

Section 3: Operations

Chapter 12: Labor Relations

Employee relations and labor relations in villages are, in many respects, the same as they are in cities. The federal and state laws that impact employee and labor relations are for the most part applicable to all public employers including counties, cities, townships, and villages. There are some special labor relations laws that affect only school boards.

Bring in the Experts

There are over 100 Michigan statutes, 35 federal statutes, and provisions in the Michigan Constitution that bear upon employee relations or labor relations in Michigan's public sector.

Since labor relations and collective bargaining are law-driven institutions, it is wise for a village to keep its attorney nearby when it is dealing with a union. Because a village probably does not have anyone working for it or on its council who is a labor relations expert, it is also wise for a village to bring in an outside expert when it is time to negotiate or renegotiate a labor agreement.

Many villages do not have village managers but instead utilize several department heads who report to committees of the village council. This makes negotiations and day-to-day administration of a labor agreement a little more difficult because it is necessary to have consistent and uniform personnel practices and contract interpretation decisions. The various department heads and committee members need to make a special effort to communicate with each other.

Because many villages are small organizations, the cost of conducting labor

relations is quite large, per employee, compared to larger cities. When money is limited, and it always is, it hurts to pay a management consultant or attorney more money than you are paying in all of the employees' raises, combined!

Elected officials should not get directly involved in union and labor relations matters. However, certain village officials may have knowledge and expertise that can hold down consultants' fees by doing some of the negotiating themselves.

The Council's Role

Another bothersome issue in many villages regarding union contracts is, what role, if any, should the village council play in the negotiated grievance procedure. The answer is that the council should not be a step in the grievance procedure and should not be mentioned in it. The council, through its committee system, should guide the village manager or the department heads, in how they should respond to grievances, but should not be directly involved in a formal way.

Another dimension to employee and labor relations in a village is how its employment practices and employee benefits compare to those in its township. Cities don't need to worry about this as much because they do not co-exist with townships geographically. But, the taxpayers of a village, being also taxpayers of the township, sometimes expect the two organizations to be consistent, or, at least, not completely different.

Chapter provided by League staff