

# United Counties of Leeds and Grenville



---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 23, 2007**

**UNITED COUNTIES OF LEEDS AND GRENVILLE  
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DIVISION TO BARGAIN AGREEMENT WITH  
CUPE LOCAL 4440**

The United Counties of Leeds and Grenville's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Division confirms that it is currently in negotiations with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 4440 which represents the paramedics employed by the United Counties. The United Counties rejects CUPE's assertion that it is pushing for a strike or lockout (*CUPE News Release, November 22, 2007*).

"The United Counties is committed to negotiating a collective agreement with CUPE," said Douglas Struthers, Warden of the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville. The United Counties and CUPE have met on a number of occasions for collective bargaining as well as on two occasions with a Conciliation Officer appointed by the Ministry of Labour. The United Counties sent CUPE an updated proposal on November 8<sup>th</sup> and is awaiting a response from the Union. A meeting has also been tentatively scheduled with the Union through the Conciliation Officer for mid December.

The EMS salaries and benefits budget has increased from \$3,963,197 in 2001 to \$5,993,250 in 2007 over the last seven years since provincial downloading of land ambulance services to the United Counties. Included in the above figures are increases in paramedic wages which have gone from \$20.40 per hour at the time of downloading to \$28.28 per hour in 2006, just over a 38% increase. Funds have also been invested during this time period to enhance land ambulance services in Leeds and Grenville. Recently an Emergency Response Vehicle was approved by the Joint Services Committee, a decision that adds one new full-time paramedic position.

“Counties Council has elected to direct management staff to negotiate a collective agreement directly with CUPE rather than having one imposed through binding arbitration by a provincial arbitrator or board. This process does not have to lead to a strike or lock out situation unless the parties reach an official impasse. It is the United Counties’ position that a mutually agreeable solution should be possible through negotiations,” said Warden Struthers.

Legal counsel representing the employer during negotiations, D. Alan Whyte, stated that “CUPE is seeking wages in excess of the current provincial average”. This statement was based on research conducted by his firm, Hicks Morley. It is the United Counties’ position that provincial comparators such as the City of Toronto are not appropriate. Whyte further commented that “CUPE is seeking a wage rate that would see them become the highest paid primary care paramedics in Eastern Ontario”.

The paramedics employed by the United Counties are currently not in a legal position to exercise their right to go on strike nor is the United Counties in a position to lock out paramedics. “An essential ambulance services agreement that would govern the level of ambulance services in the event of a strike or lockout must be in place before that can occur”, confirmed Whyte. Whyte also confirmed that “the next steps to negotiate an essential ambulance services agreement might involve an application before the Ontario Labour Relations Board, a process that would likely not be resolved until at least the new year.”

“On behalf of the United Counties, I would like to reassure the residents of Leeds and Grenville that every effort would be made to provide the best land ambulance services possible in the event of a work disruption. However, I must reiterate that it is the United Counties’ intention to negotiate an agreement with CUPE. We are hopeful that a mutually agreeable solution can be reached without a labour disruption”, said Warden Struthers.

For more information:

J. Douglas Struthers

Warden UCLG

(613) 342-3840 or (613) 498-7254 (cell)