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Sarasota County declares impasse in negotiations

Sarasota County declared an impasse in negotiations with the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1701 in a letter sent today to the union and the Florida Public Employees Relations Commission.

"The county is doing all it can to preserve the essential service provided by transit, service that residents rely on to get to work, and medical appointments for example," said Rob Lewis, executive director. "It's important that we take a strong position as stewards of the taxpayer dollars."

"I'm disappointed that the union leadership walked out on the negotiations," said Karen Morinelli, lead negotiator for the county. "The union's leadership's wage expectations are unrealistic given today's economic pressures."

"We're anticipating a projected revenue shortfall of \$30 to \$50 million next year," said Jeff Seward, chief financial planning officer.

"To date, the county has laid off about 150 employees and reduced services in libraries, parks and other areas. None of the layoffs occurred within the ATU. The union leadership appears to think they are immune to the budget challenges that have impacted every other county operation and have really lost touch with economic realities despite the proposal we have made to them," said County Administrator Jim Ley.

"We are fortunate to have a great team of professional and courteous drivers working for Sarasota County," Ley added. "It is unfortunate that ATU leadership is placing them in an embarrassing situation with the public which pays their salaries. Proposing work stoppages, picketing and demanding increases in wages when those taxpayers are cutting back in life is just unrealistic."

The county and union have conducted eight negotiation sessions since September 2008, with the union business agent declining to appear at two sessions. With the declaration of an impasse, the county and union are obligated to follow the statutory impasse procedures set forth in Section 447.403 of the Florida Statutes.

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