



CITY OF SEATTLE

Seattle City Employees' Retirement System Handbook

Revised
January 2015

This Handbook is a guide to be used in conjunction with the Seattle Municipal Code, Section 4.36 – Retirement and SCERS’ Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). The actual rules governing your benefits are contained in Seattle Municipal Code. The FAQs and the handbook are summaries, written in less legalistic terms. They are not complete descriptions of the law. If there are any conflicts between what is written in this handbook and what is contained in the code, the applicable code will govern. .

If you have a question or need clarification about anything in this document, please email retirecity@seattle.gov.

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WELCOME TO SCERS

SCERS OVERVIEW

An amendment to the Charter of the City of Seattle (Article XXII-Section 13,) submitted to the voters at the municipal election of March 8, 1927, authorized the City to create a retirement system for employees of the City and the Seattle Public Library. In 1929, the City of Seattle adopted an ordinance, codified in the Municipal Code as Chapter 4.36, which established the Seattle City Employees' Retirement System (SCERS) to provide employees a greater measure of security during their retirement years. SCERS is a defined benefit retirement plan, which means an employee's salary, years of service, and age at the time of retirement are used to determine the amount of monthly retirement benefits guaranteed for the remainder of the employee's life. The benefits you receive from the Retirement System are in addition to your Social Security benefits and your personal savings for retirement.

The Retirement System covers employees of the City of Seattle, the Seattle Public Library, and certain employees of King County and METRO. The Retirement System does not cover law enforcement officers and fire fighter employees.

Because the plan is necessarily long and somewhat complicated, this handbook has been prepared to help you understand your benefits and the retirement process. While the principal provisions of the plan are explained herein, additional reference documents including "**Frequently Asked Questions**" and a Benefit Calculator may be accessed from SCERS' website. In addition, Seattle's Municipal Code Chapter 4.36 is available online from the City Clerk's Office at the following web address (<http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~public/toc/4-36.htm>).

PLAN ADMINISTRATION

The City of Seattle Employees' Retirement Plan is administered by a seven-member Board of Administration. The members include:

- The Chair of Seattle City Council's Finance & Budget Committee;
- The City Finance Director;
- The City Personnel Director;
- Two current employees who are members of the System and one retired member (elected by both current and retired members); and,
- An at-large member (not an employee or retiree) who is appointed by the other six Board members and has no vested interest in the System.

The Board holds monthly administrative meetings that are open to you and the public. In the event you cannot attend these meetings, the minutes are posted regularly on SCERS' website.

OFFICE LOCATION

The Retirement Office is currently located on the ninth (9th) floor of the Pacific Building at 720 Third Avenue, Seattle, 98104. The telephone number is 206-386-1292; toll free 877-865-0079 and the fax number is 206-386-1506. Operating hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The office is one block from the Pioneer Square underground bus/trolley stop and on the Third Avenue surface bus line. There is public parking in the Pacific Building parking garage, which can be accessed from Columbia Street between Third & Fourth Avenues.

HOW TO CONTACT SCERS

If you wish to mail us any correspondence or documents, please use the following address:

Seattle City Employees' Retirement System
720 Third Avenue, 9th floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Alternatively, you may email queries or send us communication at the following email address:

retirecity@seattle.gov

WEBSITE

Retirement information and resources can also be found at the following URL address:

www.seattle.gov/retirement

RETIREE SELF-SERVICE

Retiree Self-Service allows retirees to change some of their account information on-line and print/save financial and tax information. By logging into your new user account in Retiree Self-Service, you will be able to change your address, phone number and email address; change your emergency contact; and set up or change your direct deposit. In addition you will be able to view, print or save copies of your pension pay statements; your W-4P Withholding Certificate; and your 1099-R forms. The site also contains links to the City of Seattle Home Page; City News Releases; City Benefit Information; City Personnel's Home Page; Deferred Compensation's Prudential website; and SCERS' Website.

Retirees' Self Service can be accessed by going to www.seattle.gov, then clicking on "Retiree Self-Service" on the right hand margin of the screen in the "Need Help?" section. This will take you to the Logon portal.

