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Public safety unions take pension fight to Newport Beach residents

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Union officials in Newport Beach are trying to rally support from residents after city officials have asked employees to contribute more to their pension funds.

As police, firefighter and lifeguard contracts expire at the end of the month, union officials sought to rally residents with a mailer last week. City administrators, meanwhile, countered with an open letter explaining why they think employees should pay more toward their retirements.

"While the city is in fairly good fiscal shape today, if the current pension practices don't change, we are concerned that it won't stay in such good shape," City Manager Dave Kiff wrote in a statement to residents.

The city faces the question of who should pay for city employees' retirement, and if city funds would be better spent on infrastructure, the [Daily Pilot](#) reported.

Unlike Costa Mesa and other cities experiencing pension problems, Newport Beach officials find themselves defending their decisions with nearly \$90 million in reserves.

Firefighters and police officers have a retirement plan that allows them to retire at age 50 with a pension that equals 90% of their largest annual salary. They contribute 3.5% of their base pay toward their retirement fund, which is managed by the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS).

Lifeguards had a similar contract until this last summer, when they faced a massive public outcry about their salaries and pensions, which critics called generous.

Guards agreed to contribute 9% of their total salary to their retirement funds and to a less-generous formula for new hires.

City officials have said they would like police and firefighters to make the same concessions.

On Friday, fliers were distributed to Newport Beach residents to rally public support for public safety services. They read: "When one of the most prosperous cities in the country unnecessarily targets public safety for cuts, it's time for Police and Fire to sound the alarm."

Newport Police Chief Jay Johnson said the reexamination of public safety pensions isn't unique to Newport Beach but is happening statewide.

In Santa Ana, a proposal released last week calls for firefighters to contribute 9% of their salaries toward their pensions — a steep jump from the 1.4% they contribute now. Gov. Jerry Brown wants public employees to eventually pay half of their pension costs, according to a reform plan he released in October.

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