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NEWS BRIEFS

Council OKs fire contract

The City Council voted 8-1 to ratify the fire union contract at a special meeting held last week. The lone dissenting vote was cast by Council President Aram Garabedian, who called an executive session – a private meeting of the council – just before the scheduled vote in order to express his concerns.

The other council members clearly did not share Garabedian's views regarding the contract; specifically, what he said were insufficient health care co-shares and a potentially unlawful schedule of raises.

The three-year contract, which went into effect July 1, includes the first-ever health care co-shares accepted by the fire union. All members of the Cranston Fire Department now pay an annual total of $1,040 for families and $520 for individuals toward their health care costs. Fire Union President Paul Valletta estimated the co-share represents about 6.6 percent of estimated health care costs for the current year – the city is self-insured, so the actual costs fluctuate from year to year.

Even though the last agreement expired June 30, 2006, the new contract calls for no retroactive pay increases for the year the firefighters worked without a contract. Salary increases will recommence on Jan. 1, 2008, with a 2 percent raise; thereafter, the union members will receive another 2 percent raise every six months. The last raise comes on June 30, 2010, the last day of the three-year collective bargaining agreement.

The total works out to about 12 percent over four years (including the gap year between contracts) – the same, said Valletta, as the other city unions receive.

The contract also offers changes to the way training pay is calculated, "callback" rules and clothing allowances. The firefighters gave up three paid holidays, bringing the total down to 15 per year, and got increased longevity pay and increased clothing maintenance allowances in return. There were also language changes benefiting the families of firefighters killed in the line of duty or who died soon after retiring.