HOW YOUR PLAN WORKS

MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Regular Employee. As a new City of Seattle employee, you are automatically enrolled as a member of the Retirement system, unless you are hired into an exempt position or temporary assignment. A letter will be sent to you from the Retirement Office following your appointment to a permanent position, welcoming you to the System, advising you of your monthly contribution rate, and asking you to designate a beneficiary. The beneficiary you designate will remain on file with the Retirement System; ***it is not applicable to any other City benefits.***

Exempt Employee. If you have been hired into an “exempt” position, your enrollment in the Retirement System is optional. You will receive a letter from the Retirement Office following your appointment, giving you the choice to accept or decline membership. You may elect membership at any time during your employment with the City. However, once you elect to become a member, the election is irrevocable and you cannot reverse your decision in the future. The only exception to this is if you are returning to City employment in an exempt position and previously withdrew any accumulated contributions and interest you had in SCERS. In such situations, membership is optional. If you did not withdraw your funds when you previously left City employment, you are required to continue your membership in your new position.

Temporary Employee. If you work in a “temporary assignment” (e.g., temporary, term-limited, interim, intermittent, or part-time assignment which is less than 20 hours per week for a year), you will have two opportunities to become a member of the Retirement Plan. First, you will receive a letter from the Retirement Office giving you the option of becoming a member within 6 calendar months of completing 1,044 hours of continuous straight-time service. If you do not exercise this option, you will have a second opportunity to elect membership within 6 months of completing 10,440 hours (equivalent to 5 years full-time) of continuous straight time temporary service. If at any time you accept a permanent, non-exempt position, membership in the Retirement System is mandatory. If you join the system during your temporary assignment, or if you join as a result of accepting a permanent assignment no later than six months after completing 10,440 hours of temporary service, then you will have the option to purchase your previous temporary service credit back to the 1,044 hour threshold. See Section “Buybacks” on page 14 for more information about purchasing previous service.

Exclusions. If you are employed as an officer or employee of a City contractor, whether or not the contractor is providing mandatory or discretionary governmental services, and whether or not the contractor is a for-profit or non-profit entity, you are excluded from membership in the Seattle City Employees’ Retirement System. Uniformed personnel in the Fire and Police Departments are also excluded.

DESIGNATING A BENEFICIARY

When you receive your *New Member Welcome* letter, you will be asked to designate a beneficiary. This will be the person(s) you authorize to receive all your remaining contributions and interest, which may be payable upon your death. It is also the person who will be the recipient of your death benefit, assuming you pass away while an active employee or you continue your membership in SCERS’ death benefit program. If you want to designate more than one beneficiary you may do so

along with specific distribution percentages. ***Please note: your retirement beneficiary is different than the beneficiary you designated as a new employee for City benefits.***

While it is not mandatory, you should consider designating a beneficiary. If you have a spouse or registered domestic partner, this person is automatically designated as your beneficiary in accordance with the Seattle Municipal Code. If you are not married, even if you are in a domestic partnership, you can change your beneficiary at will. If you do have a spouse, you need his or her signed consent, or spousal waiver to designate someone other than your spouse as your beneficiary. You can access a copy of the Retirement beneficiary form on the Retirement's website. ***Please note: the beneficiary form on file with City Personnel is not the same as the one for Retirement benefits.***

If you retire with an Option D or E and subsequently are divorced, you may not change your beneficiary. Your previous spouse, designated before retirement, will receive any beneficiary benefits. However, if you selected another retirement option and designated your spouse at the time of your retirement as your beneficiary, you may change your beneficiary.

