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Backwards and forwards: Two sides in dispute

By JOHN MAJESKI

As negotiations continue on a new contract for the city's 31,000 doormen and porters, each side is offering opposing takes on the market with their points of view. Proposed cuts to overtime, healthcare, pensions and sick pay by the Realty Advisory Board, the industry association representing the city's building owners, have been swiftly rejected by 32BJ SEIU.

RAB said building owners are facing increased costs and shrinking revenues caused by the recent downturn in the economy, necessitating the need for financial savings. Under the current contract, which expires April 20, building owners nearly \$69,000 in salary and benefits.

"You can't have an industry that has limitations on revenues and increases on costs and just go on forever," RAB president Howard Rothschild said.

"You have things that are occurring in New York real estate today that are unprecedented. You



At March 17 meeting, Howard Rothschild, president of the Realty Advisory Board, second from left, presents owners proposals to Local 32BJ for new contract with residential building workers. Also in photo are Eric Rudin, left, and Andrew Hofman, right, Co-Chairs of the RAB Residential Negotiating Committee, and Paul Salvatore, legal counsel, next to Rothschild.

have some large-scale foreclosure actions that you just never really saw in the past."

But the union said the real estate industry has grown by 28% since the last contract was ratified in 2006, while cost-of-living expenses, like transportation and milk, have seen double-digit spikes. The down-market excuse is illogical, they added.

"We're looking forward to the future economics while they are talking backwards," 32BJ president Mike Fishman said. "As I said to them, we think, and economists say, that the industry bottomed out six months ago. We think if you look ahead, New York's future looks better. Business on Wall Street are significant and nobody's saying they're not going to be the same."

"We don't think any cuts are warranted," he added.

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building workers that focuses on green operations, which they said will continue to help building owners reduce energy costs.

But the RAB is calling for changes such as making employees begin paying for a portion of their health insurance: 10% for current workers and 18% for new hires.

They also want to axe the pension plan for new hires, double the time it takes new hires to reach full-time pay from 30 months to 60 months, trim holidays and

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2010: Year of the Renter? or you see apartments selling for 20 to 25% of what they were before, I think it's hard to really make a

credible case that the market is stronger now than it was before," Rothschild said.

The affected workers are employed at nearly 3,000 rental and co-op or condominium apartment buildings, mainly in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens.

Contract negotiations began March 9. The union was expected last week to authorize a strike should they decide to take such an action.

A strike has not occurred since 1991, when one lasted 11 days before an agreement was reached.