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SV police unhappy with pay negotiations

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Police officers here have let it be known they are not pleased with the way salary negotiations have been proceeding with the city.

Lou Silver, negotiating attorney for the Scotts Valley Peace Officers Association, aired the officers' grievances during oral communications Wednesday evening at the City Council meeting.

"We have longstanding problems within the police department and we ... have gotten unsatisfactory responses from the city," said Silver, an attorney from San Jose.

The police have been in negotiations since May.

The issues are salary, manpower and the retirement plan. Silver said Scotts Valley police officers earn less than highway patrol officers, sheriff's deputies or police officers in Santa Cruz, San Benito and Santa Clara counties.

"There is a direct relationship between the compensation of police officers and morale," said Silver. "The pay of police officers in Scotts Valley is 11 percent behind the county average and 17 percent behind the average in the top-step positions."

According to Silver, Scotts Valley officers start at an average monthly salary of \$1,585. Law enforcement officers elsewhere in the county start at between \$1,657 and \$1,803.

Scotts Valley officers also want a retirement plan similar to the one offered to California Highway Patrol officers, said Silver. "We were told last year the city was studying the CHP retirement plan...they studied it and we never heard anything else about it."

The city has not yet even addressed changes in the retirement plan in its

offers, according to Silver.

As for manpower, Silver pointed out that the city has not hired any additional officers since 1978, and that after 4 a.m. there is only one officer on duty, sometimes until noon.

Officers are not thinking of going on strike, Silver said afterwards. "That has not even been considered."

But as a result of the disparate salaries, Scotts Valley risks becoming a "training department," said Silver, one which trains young, inexperienced recruits, who leave at the first opportunity of a job elsewhere.

Some 14 non-uniformed members of the department sat in on the council sessions to show their support.

The city made a salary offer identical to the package offered to City Hall employees, but the problems are not the same, Silver maintained.

He concluded, "We'd like to see a mutual effort being made on this problem. We've looked at the budget and we know Scotts Valley does not have bags of money ...but the cost of our salary contract would take less than 25 percent of the city's reserves. If the money is not going to be used for police services and to guarantee the safety of Scotts Valley, we're at a loss to figure out what it should be used for."

Afterwards, Tom Bush, president of the Scotts Valley Peace Officer's Association, said the low salaries offered to Scotts Valley police officers make it difficult to hire and to keep qualified officers. "These guys can pick up anywhere from \$400 to \$700 a month anywhere else in this county," he said of the officers. "Under those circumstances I don't blame them for leaving."

Council members listened to Silver's report quietly, then indicated they would discuss it further in executive session.