If you are an unmarried member with a domestic partner, you may designate your domestic partner as your beneficiary for retirement benefits. However, you must file an affidavit of domestic partnership with the Retirement Office. If, after you file an affidavit of domestic partnership, you are married, the affidavit shall be considered void. Any changes in the domestic partnership must be communicated in writing to the Retirement Office.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE PLAN

Pre-tax retirement contributions will be deducted from your pay check each pay period. Your contributions, plus contributions paid by the City of Seattle on your behalf, are invested by the Board of Administration and SCERS' Investment staff. These contributions plus the earnings from investments pay the cost of providing your retirement benefits. Contribution rates are recommended annually by the Board, based on the system's actuarial valuation. The rates are then negotiated and approved by City Council before becoming effective.

Employee contributions, which are automatically deducted on a pre-tax basis from your paycheck, are 10.03% of your salary. Each year, you will receive a Statement of Accounts reflecting your total employee contributions and accrued interest as of the last full pay period in December of the previous year. For security reasons, the Retirement Office does not release information on anyone's account over the telephone. You may, however, monitor your accrued balance during the intervening months through Employee Self-Service.

The City's contribution to the Retirement Fund varies but is equal to or greater than the employee's contribution. If you leave city employment and withdraw your funds, you will be entitled only to your accumulative contributions and interest; you will not receive the contributions made by the City.

CREDITED INTEREST

Members earn interest at an annual rate of 5.75% on contributions made on or before December 31, 2011. The interest rate for contributions made after December 31, 2011 varies each year. This rate is set at the July Board meeting for implementation the following January.

Interest Rates on Member Contributions

Year	Contributions Received on or before December 31, 2011	Contributions Received after December 31, 2011
2011 and before	5.75%	N/A
2012	5.75%	4.47%
2013	5.75%	3.33%
2014	5.75%	2.91%
2015	5.75%	3.66%

RETIREMENT SERVICE CREDIT

Service credit with the City is not necessarily the same as the service credit you accumulate in the Retirement System. Generally, retirement service credit is accumulated for periods of time when both you and the City make contributions to the Retirement System. The way in which service credit in the Retirement System is administered has been changed three (3) times over the years.

1. If you were regularly appointed to a permanent position prior to January 1, 1988, you will receive credit for your initial 1,044 hours (6 months full-time) of City service when you retire, even though no contributions were made for those months. This particular provision was extended to temporary employees hired for assignments prior to January 1, 1988 as a “transitional exception”. Temporary employees hired for assignments after January 1, 1988, first become eligible for membership in the Retirement Plan within 6 months after completing 1,044 hours of continuous straight time service and do not receive service credit for time worked prior to membership eligibility.
2. If you were regularly appointed to a permanent position between January 1, 1988 and December 31, 1998, there was a 6-month membership waiting period. Under this scenario, you would receive service credit only for the time you were making contributions to the Retirement System. Since no contributions were made during your first 6 months of employment, these months do not count toward retirement unless you purchase this service time at the actuarial cost of the corresponding increase to your retirement benefit when you resign or retire. (See Section “Buybacks” on page 14 for more information). Note: the Board and City Council did provide a one-year (1) window of time for regular employees to purchase service credit from this first 6-month period at the lower cost, but this provision is no longer available.
3. If you were hired after December 31, 1998 into a regularly appointed, non-exempt position, you became a Retirement System member and made contributions upon employment, without a 6-month waiting period. Therefore, your service credit should have started immediately.

Be sure to check your pay stub to confirm your retirement contributions are being deducted.

Service credit in the Retirement System is not always the same as your service credit in City employment. Your service credit as a member of the Seattle City Employees’ Retirement System does not begin to accumulate until deductions start. If there has been a delay, call the Retirement Office immediately so you can ensure deductions commence and you can buyback service credit loss without delay. The sooner this is done, the cheaper it will be for you.

MILESTONES/LIFE CHANGES

BECOMING VESTED

If you have a minimum of 5 full-time years of service credit in the Retirement System or in combination with a system which has portability with the Retirement System, you are considered “vested” in the Retirement System and you may elect to leave your funds with the Retirement System until you reach an age at which you become eligible for retirement.

If you ***are vested*** when you leave City employment but are not eligible or ready to retire, you will continue to accrue interest at the Board-approved applicable rate per annum, and you will be able to retire when you reach the eligibility threshold. However, you will lose any sick leave credit you have accrued and you will not be eligible to participate in the Death Benefit Program when you retire.

