EDC pays $375,000 for flawed salary study

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County spent more than a quarter of a million dollars to do a salary study that it doesn't want to use during current negotiations with workers.

The 900 or so employees represented by Local 1 are working without a contract. The last full contract expired June 30, 2016, but had a one-year extension to June 30, 2017.

"The county and labor have both identified some errors identified in the data which is common for compensation studies of this size, and those were easily corrected," Carla Hass, spokeswoman for the county, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

But the county is not saying what the errors are or why it isn't using the study or why it paid the contractor for something that is flawed.

Hass went on to say, "Labor has also expressed concern regarding what level of benefit should be used to serve as the baseline, such as the PPO health plan versus the HMO health plan, or the various tiers of retirement plans depending on when an employee was hired. These are normal discussion points in any classification/compensation study and the county is committed to working with labor to discuss those issues and using the Koff report as a tool and resource as we implement improvements to the county's overall classification and compensation system."

The union has a little different take on what is going on.

"It is a flawed study and they would be better off putting it on the shelf. It's held up negotiations for a year and now the county is saying it will take 12 to 18 months to review the study before any implementation; meanwhile we go without a contract," Jere Copeland, union rep, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The contract with Berkeley-based Koff & Associates was for $377,545, of which they were paid $376,855. Hass said this is the going rate for this type of study.

The whole point was to provide a comprehensive classification and compensation study. There were 209 job classifications studied. El Dorado County was compared to the counties of Butte, Merced, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, Shasta, Solano, Sutter, Tuolumne and Yolo, as well as to the state.

Public agencies are known for doing these types of studies because employees want to be making what their peers earn and the jurisdiction wants to stay competitive to be attractive to potential hires. With unions, everyone gets the same raise and it has nothing to do with merit/job performance.

It was Pamela Knorr, then director of Human Resources, who signed the contract in May 2016.

A separate consulting firm had been hired the prior year to help the county with getting the study started. That contract, also signed by Knorr, was for $64,000. Municipal Resource Group only received half of that amount.