

# What do we want?

Fair wages. Adequate health care coverage. Safe and respectful working conditions.

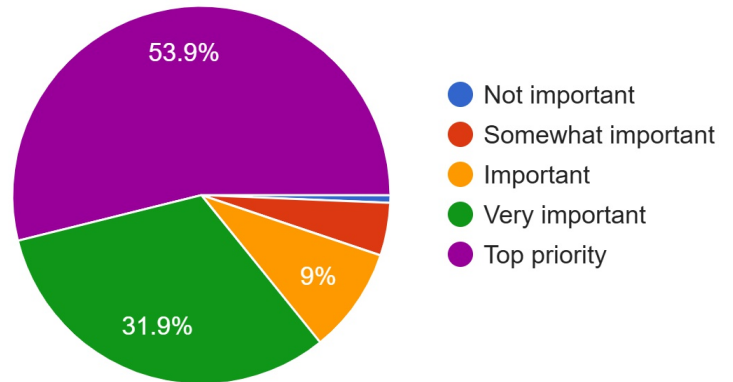
These were the priorities brought forward by the Local 66 Basic and Merit Negotiating Team when negotiations opened Aug. 13. Team members had hoped for a reasonable response from management, but the vast majority of proposals – even those that cost the employer no money but create a better work environment – were rejected.

“I do want to remind members that this is only the first proposal,” said Denise Allan, Merit negotiating team chair. “And while we are certainly far apart on an agreement at this time, we do have some time to come to a mutually beneficial agreement in the near future.”

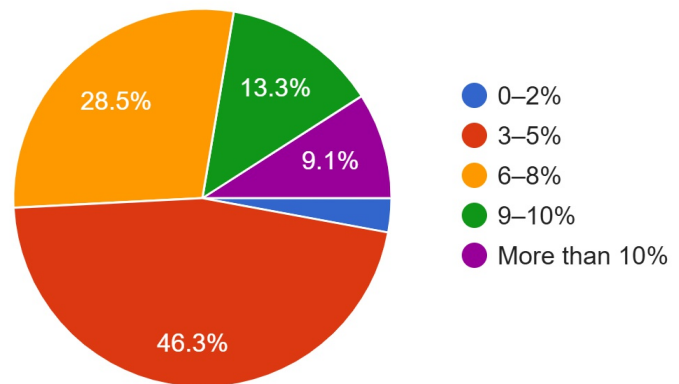
In the second full round of talks, held Sept. 17

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How important is a wage increase to you in the upcoming contract negotiations?



What percentage wage (per year) increase do you feel is fair and reasonable?



# What is management offering?

This week, members of Teamsters Local 320 reached a tentative agreement with the University of Minnesota for a contract that would increase wages by 3.5 percent in the first two years and 3 percent in the third year. Nurses in the Essentia Health System reached an agreement in July for a contract that would increase wages by 3 percent

in year one, 4 percent in year two, and 2.75 percent in year three.

That equates to a 10.5 percent increase for the Teamsters and a 9.75 percent increase for Essentia nurses over the life of their three-year contracts.

What is St. Louis County offering? The employer has proposed a 3.75 percent increase

over the course of three years. That’s an average of 1.25 percent each year.

The employer is also seeking to terminate the Sick Leave Bank and cease allowing vacation donations. Minimal increases to the vacation cap and accrual rate were proposed

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## Q&A Corner

### **Q: What are the next steps in the negotiating process? How long does it usually take to agree upon a contract?**

A: Members of the negotiating team met with management Sept. 17 and 18 at the Government Services Center in Duluth. The two sides will continue to meet until the negotiating team has a tentative agreement it feels comfortable bringing to the membership for a vote, or until an impasse is reached.

Typically 16-18 meetings will take place between the two sides during the negotiating process. So far, the negotiating team and management have met four times, so several more months of bargaining are likely.

*Do you have a question you would like answered? Send it to the BMOOC members at [afscmebmoc@gmail.com](mailto:afscmebmoc@gmail.com).*

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by management to offset the stripping of paid leave options.

Anja Hogan, a member of the Local 66 Basic and Merit Negotiating Team, said County Board action will be required to end vacation donations, and the Union intends to fight that potential change.

Hogan said flex-time agreements have also been discussed at the bargaining table. She expressed optimism the Union and employer could work together to come up with an agreement that works for both sides, but no framework has been laid out yet.

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and 18, the negotiating team managed to make some progress on language items, but there was no movement on wages.

Wages were identified as a top concern during this summer's "Dot Meetings," and Union members reaffirmed that position in a recent survey. According to the survey results, nearly 86 percent of respondents considered wages to be either the top priority or a very important negotiating point in this contract cycle.

When asked what percentage wage increase per year would be fair, 46.3 percent of respondents voted for a 3-5 percent increase. More than a quarter of respondents (28.5 percent), felt a 6-8 percent increase would be more appropriate.

The negotiating team brought two wage-related proposals to the table. The first was a market adjustment for all positions. The proposed increase was equal to a four-grade jump for Basic members and a corresponding percentage increase

for Merit members. The second was an additional wage increase on top of the market adjustment.

The employer declined market adjustments across the board for all positions, and countered with what equates to a 1.25 percent annual wage increase.

The gap between the two sides' proposals is wide.

Under the Union's market increase proposal, an IT applications developer (grade B24) with an hourly wage of \$33.42 would have moved to grade B28, with an hourly wage of \$38.73. The employer's proposal would move that same employee's wage to \$33.84, and increase of just 42 cents.

For employees in the Information Specialist I job classification, the Union's goal was to move the starting wage from \$17.96 to \$19.87. The County is proposing and increase of 22 cents in the first year of the contract, bringing the hourly wage to \$18.18.

"This is not a living wage in our current economy. Many current employees are relying on working

second or third jobs to make ends meet," Allan said. "This is embarrassing to me as an employee and a taxpayer. St. Louis County employees deserve to be paid a living wage that allows them to provide medical care, food, and basic necessities to themselves and their families."

In terms of health insurance, negotiating team member Anja Hogan said the team is committed to ensuring members see no change in benefits. Another priority is for St. Louis County to remain self-insured, which allows for group savings to be retained within our account.

Costs have already gone up following an insurance premium increase effective Sept. 1, but the Union has declined an additional increase for January. Currently, employees pay 9 percent of premium costs for individual coverage (\$104.05) and 18 percent for family coverage (\$483.31).

Both Allan and Hogan said the negotiating team intends to protect the benefits fought for and gained by Union members over the years.