As a vested employee, you are not required to leave your money in the Retirement plan when you leave City employment. You have the right to remove your contributions with interest from the Retirement System at any time up to the day of your retirement. In removing your funds, however, you lose all rights in the Retirement System and your funds will be subject to any and all applicable Federal taxes.

LEAVING CITY SERVICE BEFORE BEING VESTED

If you do not have five (5) full-time years of membership in the City Retirement System when you leave City service, you are ***not eligible to “vest”*** and should withdraw your funds from the Retirement System, unless you intend to claim portability and establish dual membership. These funds will only include your contributions and interest; the City contributions are not available to you. If you leave your contributions and interest in the Trust, you will cease earning interest on these funds two years from your date of separation. The date of separation is defined as follows:

- if you leave the city voluntarily by terminating your employment or if you are laid off without being eligible for reinstatement, your separation date is your termination date;
- if you are laid off and are eligible for reinstatement your separation date is the end date of the reinstatement period;
- if you are a temporary employee, your date of separation is your termination date.

WITHDRAWING YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE SYSTEM

To withdraw your contributions and interest, you must submit a withdrawal form with your original signature and a copy of your Social Security card. You may download a copy of this form from SCERS' website (<http://www.seattle.gov/retirement/forms.htm>).

When you leave City service, if you opt to withdraw your contributions and accrued interest from the Retirement System, you may receive your funds directly or transfer them to an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or other qualified plan. If your funds are transferred directly to an IRA or other qualified plan, you will not be subject to taxes or penalties at the time of withdrawal. If you choose to withdraw your funds, and have payment made directly to you, Federal law requires 20% of the taxable portion of your retirement funds be withheld for tax purposes. (All contributions since 1985 and all accrued interest are taxable. Contributions made before 1985 have already been taxed and will be returned to you without any tax deduction). Whether the 20% withheld covers or exceeds your Federal tax liability is entirely dependent upon your income for the year in which you

are paid the funds. Further, a 10% penalty may be assessed by the IRS against all taxable funds removed from the Retirement System that are not rolled into an IRA or other qualified plan. In accordance with Federal law, you may change your mind about withdrawing your funds without penalty during the 30 days following your application to withdraw. This period will allow you time to reflect on the decision to remove your funds.

RETURNING TO CITY SERVICE

If you are rehired in a permanent non-exempt position, your membership in SCERS will automatically be reinstated and contributions deducted from your paycheck. In the event you withdrew your accumulated contributions when you previously left City service, you have the option for two years to re-deposit your withdrawn contributions with interest at the assumed rate of return on investment. By so doing, you will recover the service credit you had previously accumulated in the Plan. (See the Buyback section for details.)

If you are rehired in an *exempt* position, your membership in SCERS will automatically be reinstated **only** if you were previously a member of SCERS and left your contributions in the Plan. If you withdrew your accumulated contributions when you previously left City service, you will be given the option of rejoining. If you choose to rejoin, you may also redeposit your withdrawn contributions and interest at the assumed rate of return on investment. (See the Buyback section for details.)

If you leave City service and later return as a temporary employee, your SCERS membership status is contingent on whether you withdrew your accumulated contributions at the time you left regular service. If you left your contributions in your SCERS account, your SCERS membership will automatically be reinstated and contributions deducted from your paycheck. However, if you withdrew your contributions and interest when you left regular city employment, you would have the option of joining SCERS again after 1,044 hours of temporary work. You would also have the option to buyback your previous service credit. (See the Buyback section for details).

MARRIAGE OR DIVORCE

When you become a member of SCERS, you will be asked to designate your beneficiary. If you are married, you must designate your spouse as your beneficiary, unless your spouse willingly relinquishes this right. Though you are not required to designate a beneficiary until you actually retire, it is wise to have a beneficiary on file in case something happens to you.

