is committed to negotiating a fair contract that balances competitive compensation for transit employees with long-term affordability for taxpayers,” said Elizabeth Bourns, director of human resources for the Town.

“Over the past year, we have successfully negotiated contract settlements with our two CUPE locals, and we will work to do the same with Unifor 1256.”

Willie Lambert, chair of the transit workers bargaining committee, is not convinced. He said the Oakville Transit system is going to expand by leaps and bounds during the life of the proposed collective agreement. He argued that improvements to working conditions and appropriate pay are not a lot to ask for when considering the work of transit staff.

Oakville Transit drivers make \$26.85 per hour, said the Town’s communications director.



The Town of Oakville is continuing negotiations with Unifor Local 1256 in an effort reach a contract settlement and avoid an Oakville Transit strike, which could take place as early as Feb. 1. | Oakville Beaver file photo

Lambert did not divulge the wage increase being sought, stating that, for the moment, the committee is focusing on other areas.

“They want to remove our employment security provisions and they want to remove a number of other accomplishments that we’ve made in our collective agreement. They’re talking about removing sick days, restricting all forms of shift changes and denying maintenance workers a chance to take a day off if they are scheduled on a weekend,” said Lambert.

“They are taking a real anti-worker stand and we are not going to abide by it. If they want an

all-out class war then they are going to get it. We are going to fight them for everything we’ve established and what we believe we deserve into the future.”

While Lambert is hopeful a strike will not take place, he said it is a real possibility.

The Town and the union have scheduled four days of collective bargaining for next week.

Bourns said it is not unusual for labour negotiations to continue right up to, and even past, a strike deadline, but noted the Town is making contingency plans in case a strike occurs.

In the event of strike action, the Town says it

will work to ensure Oakville’s care-A-van service for the physically disabled will continue to operate for medical appointments.

All other regularly scheduled transit services in Oakville would be discontinued immediately.

“We remain optimistic that a settlement will be reached, but we have been receiving questions from the public and we want to ensure our riders have sufficient time to prepare alternative travel arrangements,” said Bourns.

Updates and information will be posted on [www.oakvilletransit.ca](http://www.oakvilletransit.ca) and [www.oakville.ca](http://www.oakville.ca) and Twitter at @townofoakville or @oakvilletransit.

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