**BEDFORD**

**Negotiations with police union at a standstill**

J

Officers take their case to the public after five months of bargaining.

**By Mark Hayward**

Union Leader Staff

A union representing Bedford police employees has accused Police Chief John Bryfonski of stonewalling and bringing an adversarial tone to negotiations, following the collapse of talks last month.

Members of the Bedford Police Union gathered outside Bedford community television studios Wednesday evening, the 11th day they will be working under an expired contract.

The campaign follows five months of unproductive bargaining with Bryfonski, who has led the department for 11 years, according to the union.

“Our chief was essentially bidding against his department the entire time,” said Tim Hayden, president of the Bedford Police Union.

Bryfonski calls that nonsense. He said he advocates on behalf of his officers when he meets behind closed doors with town officials.

“To be publicly vilified when they union has no idea what I’ve said and advocated on their behalf during this contract negotiation is grossly improper,” Bryfonski said in an email.

Bryfonski also took the unusual step of publicly stating that he disagreed with his boss, Town Manager Rick Sawyer, and advocated for bigger longevity bonuses for his officers.

But the town decided to devote its $1.4 million raise-and-benefits package to increases in base pay and costof- living increases, Bryfonski said.

Bryfonski said the town’s initial proposal called for higher raises than proposed by the union. Under the town’s proposal, 25 of the 45

+



Records clerk Cristina Catano organizes the signs as Bedford police employees demonstrate outside the town council meeting Wednesday to call attention to their lack of a contract. ALLEGRA BOVERMAN/UNION LEADER

**Bedford**

employees represented by the union would have received pay increases of 10% or more for the first year of the contract.

Hayden, who is also a Bedford police officer, faults the town for loading up nearly all the compensation in the first year of a proposed threeyear contract. His union has called for three years of 2% raises on top of what the town has proposed.

The Wednesday gathering was expected to take place during a monthly open forum that town councilors have with residents. Hayden said officers were expected to gather outside while supporters spoke inside.

Although expired and not replaced, the contract remains in effect. Officers will continue to work, Hayden said.

“We love this town. We show up to work every day,” Hayden said. But that doesn’t mean they will remain. Three officers have left the department during the five months of negotiations, and he hears that others are looking.

“If this continues on the course we’re going, we won’t adequately be able to keep the town safe,” Hayden said.

He said the union’s proposed pay scale would keep it comparable with surrounding towns.

He said wages are not the only sticking point. The union wants any arbitrations to be decided by a state government panel, the Public Employee Labor Relations Board; the town wants to continue using a private firm.

Hayden said the union opposes a town effort to make an employee pay for the cost of specialized training if he leaves within three years of the training. Bryfonski said the move is intended to ensure town funds are properly spent.

In a statement, Hayden called the contract discussions fruitless and tumultuous.

Bryfonski said he is not the chief negotiator. The town hires lawyers to bargain, and though he’s in the room, he speaks only to make a point about operations or clarify language.

“When attacked, vilified and accused of inaccuracies by a member of the union negotiating team, I responded professionally but directly and forcefully,” Bryfonski said.

The police union is part of State Employees Association/SEIU Local 1984, the union that represents more than 10,000 state and municipal workers in New Hampshire.

mhayward@unionleader.com