When you come in for your retirement transition meeting, you will be required to bring in a copy of your Marriage License if you are married. At this meeting, you will specify the Retirement Option you are selecting, the medical plan and coverage you have selected, and review other aspects of your transition to retirement. Your spouse is required to sign your retirement application. If you designate someone other than your spouse as your beneficiary, your spouse's signature on the retirement application will serve to relinquish rights to be your beneficiary.

In the state of Washington, a public employee's retirement benefit constitutes marital property that must be taken into account when property is divided in the event of a marital dissolution. If you become divorced or legally separated, a court can divide your retirement account between you and your ex-spouse through a property division order (Qualified Domestic Relations Orders or QDRO). The QDRO can award an interest in your account to your ex-spouse, or split your account into two separate accounts, one for you and one of your ex-spouse, if you are a vested member of the retirement system. SCERS can review a **draft** QDRO to determine whether SCERS can comply,

before court approval of the QDRO is sought. You may submit a proposed QDRO for review via fax (206) 386-1506.

If you have specific questions relating to QDRS, you can review the QDRO FAQs on SCERS' website or call the Member Services supervisor at (206) 615-1421. An example of a QDRO is attached to the FAQs for your review.

LOANS

There are no provisions for borrowing from your retirement account; funds can only be removed in the case of retirement, separation from employment or terminal illness. Loans are permitted through the City's Deferred Compensation Plan.

PERMANENT DISABILITY

Eligibility

A key requirement for receiving permanent disability retirement from the Retirement System is that you are no longer employable in ***any*** City position due to a totally disabling medical condition. If you are a member, you may qualify for disability retirement if you meet one of the following conditions:

- If you are permanently and totally disabled due to an ***on-the-job injury***, regardless of your length of service with the City.
- If you are permanently and totally disabled due to an illness or injury, you must have at least 10 years of service with the City over a period of no more than 15 years immediately preceding retirement

You may also apply for disability retirement within three (3) months after the discontinuance of City service if you are totally and permanently incapacitated and your incapacity has been continuous from the point you discontinued your City service.

Applying for Disability Retirement:

To apply for disability retirement, you must first complete an Application for Disability Retirement Evaluation (which is available from SCERS' website). You do not need to schedule a Retirement Transition meeting. If you are applying for disability retirement related to an on-the job injury, you must authorize the Retirement System to obtain copies of records related to that injury from the City Workers Compensation files by signature on the application form. If you are applying for disability retirement on a basis other than an on-the-job injury, you must state in the application all medical conditions which individually or in combination, you believe are disabling. You must also provide the Retirement Office with any medical records that pertain to your disability including any treatment or rehabilitation plans, a statement from your physician(s) as to how the medical condition(s) affect your ability to work. It is critical that these records show the complete history of your condition(s) and include information from any specialists that have been treating your disability. All medical or supporting documents must be submitted within ***60 days*** of the date you filed your disability retirement application form with SCERS.

Once SCERS receives your application and medical records from you, an Independent Medical Examination (IME) will be scheduled and your records will be provided to the doctor(s). The Retirement Office will contact you with the appointment information. You will be examined by one or more physicians appointed by the Retirement Board.

If no other examinations, tests or vocational evaluation is needed, the Board will review the report of the medical panel. The Board's decision with regard to your Disability Retirement Application will be based on the medical records and evaluations made by the doctors used by the Retirement Board. If the independent medical examination, in conjunction with any vocational evaluation undertaken, shows that you are permanently and totally disabled from work in any position in the City, the Board may approve your application for disability retirement.

Disability Retirement Benefit:

Under the terms of this benefit, you will receive 1.5% of your Final Compensation (the average of your highest 52 consecutive pay periods of pay) multiplied by the number of years of retirement service credit you have earned. If this calculation does not exceed one-third (.33%) of your Final Compensation, then you will receive an additional 1.5% of your Final Compensation for each year between your age at retirement and age 62, until your disability retirement benefit equals one-third (33%) of your Final Compensation. The minimum benefit is \$140.00 per month.

