

WHAT'S A LIVING WAGE, ANYWAY?

On Wednesday, Vancouver city councillors approved a plan for the city to become a living wage employer within the next few years. It may sound great, but most city employees already make more. In a recent report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a living wage is defined as one that covers basic needs, and its value varies by region. In Metro Vancouver, it is \$20.64 an hour. A family of four would need two parents each earning \$37,565 to cover necessities and participate in their communities, according to the think-tank. *Matt Robinson* goes over the numbers:

\$831 Monthly food budget

It would take about \$831 to feed a family of non-picky eaters without special dietary requirements each month. That's not counting the cost for ketchup, curry powder or other condiments and spices.

\$184 Monthly clothing budget

You can't send your kids to school without shoes or clothes, and you can't go to work that way either. Knock \$184 a month off your earnings to cover those expenses.

\$1,652 Monthly rent

Some Vancouver residents may scoff at this estimate, but the think-tank figured they could find themselves a three-bedroom apartment with utilities, phone and insurance for \$1,652 a month. Most families would need to look farther afield or pay more.

\$505 Monthly transportation costs

This includes the cost of owning and operating a car and a couple of transit passes.

\$1,356 Monthly child care

It would cost \$1,356 a month to provide care for a four-year-old in full-time care and a seven-year-old in part-time care.

\$289 Monthly health care

B.C. residents pay Medical Ser-



Director Seth Klein and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives figure the living wage in Metro Vancouver is \$20.64 an hour. *DAVE RIGLER*

vices Plan premiums, and this hypothetical family is no different. Knock off \$150 a month for that and another \$139 a month for a basic extended health and dental plan.

\$92 Education

It would cost about \$92 a month

for one of the parents to take a couple of college courses each year.

\$241 Contingency fund

This family likes to play it safe by socking away a couple of hundred dollars a month in case someone gets seriously ill or laid off.

\$765 All other monthly expenses

Internet access, toilet paper, furniture, laundry, art lessons, birthday presents — the list goes on. It all costs money. Knock off a couple hundred dollars per family member per month.

\$0 Debt or future expenses

That's right, a great big zero. The living wage does not cover things like credit card debt, interest payments or savings for the parents' retirement or the kids' post-secondary education.

mrobinson@postmedia.com