

City workers OK contract

S.C. pact garners grudging approval

By SHANNA McCORD

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Employees - City 12-9-04

SANTA CRUZ — In what union leaders view as lukewarm acceptance, city workers voted 227-122 in favor of a new contract that includes a 1 percent pay raise and health-insurance costs covered entirely by the city.

“What that says is we still have some work to do,” said Leslie Scanagatta of Service Employees International Union Local 415. “They can live with this, but it didn’t meet their expectations.”

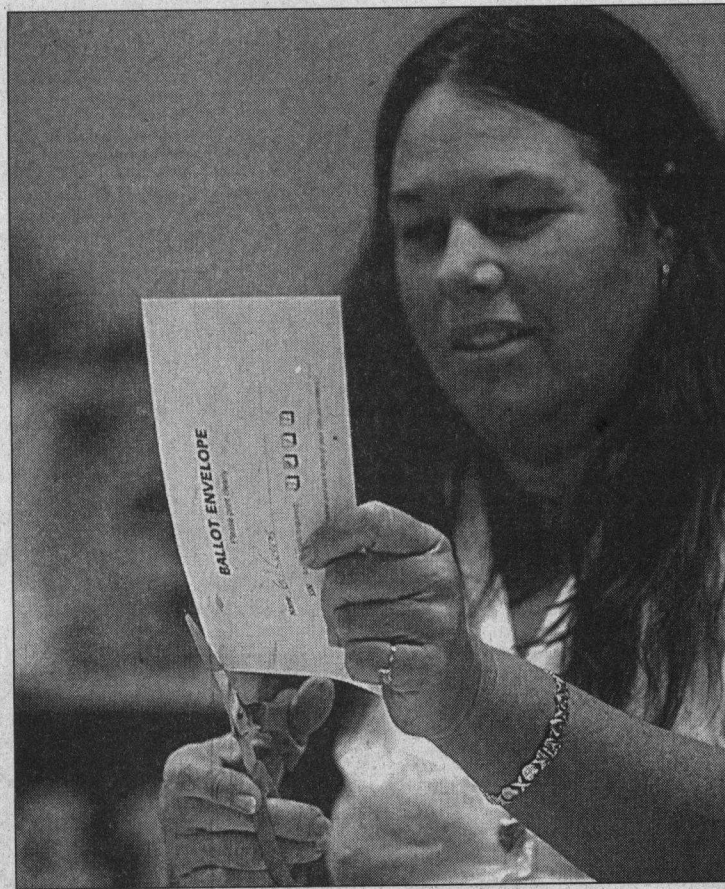
About 18 city workers tallied votes Wednesday at union headquarters on Mission Street.

The new contract, which covers about 500 employees, was reached last Thursday — the eve of its Dec. 3 expiration date.

It was up to employees, by a

‘They can live with this, but it didn’t meet their expectations.’

LESLIE
SCANAGATTA,
UNION REP



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Debra Allen opens ballots at SEIU headquarters Wednesday.

Pact

Continued from Page A1

simple majority vote, to either accept or reject the offer.

Union officials had recommended city workers accept the contract, Scanagatta said.

Contract highlights include an immediate 1 percent bump in wages, a one-time 1 percent cash bonus in June, a one-time floating holiday and a 0.3 percent reduction in the amount employees contribute to their retirement.

In addition, city officials promised no layoffs for at least six months and agreed to conduct a study of parity with wages and benefits for workers in other cities.

Still, city workers such as Ray Cunningham of the Public Works Department say the new contract is less than ideal. He called the 1 percent salary increase “laughable.”

“That’s not even a cup of coffee a day,” said Cunningham, who earns about \$23 an hour maintaining the city’s traffic signals and street lights.

Cunningham declined to say whether he voted for or against the new contract. He said he might look for other work, and that includes moving his family to another city.

Jeff Mitchell, a senior water distribu-

tion employee, voted against the contract.

He was mostly displeased with an agreement to modify workers’ compensation so employees will not get paid while waiting for benefits to kick in from the state.

“The chances of us getting hurt on the job are high,” Mitchell said. “We’re out there digging, working near traffic day and night. If someone does get hurt, we don’t want to lose workers’ comp.”

“My personal feeling is that the city can do better.”

Not entirely satisfied with the new deal, Kevin Hunt, an arborist of nine years in the Parks and Recreation Department, said he understands the city’s financial bind.

“I voted for it,” Hunt said. “But I’m not sure I made the right vote. It’s a very meager contract.”

The contract is good for two years except for wages and health benefits, which will be negotiated again in November.

Twice the union agreed to extend the contract past its original expiration in April 2003, recognizing the city’s serious budget woes.

Tired of waiting for the city’s financial picture to improve, city workers contemplated a strike if a deal wasn’t reached.

The contract does not include the police or fire department employees.

Contact Shanna McCord at
smccord@santacruzsentinel.com. •