Recovery from Disability:

If, subsequent to receiving a disability retirement benefit, you are able to return to work *part-time*, you may continue to receive your disability allowance, provided the total of your disability payment and your earnings do not exceed the salary currently payable by the City for your last job classification. If this should occur, your retirement allowance would be reduced proportionally by excess earnings. If, subsequent to receiving a disability retirement benefit, you return to work full-time, the disability retirement benefit will be discontinued.

TEMPORARY TOTAL DISABILITY

If you are under the age of 65 and have at least ten (10) years of City service over a period not to exceed 15 years, you may apply for temporary total disability occurring while in City service. The process for evaluating and granting such applications is similar to that outlined above. A temporary total disability retirement application will be granted for a specific period of time based on the recommendation of the examining doctor(s). In accordance with this recommendation, you will be required to be re-evaluated and the status of your disability assessed. If the Disability Committee determines that your temporary total disability has ceased, the Board may terminate your temporary total disability retirement and your retirement allowance will be cancelled. Alternatively, if you are otherwise eligible, the Board may convert your temporary total disability retirement to a permanent total disability retirement or a service retirement.

If you are able to return to active City service, you will be reinstated as a non-retired member and your accumulated contributions less annuity payments, shall be credited to your account. Your contribution rate will be equal to that applicable at the time you were retired. If you do not return to City service once your temporary total disability retirement has been terminated, you will receive your accumulated contributions less any annuity payments made to you.

TERMINAL ILLNESS

It is possible to make an early withdrawal of your employee contributions plus accrued interest, if you have a terminal illness. Your physician must attest that your illness is likely to cause your death within a period of 24 months. A second medical opinion may be required by the Retirement Board.

Withdrawal under this provision does not exempt the employee from any Federal taxes or penalties associated with the early withdrawal of funds from a retirement plan. Further, the withdrawal of funds severs all connection with the Retirement System. The member also forfeits all current and future rights to retirement, disability, and death benefits, including those of a spouse or domestic partner, if any.

DEATH AFTER DISABILITY RETIREMENT

If, subsequent to receiving a disability retirement benefit, you die, your surviving spouse or domestic partner, if named as your beneficiary, may be eligible to receive a monthly survivor's benefit. Contact the Retirement Office directly to determine whether you are eligible.

DEATH PRIOR TO RETIREMENT

If you should die before retiring, your employee contributions and interest deposited in the Retirement System will be handled in one of the following ways:

1. A lump sum payment or installment payments of all employee contributions and interest made to either your beneficiary or estate.
2. If, at the time of your death, you have 10 years of retirement service credit, your spouse or domestic partner may elect to receive #1 above or one of the following:
 - A benefit equal to what you would have received under the provisions of Retirement Option E, had you retired on the day of your death; or
 - A cash payment, not to exceed 50% of your total employee contributions and interest, along with the monthly retirement benefit described above that is proportionately reduced by the amount of the cash payment.

Both of these options are valid only for the life of the spouse or domestic partner. If there is no surviving spouse or domestic partner, minor children may elect to receive a similar benefit until they reach the age of 18.

INVOLUNTARY RETIREMENT

In the event your retirement is *involuntary* (e.g., as a result of layoff, termination etc.), you should call the Retirement Office immediately, let the staff know that you have an immediate need for a retirement interview with a Retirement Specialist. Tell staff whether you have had a retirement estimate prepared in the last year. This will enable staff to prioritize scheduling an appointment for you and ensure the necessary calculations have been completed for your meeting with the Retirement Specialist.

The Board may deny retirement benefits to a member convicted of a felony related to or arising out of the member's duties as an employee or officer of the City.

APPROACHING RETIREMENT

PORTABILITY & DUAL MEMBERSHIP

“Portability” refers to an agreement that has been legislated between the City of Seattle, the City of Tacoma, the City of Spokane (see ordinance 115460) and eligible retirement plans in the State of Washington (see RCW 41.54), which allows portability of retirement benefits between eligible organizations. For more information you can contact the Retirement Office at (206) 386-1292 or the State Department of Retirement Systems at (360) 664-7000 or 1-800-547-6657.

