



Administrative leave comes with public costs, benefits

Leave not used by end of fiscal year forfeited by Apple Valley managers

By Gary Brodeur

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Though some town leave policies for employees may be liberal by corporate standards, they are definitive in who gets what type of leave and how much.

In Apple Valley, the usual work-and-business week is 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on alternate Fridays. The work schedule also is known as a 9/80 schedule.

If town employees are on a salary schedule, they occupy one of three "exempt" benefit levels — professional/supervisory, management or executive management. Exempt employees may be granted administrative leave.

"Administrative leave is provided to exempt (salaried) staff at a level appropriate to the employee's level of responsibility," said Nikki Salas, Apple Valley's director of human resources and risk management. "As a recruiting and retention tool, administrative leave is an attractive benefit as it provides paid time off to staff that often work many hours beyond the regularly scheduled work day.

"It also helps attract new staff in exempt positions, especially when he or she is leaving a position at another agency where they may have earned a higher level of time off, such as vacation time."

However, fiscal conservatives take issue with tax-payer funded items such as administrative leave.

"Many employers — both public and private — provide administration leave to their employees," Nicole Kaeding, of The Cato Institute said. The institute describes itself as a public

policy research organization — a think tank — dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets and peace.

"Administrative leave generally refers to paid types of leave that do not fit neatly within the sick or vacation time-off buckets, such as leaves for bereavement or jury duty," Kaeding said.

"However, many public employers are expanding their leave policies to cover more types of absences. At the same time, governments are allowing employees to take even more days off."

Professional-level supervisors with at least six months of service can earn administrative leave of up to 40 hours per fiscal year — July 1 to June 30 — at the discretion of their supervisor. They also participate in a deferred-compensation program contribution of 2 percent of their annual salary.

Managers can be granted up to 56 hours of administrative leave per fiscal year — July 1 to June 30 — after completing six months of service and at the discretion of the appropriate supervisor. Their deferred-compensation contribution is 3 percent.

The town's executive management staff consists of seven positions — town manager, three assistant town managers, director of human resources and risk management, director of public works, and marketing and public affairs officer.

Executive managers can use up to 80 hours per fiscal year at the discretion of the appropriate supervisor after six months of service. They also receive an automobile allowance of \$470 a month if a town vehicle is not provided, if approved by the town manager. Their deferred compensation program contribution is 5 percent of annual salary.

Any administrative leave not used by June 30 each year is forfeited.

"Ultimately these items are developed by the personnel committee that includes two members of the Town Council, the HR director and town manager, then is adopted by the full council," town spokeswoman Kathie Martin said.

Town Manager Frank Robinson's leave is the same as other employees at his level and years of tenure, except that at his last contract renewal the Town Council added one additional week, or 40 work hours, of vacation leave, Martin said.

"So, where he would still be at three weeks based on being with the town for almost seven years, he now gets four weeks," Martin said. "Everything else is standard benefits."

The town manager, prior to his absence, does not have to get council approval and designates one of the assistant town managers to act in his place. That policy exists partly to make sure all three do not take the same day off, town officials said.

By comparison, at a large employer in town — St. Joseph Health, St. Mary — "We don't have that," spokesman Ryan Orr said of anything like municipal administrative leave.

The health-care provider's benefits package includes family leave according to state law, medical, personal and military leave, he said. So-called administrative leave is granted temporarily in cases such as employees needing time off to meet necessary certifications. Its use is approved "case-by-case" and applied "across the board," Orr said.

"Expanding leave policies for public employees represents a cost to taxpayers," Kaeding said. "Public employees' compensation should mirror that of their private-sector counterparts."

But Salas said there is another dimension to the town's leave policy.

"Administrative leave is one piece of a benefits package that helps us remain competitive with similar agencies," she said. "When taken as a whole, benefits are an important part of employee satisfaction and have been shown to decrease absenteeism and contribute to employee morale."