

# Firefighters want parity with police

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we've always gotten, but the town is still pushing," he said. "We're not asking to be the highest paid firefighters in the province, we just want what is comparable to YRP."

Former fire chief Jim Sales, now overseeing the department as the town's commissioner of community and fire services, said it's not that simple.

"It's not realistic to compare fire and police in all cases," he said. "The truth is we cannot just give in to every desire of the union when they are not willing to negotiate, because ultimately we have to be responsible to the taxpayers."

But Mr. Brassard said firefighters in Hamilton and, just recently, Toronto, have already signed similar deals.

"Fifty feet across the street in Toronto they are getting comparable wages to YRP, so why not here?" he asked.

## CANNOT STRIKE

Firefighters are deemed an essential service and, therefore, cannot legally strike. If negotiations reach an impasse, they can ask for binding arbitration. Mr. Brassard said they did so in December, but not willingly.

"We win every time anyway so it's really a waste of time, energy and money. It's going to cost the association \$50,000. Probably double that for the



**JIM SALES:** Comments on treatment of Markham firefighters called negotiating ploy.

town and that's paid directly by the taxpayer," he said.

"It's really an unwillingness on behalf of the town to make a decision and allow someone else to make a decision for them, even though it's going to go against them. At the end of the day, it really doesn't help employee relations, either."

Employee relations have improved since 1999, when the association signed its last contract. It was the only contract in the last decade to be negotiated without an arbitrator.

Then, there were upwards of 60 grievances filed by the town's 200-plus

firefighters. Now there are only eight. Union secretary Scott Daniel, who was president at the time, said the town did make an effort to improve the rocky relationship it had with the department's personnel, but it looks like the animosity is growing again.

"We resolved those issues," he said. "And now, here we go again."

Mr. Sales said he was brought in as fire chief in 1999 to help solve the labour relations issues and take responsibility for modernizing the town's fire services, a goal he claims to have almost reached.

"We're really trying to create a positive relationship with firefighters and, I think if you ask most of them, we have," he said.

Mr. Sales said a negotiated settlement is the goal for the town and the problems it has run into have stemmed from the union having had three sets of negotiating committees since April 2003, with Mr. Brassard's team coming in just two months ago.

## NEW EXECUTIVE

"Every time they change the executive, it's back to square one," he explained.

In fact, Mr. Sales suggested Mr. Brassard's comments on the treatment of firefighters is simply a negotiating ploy.

"He's doing everything he can to get a settlement," he said. "But as you know, there are two sides to every story."

# Stouffville union, chief confident of deal

Whitchurch-Stouffville firefighters' contract expired in December and both management and the six-person union are anticipating smooth negotiations leading up to the department's second collective bargaining agreement.

Firefighters' association president John Winters said the first agreement,

signed in 2002, was done without an arbitrator and he is confident 2004 will be no different.

"We're thinking positively," he said. Fire Chief Tim Beckett agreed.

"We're still in the early stages of negotiations," he said. "But we have a good working relationship and open commu-

nication and we're positive we can work things out."

—Martin Derbyshire

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