If you have ever worked for the City of Tacoma, the City of Spokane or another organization covered by the Washington State Retirement System (PERS, TRS, etc.), or if you plan to do so at any time in the future, you may be eligible to establish dual membership through portability. Benefits under portability include **combining time worked under both retirement systems to qualify for retirement and to determine the salary factors used by each respective system**. Once qualified, both systems will calculate your retirement separately, using your highest average salary, regardless of the system in which it was earned. You will receive a separate retirement check from each retirement system based on the amount of service in each. Portability **does not mean you transfer your service credit earned in one system to another retirement system** and retire with one monthly benefit payment from that system.

In order to establish dual membership, just complete a “Portability Claims” form, which is available from the Retirement website, and return it to the Retirement Office. This will be kept on file until you are ready to retire. If you previously worked for an eligible jurisdiction, you are not responsible for getting your records from the State or any other portable pension system. When you get ready to retire and request an estimate, you need to indicate in the comment section that you have service credit in a portable pension system, identifying the system and the approximate amount of creditable service time in that system. The Retirement Specialist preparing your estimate will contact staff from that pension system to verify your portability claim and secure the necessary information.

If you are a current member of SCERS and you previously worked with the State of Washington or any agency covered by a Washington State Retirement System, you may wish to redeposit your funds so you can establish portability. To do so, call the State Department of Retirement Systems’ Restore Unit at (360) 753-3113.

BUYBACKS

Under certain conditions, the Seattle City Employees’ Retirement System allows members to purchase service credit for time previously worked or lost. These purchases, called “buybacks,” can occur in a variety of instances, which are outlined in the following section.

The cost of buybacks varies depending on the type and timing. Some buybacks require you to pay the actuarial cost of the retirement benefit you are purchasing. The actuarial cost is the full value of the increased retirement benefit that results from the purchase of additional service credit. When you purchase service time through an actuarial buyback, your account is credited with the current hourly rate multiplied by your current rate of contribution and the number of hours you are purchasing.

Other buybacks require a payment of previously withdrawn employee member contributions with interest. Interest in this case is “the actuarial assumed rate of investment return,” currently 7.75%

per year. If you purchase service time at this cost, you will be credited with the service time the buyback represents, and your account will reflect the redeposit.

In most instances, you will have repayment options. Payment for service credit purchased at retirement must be in the form of a personal check or rollover from deferred comp or other IRA; payment for service credit during your career can be in the form of a personal check, rollover, or through payroll deductions. If you make payment through payroll deductions, you will be charged a financing fee equivalent to the assumed rate of investment return, currently 7.75% per year. In certain buyback cases, you will not be required to pay either the actuarial cost or your withdrawn contributions with interest. For more information, see the section below, the Buyback section of the SCERS' Frequently Asked Questions (available from the website) or contact the Retirement Office directly.

TYPES OF BUYBACKS

If eligible, you may purchase service credit in accordance with the following different types of buybacks. The particulars for each type of buyback may vary and eligibility may be limited. If you wish to purchase service credit, you can make a request by submitting a *"Buyback or Re-deposit Calculation Request"*, which is available from the Retirement Office's website. The records research necessary to complete these calculations may take up to 60 days under normal conditions, so please submit your request with that timeframe in mind.

1. Initial Six Months of Employment:

This buyback is only available to those employees who were hired in permanent positions between January 1, 1988 and December 31, 1998. Employees hired during this time period did not contribute to the Retirement System during their first 6 months of employment and thus, did not receive any service credit during these 6 months. These employees were given the opportunity to purchase this time in 2007.

If you missed the opportunity to buyback your initial 6 months of service, you have another opportunity at the time of separation from employment or retirement; at that point, the buyback will be at the actuarial cost.

