**Vic USW COVID-19 Update #13 – June 8, 2020.**

**Reducing the Number of Pandemic Related Temporary Layoffs & Reducing the Impact of the Temporary Layoffs that are Implemented**

From Monday, May 25 to Wednesday, May 27, the Union held a series of meetings with full-time and part-time employees in Food Services and Housekeeping that focused on the temporary layoffs scheduled for June 15 to August 23 that the University determined are necessary to deal with the elimination of virtually all revenue from outside sources in their ancillary businesses through to the end of August. The Union presented details of the provisions it had proposed, and the University had agreed to implement, to reduce the financial hardship of the University’s decision to temporarily layoff all part-time Food Services and Housekeeping employees. In the meetings with full-time employees, the Union presented details of the Work-Sharing program that it and the University had agreed on to reduce the number of layoffs of full-time employees, the details of the vote that would be held to determine whether the Work-Sharing program would be implemented and the provisions the University had agreed to implement to reduce the financial hardship on those who are laid off.

**Work-Sharing**

The unprecedented number of layoffs that management planned to issue this summer and the likelihood of an unprecedented number of members in Housekeeping being bumped out of their jobs by laid off workers with more seniority led the Union to propose the implementation of Work-Sharing.

Work-Sharing involves employees in departments that are facing temporary layoffs sharing in a reduction of hours of work so that layoffs can be reduced or, in a best-case scenario, avoided. Employees in the same job class work the same number of hours and take an equal reduction in hours of work. Employees who would not be facing layoff and employees who would be facing layoff all participate in a work week with reduced hours of work.

USW members in full-time Food Services and Housekeeping jobs voted on whether the agreed upon terms of the Vic Work-Sharing program should be implemented. The result of the vote saw the majority of ballots cast marked in favour of Work-Sharing. Twenty-one members voted in favour of the program and eighteen voted against it.

The depth of the pandemic related reduction in business in Vic’s ancillary services means that involuntary temporary layoffs cannot be avoided by the implementation of Work-Sharing, but the number of layoffs will be significantly reduced. The redistribution of work hours under the agreed upon Work-Sharing program has led to six fewer layoffs in Food Services and three fewer layoffs in Housekeeping. As important as the fewer number of layoffs are the seven fewer Housekeepers who will be bumped out of their jobs by Food Services employees with greater seniority exercising their collective agreement layoff rights. The reduction in the number of members being bumped out of their Housekeeping jobs is a result of the seven three-days-per-week temporary Housekeeping positions that have been created by the redistribution of Housekeeping hours through Work-Sharing. The creation of the seven temporary Housekeeping jobs also reduces the risk of employees in departments outside of Food Services and Housekeeping being bumped out of their jobs by laid off employees with greater seniority.

The Food Services and Housekeeping Work-Sharing program is divided into two phases. Phase 1 lasts for four weeks and, during those weeks, members can use banked vacation days to cover the days that they are not scheduled to work. Members who do not have enough banked vacation days to cover all the days that they will not be working can choose to borrow vacation days that they have not yet accrued and pay back those borrowed days within a reasonable schedule in future vacation years. The length of Phase 1 was, in part, determined by keeping in mind that the longer it lasts, the more members there would be who would not have enough banked days to cover all of the days they would not be working and the discomfort some members would have in borrowing from their future accrual of vacation days. The University’s decision to cut their payroll costs during the summer also limited how long Phase 1 could last. Employees using vacation to cover the days they are not scheduled to work may reduce the University’s vacation liability, but it does not reduce their payroll costs. Phase 2 spans the last six weeks of the layoff period. During Phase 2 it is anticipated that the participants will take part in the provincial government’s official Work-Sharing program and will be paid EI benefits for the days they do not work. To access the government’s Work-Sharing program, the Union and the University must file an application with the provincial government and the Ministry of Labour must approve it.

Originally, in anticipation that the development of the pandemic could lead to the University deciding that temporary layoffs need to be extended, we planned to have the Work-Sharing agreement with the University end a couple of months after August 23, with an extension past that time, if needed, being brought to a vote by the members who would be affected. Given the small margin of the vote in favour of the Work-Sharing program, the Union determined that it is best to have the Work-Sharing agreement end on the last day of the layoff period. If the University extends some or all of the temporary layoffs, the Union and the University have agreed to consider an extension of Work-Sharing and, if an agreement is reached, it will be brought to a vote by the members who would be affected.

**Work-Sharing Without Part-time Employees**

The lack of work hours in Food Services and Housekeeping this summer means that, without Work-Sharing, at least one full-time employee would be laid off in each job class. The Union and the University tried to create a work sharing program that included part-time employees, but the University’s operational needs for the summer do not provide enough hours of work to keep all full-time employees working within a viable Work-Sharing program. That meant part-time employees could not be included in the work sharing program.

**Special Provisions for Laid Off Part-time & Full-time Food Services and Housekeeping Employees**

The University has agreed to pay the employee share of health care benefit premiums for each part-time and full-time employee on layoff. This provision applies to the health care benefits each employee was enrolled in at the start of their layoff.

To further support laid off employees, the University has agreed to pay a top up to their Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), up to 80% of the employee’s normal weekly gross wages or $250 per week, whichever is less, up to a maximum of $1,000 in each four week period*.* In order to have more part-time employees qualify for a top up than would be the case if their weekly gross wages were based on a twenty-four hour work week, the University agreed that the weekly gross wage used in the calculation will be the average weekly gross wage they earned during the fifty-two weeks immediately proceeding June 15, 2020. This averaging will allow for the hours worked in excess of twenty-four per week to be counted in the calculation. A significant number of part-time employees worked more than twenty-four hours a week last summer.