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TEXARKANA, Texas — After three years of collective bargaining, City Council and union membership approval votes are the last remaining steps to adopting an employment contract for the city's firefighters.

Negotiators on Thursday reached tentative agreement on a contract featuring a pay raise plan that will move firefighters' salaries to a market average — based on comparable East Texas cities' fire departments — in three annual steps.

Firefighter union members will vote on ratifying the contract as soon as possible, and if as expected they approve it, the City Council will have its own approval vote during a future meeting.

Firefighters will get 40% of the pay increase the first year, 20% the second and 40% the third. The first step up will take effect Jan. 1, 2021, and the subsequent steps will take effect at the beginning of the fiscal year, Oct. 1.

An entry-level firefighter, the lowest-paid rank in the Department, now earns \$38,643 a year. By Oct. 1, 2022, that position will pay \$44,586. An assistant fire chief who has held that position for at least five years, the highest-ranking firefighter covered by the contract, will see their pay increase from \$77,124 to \$87,840 a year. All the various ranks and experience levels between will get raises, as well.

The contract includes a clause that allows the city to suspend the pay plan in the event of a major fiscal emergency.