



Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations

Helping Civic Organizations Remain Educated for 65 years

Post Office Box 9252

Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9252

www.vbccco.org

Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations Conversations with the City

Topic: Collective Bargaining in Virginia Beach

Definition of Collective Bargaining:

Collective bargaining is a process where public employees, through unions, negotiate with government employers to establish employment terms such as wages, benefits, and work conditions. This can affect various public sector workers, including police officers, teachers, and city workers. The State of Virginia had long banned collective bargaining in government, but changes in 2020 allowed local governments to opt-in if desired([Cato Institute](#))([Cato Institute](#)).

Why is Collective Bargaining Important to Citizens and Residents?

Collective bargaining has broad implications for city budgets, public service quality, and employee rights. Through this process, city employees can achieve better compensation and work conditions, which can enhance job satisfaction and service delivery. However, it also means that wage agreements and benefits for public workers, which are set for years at a time, can significantly impact city financial planning and could lead to higher taxes or reduced services to cover costs([Better Cities Project](#))([Cato Institute](#)).

Challenges/Concerns Related to Collective Bargaining:

Increased Costs for Taxpayers:

Conservative institutions like the **Cato Institute** and the **Hoover Institution** argue that public-sector unions often drive up compensation costs. Public-sector wages and benefits are frequently higher than those in the private sector, and unlike private companies, governments can pass these costs onto taxpayers through higher taxes or reduced services([Cato Institute](#))([Hoover Institution](#)). A 2018 survey found that wage hikes impacted 88% of city budgets, and those costs are often tied directly to collective bargaining contracts([Better Cities Project](#)).

Rigidity in City Management:

Collective bargaining agreements can limit the city's flexibility in hiring, firing, or reallocating resources. Long-term contracts may reduce the city's ability to adapt to budget changes or crises like economic downturns([ConnectUS Fund](#))([Cato Institute](#)). In addition, conservative voices suggest that unions protect



Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations

Helping Civic Organizations Remain Educated for 65 years

Post Office Box 9252

Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9252

www.vbccco.org

underperforming workers and resist the introduction of new technologies or methods that could improve efficiency([John Locke Foundation](#)).

Potential for Strikes and Work Stoppages:

While strikes in essential public services like police and fire are typically prohibited, collective bargaining can still lead to tensions and work slowdowns, affecting city operations and service delivery([Vittana](#)) ([Better Cities Project](#)).

Transparency and Accountability Issues:

Some argue that collective bargaining negotiations often occur behind closed doors, limiting public scrutiny. By making these negotiations more transparent, local governments could enhance public trust and ensure that decisions are aligned with taxpayers' interests([Better Cities Project](#)).

Negative Effects of Collective Bargaining:

Long-Term Financial Commitments:

Public-sector collective bargaining agreements often include commitments to increased wages, benefits, or pensions, which can lead to large unfunded liabilities for the city. These financial obligations, including retirement benefits and healthcare, are often less transparent to the public, adding to the fiscal burden over time([Hoover Institution](#)).

Reduced Efficiency:

Critics of public-sector unions argue that collective bargaining agreements may protect underperforming workers, making it difficult to implement performance-based evaluations or disciplinary actions. This reduces overall productivity and service quality([Vittana](#))([ConnectUS Fund](#)). Furthermore, unions can sometimes push for larger staffing levels than needed, and their resistance to reforms such as the use of volunteer labor or new technologies adds to inefficiencies in government services([John Locke Foundation](#)).

Union Influence Over City Policies:

Public-sector unions may exert significant influence over city policies, prioritizing their members' interests over broader community needs. This can create challenges in balancing the budget, as certain union demands might lead to cuts in public services([Better Cities Project](#))([ConnectUS Fund](#)).



Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations

Helping Civic Organizations Remain Educated for 65 years

Post Office Box 9252

Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9252

www.vbccco.org

Meet and Confer as an Alternative to Collective Bargaining:

Definition of Meet and Confer: Meet and confer is an informal process where public employees discuss issues related to wages, working conditions, and benefits with management. However, unlike collective bargaining, agreements made through meet and confer are not legally binding([Hoover Institution](#))([John Locke Foundation](#)).

Pros of Meet and Confer:

1. Flexibility for Employers:

Employers have greater flexibility with non-binding agreements. This process allows public employers to listen to employee concerns without the strict legal constraints of collective bargaining([Hoover Institution](#)).

2. Faster Resolution of Issues:

The meet and confer process tends to resolve issues more quickly since it avoids the legal formalities and drawn-out negotiations typical of collective bargaining([Hoover Institution](#)).

3. Reduced Risk of Strikes:

Meet and confer does not typically involve the risk of strikes or work stoppages, fostering a more cooperative relationship between employees and management([John Locke Foundation](#)).

4. Good for Smaller Entities:

Smaller public entities can find meet and confer to be a cost-effective way to address employee concerns without the legal and administrative burdens of collective bargaining([John Locke Foundation](#)).

Cons of Meet and Confer:

1. Lack of Binding Agreements:

The absence of legally binding agreements can frustrate employees if management does not follow through on promises, leading to a lack of accountability([Hoover Institution](#)).

2. Weaker Employee Leverage:

Employees have less power in the meet and confer process because they lack the legal protections provided in collective bargaining. This can make it harder for them to achieve significant improvements in working conditions([John Locke Foundation](#)).



Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations

Helping Civic Organizations Remain Educated for 65 years

Post Office Box 9252

Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9252

www.vbcco.org

3. Potential for Inequity:

Since the agreements are not legally enforceable, the process can sometimes favor management over employees, leading to unequal consideration of employee demands([Hoover Institution](#)).

4. Inconsistent Implementation:

Without legal enforcement, the outcomes of meet and confer agreements can vary greatly depending on the management team in place, potentially leading to inconsistent results([John Locke Foundation](#)).

Impact of Collective Bargaining on Essential Services:

Collective bargaining can greatly impact essential services such as policing, firefighting, and education. It provides security and better working conditions for public workers, potentially leading to better service delivery. However, it can also reduce city management's flexibility in reallocating resources or making necessary adjustments during emergencies, which is critical for services that residents rely on([Better Cities Project](#))([ConnectUS Fund](#))([John Locke Foundation](#)).

The Role of Taxpayers in Collective Bargaining:

Since taxpayer dollars fund public-sector collective bargaining agreements, citizens are directly impacted by the financial decisions made in these agreements. Highlighting this connection helps ensure transparency and encourages taxpayers to advocate for accountability in negotiations([Better Cities Project](#))([Cato Institute](#)).

Public-Sector vs. Private-Sector Collective Bargaining:

Many residents may not realize the differences between public-sector and private-sector collective bargaining. Public-sector agreements are funded by taxpayer dollars, which can create longer-term financial commitments for cities. Private-sector bargaining is driven more by market forces, and agreements do not usually affect public resources([Vittana](#))([Cato Institute](#))([Hoover Institution](#)).

Potential for Pension and Healthcare Liabilities:

Pensions and healthcare benefits negotiated through collective bargaining are often generous, but they can result in large, unfunded liabilities. Over time, these financial obligations may require higher taxes or reductions in other city services to balance the budget([ConnectUS Fund](#))([Hoover Institution](#)).



Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations

Helping Civic Organizations Remain Educated for 65 years

Post Office Box 9252

Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9252

www.vbcco.org

Historical Context and Legal Framework:

The rise of unions in the 1940s and 1950s led to the development of collective bargaining as a way for workers to secure better pay and conditions. In public-sector jobs, collective bargaining laws differ widely by state, with states like New York having strong support for public-sector unions, while Virginia only recently allowed local governments to opt into the process([Cato Institute](#))([Better Cities Project](#)).

The Role of Unions and Public Perception:

Unions play a key role in representing workers' interests, but they can also face criticism for exerting undue influence on city budgets and policies. Educating the public on both the positive aspects of union representation and the potential financial risks ensures a more balanced perspective([Vittana](#))([ConnectUS Fund](#))([Hoover Institution](#)).

Best Practices from Other Cities:

Many cities across the U.S. have successfully implemented collective bargaining agreements by balancing fair employee compensation with responsible budget management. Highlighting these examples can show how transparency and accountability can benefit both workers and taxpayers. Cities that adopt open negotiations and involve public input often achieve better results([Better Cities Project](#)).

What Would You Like to Know from City Representatives?

- **How will the city manage the long-term financial commitments that come with collective bargaining without raising taxes or reducing services?**

The city should provide a clear explanation of how it plans to balance wage increases, pension benefits, and healthcare costs negotiated through collective bargaining agreements. Are there plans to set aside reserves or make adjustments in other areas to cover these expenses without increasing the tax burden on residents? Ensuring that there is a sustainable approach to managing unfunded liabilities, such as pensions, will be key([Hoover Institution](#))([Cato Institute](#)).

- **What steps will be taken to maintain city operational flexibility while respecting collective bargaining agreements?**
- The city must address concerns about how collective bargaining may limit its flexibility in managing the workforce, particularly in times of budgetary constraints or emergencies. How does the city plan to navigate the rigidities of long-term contracts while ensuring it can make necessary



Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations

Helping Civic Organizations Remain Educated for 65 years

Post Office Box 9252

Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9252

www.vbccco.org

adjustments to staffing, resource allocation, and technology implementation when needed ([Hoover Institution](#))([John Locke Foundation](#))?

- **How will transparency be ensured during the negotiation process, so that citizens can better understand the financial implications?**

Transparency in collective bargaining negotiations is crucial for maintaining public trust. What measures will the city take to ensure that negotiations are conducted in a way that allows residents to understand the financial commitments being made on their behalf? Some cities have implemented public oversight or open meeting policies during negotiations([Better Cities Project](#)).

- **What safeguards will be put in place to prevent strikes or work stoppages in essential public services?**

Given the critical nature of services like public safety, policing, and firefighting, what measures will the city put in place to prevent disruptions from strikes or slowdowns? Will the city include "no-strike" clauses in collective bargaining agreements to ensure that essential services remain uninterrupted([Vittana](#))([Better Cities Project](#))?

- **How will the city ensure that collective bargaining benefits both workers and the broader community equally, without compromising public services?**

- While securing better wages and benefits for employees is important, the city needs to balance these improvements with the overall needs of the community. What steps will be taken to ensure that collective bargaining does not lead to reductions in service quality or increased costs for residents? Is there a plan for measuring the long-term impacts of these agreements on both workers and public services([Hoover Institution](#))([John Locke Foundation](#))?