

# Once signed, contract will have expired and new negotiations need to begin

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started more than three years ago, told the Milton Champion he expects the loose ends of a few issues to be tied up and a new contract formally signed, by the town and the firefighters union, within the next two months.

The agreement between the municipality and the firefighters' association (IAFF Local 3168) expired on Feb. 28, 2015.

During negotiations, the parties were able to reach resolution on 38 operational and non-monetary items, including changes in contract language.

When a new deal is signed, the two sides will have to quickly restart negotiations on another pact.

Pratt said he expects

talks to begin this September on possibly a new three or four-year contract.

At the town council meeting on Monday, May 28, some town staffers and councillors expressed concern about the financial impact of what will be the "new" old contract, which runs from March 1, 2015, to Feb. 28, 2018.

Linda Leeds, the town's deputy chief accounting officer and chief financial officer, told councillors that the awarded increases to financial compensation for Milton firefighters equals about \$535,000 a year more in costs to the town, the equivalent of almost a one per cent budget hike, based on the 2018 tax levy.

"This award will have a significant financial impact on the cost of operating the

Milton Fire Department and will further compound the costs to increase on-duty staffing levels," says Leeds' written report to council.

"The board awarded a number of additional items, which result in significant increase in the overall total compensation costs, without consideration to offsets nor cost containment," the report stated.

In terms of salary compensation awarded by the arbitration board, firefighters get a 3.75 per cent raise for 2015, 2.1 per cent for 2016, and 2.3 per cent for 2017.

The incremental increases means a first-class firefighter in Milton is being paid \$96,925 as of March 2017.

Leeds' report notes that

the arbitration decision results in first-class firefighters in Milton earning slightly more than first-class constables with Halton regional police, for 2017.

"... there is evidence to suggest that the norm of police/fire parity will be reinstated in 2018 and beyond," says her report.

Now the town has to cost out the firefighter wage increases.

"Staff, in conjunction with town's benefits advisors, continue to work through the final costing of the aggregate impact of the remainder of the arbitrators' rulings," said Leeds' report.

"There will be budget pressure in 2018 in order to accommodate the higher rate of pay and other awards made.

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These will be reflected in the quarterly variance processes and incorporated into the 2019 budget process."

Pratt, who attended the contract arbitration hearings on behalf of the town, sees both sides of arguments made at the bargaining table, as he technically represents the employer (the town) but works directly with many fire department staff and unionized firefighters.

"I feel bad for the (elected town) councillors because they have to answer to the public and set the tax levy.

"The fire associations

provincially are aligning themselves to get the same (compensation) as in other parts of the province.

Then in arbitration awards it becomes normative," he told the Champion.

The Milton Fire Department has 130 employees. Fifty-eight of that number are unionized staff, with 45 of the 58 being full-time firefighters.

The department also has 65 part-time/volunteer firefighters.

Pratt said the service will add five full-time positions in 2018 - three firefighters and two communicators.



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