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December 14, 2015

Mayor and Council
City of Grand Forks
Box 220
GRAND FORKS, BC V0H 1H0

RE: OPEN LETTER TO MAYOR AND COUNCIL

CUPE local 4728 representing your Grand Forks City workers is writing to publicly respond to the City's December 10, 2015 news release concerning the layoff of three staff. We are asking the City to take another look at the process and at solutions put forward by its workers.

We recognize that the City finds itself in a difficult financial situation and is looking to save \$300,000 out of its unionized staff budget as part of its Asset Management Investment Plan. Until very recently, we understood that the City was looking to reduce positions with a commitment that changes would be done through attrition and not layoffs. Now it appears that the City has backtracked on the commitment to protect employees, and despite union proposals that would see no layoffs, the City has gone ahead with a plan that will put loyal and competent staff who want to keep working for the residents of Grand Forks out on the street. We believe that it is important for our community to understand what has happened and why we are asking our Mayor and Council to step back from the current approach.

On September 11, 2015 the City served notice that it intended to eliminate three bargaining unit positions. Since that time we have taken many steps to understand the rationale for this and we have proposed many alternatives.

Union representatives have been involved in a number of meetings and discussions, including a significant meeting on October 6, 2015 involving local union members and two CUPE National representatives where we left assured that the City would find ways to vacate positions through attrition and not layoff.

In this spirit, on December 4, 2015 CUPE submitted a comprehensive proposal that would save the City \$300,000 annually and in perpetuity and protect members from layoff. Specifically, we proposed a solution that would see long-serving workers retire and allow younger workers, with families and financial responsibilities, to continue working for the City. The union also offered provisions giving the employer greater flexibility to create new positions.

PAUL MOIST – National President / Président national **CHARLES FLEURY** – National Secretary-Treasurer / Secrétaire-trésorier national

FRED HAHN – DANIEL LÉGÈRE – LUCIE LEVASSEUR – KELLY MOIST – MARLE ROBERTS – General Vice-Presidents / Vice-présidences générales



On December 7, 2015, the City responded with an aggressive package – rejecting union proposals that would avoid layoffs and disruption and instead demanding that the union give up positions as well as replacing a higher level position with one that is lower paid and has a schedule of work requiring regular weekends that is outside of the current collective agreement provisions.

On top of this, the City added more conditions that it knows or should have known a union cannot meet. The City requested that the union provide a list of 2016 retirees who would be willing to give written “non-rescindable” statements of specific retirement dates as well as a list of members who would accept voluntary layoff. There was no indication of what the employer intended to do with these lists should the union supply them.

And finally, the City added a demand that all grievances be dropped. Our employer should understand that City workers have a right to file grievances in order to seek a resolution to workplace problems and that the union has a legal responsibility to represent members through the grievance process. The union cannot just drop grievances that are in process. As well, by tacking on an unreasonable and insulting demand unrelated to the cost saving plan at the eleventh hour, the employer has only served to further aggravate a very strained relationship with its union.

Following the employer’s aggressive package, the union made a further proposal on December 9, 2015 that would save the City \$300,000 annually through the loss of three permanent bargaining unit positions while avoiding layoff of members. This too was rejected out of hand.

In the City’s December 10, 2015 media release announcing the layoffs, Mayor Konrad says that the City’s “approach isn’t necessarily the easiest approach and the decision was not made lightly.” Mayor Konrad goes on to say that while he was not directly involved in the plan, he understands that it is based on “discussions with CUPE on how the plan could work with the least amount of impact to the community.”

With all due respect, we suggest that the City could and still can do better. Choosing a solution that puts people who want to work out on the street and keeps those who are ready to leave the workforce, is hardly a ‘least impact’ or a balanced solution. We are a small community and there will be many impacts on the individual workers, their families, the City workforce as a whole and quite possibly on services to residents. When you add in the unreasonable demands that the union offer up members for retirement and layoff with no commitments from the City, as well as dropping all grievances, all notion of balance goes out the window.

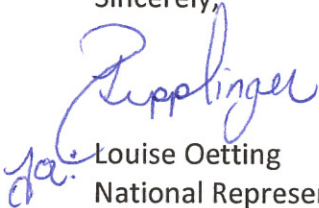
We note that the approach being taken by the City so far will be the subject of further legal proceedings, and Mayor and Council should be aware that it is highly likely that City savings will be eaten up by costly litigation.

It is no secret that the relationship with the current CAO and the City workforce is strained. The latest series of demands and decisions, if the City decides to continue down this road, will only increase internal strife.

Council has seen CUPE members at meetings with signs calling for respect. We have a very high level of solidarity and support within our union to pursue a better resolution to the City's financial concerns and to get back to fair and respectful treatment of workers.

As we close out 2015 and look to begin a new year, we hope that our elected Mayor and Council will commit to taking another look at ways to deal with our City's financial woes and to working towards a better relationship with its staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Louise Oetting". To the left of the signature is a small, stylized blue mark that looks like "ja".

Louise Oetting
National Representative

cc: CUPE Local 4728
M. Brisard, Regional Director
T. McKenna, Assistant Regional Director
R. Moran, National Communications Representative
M. Boyd, National Legal Representative
H. Nott, National Representative
D. Allin, CAO City of Grand Forks

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