2. Temporary Employment Time:

Eligibility for temporary employees to join the retirement system is explained in the Membership Eligibility section on page 6. If you become a member within 6 months of completing 10,440 hours (equivalent to 5 years full-time) of temporary service, you have the right to purchase your previous temporary time back to the 1,044 hour threshold, provided you initiate the buyback within 6 months of becoming eligible for membership. You will have the same opportunity to purchase previous temporary time if you become a member upon accepting a regular position before reaching the 10,440 hour threshold. This opportunity expires six months after you join the system.

Temporary hours worked in a student or intern position, and temporary hours before a break in service are not eligible for purchase.

If you decide to purchase prior temporary City service, you will pay the amount that would have been deducted from your paycheck, had you become a member when first eligible, plus interest at the assumed actuarial rate of investment return. You can pay this in a lump sum, as a rollover from deferred comp/IRA, or through payroll deductions. If you prefer to purchase your prior temporary service through payroll deductions, you must initiate a purchase contract within the 6-month eligibility period. In such instances, you will be

charged a financing interest rate equivalent to the assumed rate of investment return (currently 7.75% per year) during the purchase period.

If you decide not to purchase temporary service credit during the eligibility period, you will also have the option to make the purchase at the time you retire. When purchased at the time of retirement, however, the cost of the service time is the actuarial present value of the resulting increase in your benefit.

3. **Exempt Employees:**

An employee in an exempt position has the choice of membership. If you are appointed to a position classified as “exempt”, you have the *option* to become a member of the Retirement System when you are hired; membership is not mandatory. You will receive notification from the Retirement Office of your options. If you elect to become a member, your decision *is* irrevocable and may not be reversed in the future. Membership is permanent until you either separate from City employment or retire.

If you decide you do not want to become a member of the Retirement System when you are hired, your decision is *not* irrevocable. You may opt to become a member of the Retirement System at any time. If you decide to join the Retirement System at a date after your initial declination, you will have an opportunity to purchase service credit for the time you worked as an exempt employee before joining the system by paying the actuarial cost in a lump sum personal check or rollover from deferred comp or IRA at the time of separation or retirement.

4. **Medical Leaves and Industrial Injury Time-loss:**

There are three types of leaves in this category:

- Family Medical Leave;
- Leaves of absence for medical reasons documented by your physician as part of the Leave approval process; and
- Time loss due to an industrial injury while employed by the City and during your time as a member of the system.

If you took unpaid leave of this type you have the option to buy back the service credit lost. You may exercise this right immediately upon returning from the leave or at any time afterwards. The cost is calculated based on your pay rate at the time of your leave and interest is applied at the assumed rate of investment return (currently 7.75% per year). Because of the interest charge, the cost does increase the longer you delay the purchase. You may make payments through a lump sum payment, a rollover from deferred comp/IRA or by payroll deduction. If you chose to make payment by payroll deduction, you will be charged a financing fee equivalent to the assumed rate of investment return.

5. **Military Time:**

There are two types of military time which may be purchased. If you are a member of the Retirement System and are called to active duty while you are employed by the City, you may purchase your lost service credit if you return to City service within 90 days of the termination of your military leave. The cost is calculated based on your pay rate at the time of your leave and interest is applied at the assumed rate of investment return (currently 7.75% per year).

If you served on active duty before being employed by the City, you may purchase up to 5 years of creditable service *upon your retirement or resignation*, provided that you received an honorable discharge from the service. This buyback is calculated at the actuarial cost and payable in one lump sum when you retire or resign.

6. **Redeposit of Withdrawn Contributions:**

Funds withdrawn after your last period of employment with the City may be re-deposited and the creditable service time recovered. You have ***two years*** from your date of rehire to redeposit an amount up to what was previously withdrawn, plus interest at the assumed rate of investment return (currently 7.75% per year). If you enter a purchase contract (payroll deductions) with the Retirement System during this two year period, you have up to a 10 year period for repayment. However, you are charged a financing interest rate equivalent to the assumed rate of investment return (currently 7.75% per year) at the time the purchase contract is initiated. The minimum payroll deduction for a redeposit is \$25.

If you do not make a redeposit or enter into a purchase contract within two years, you may still recover lost creditable service time. However, this will be at a higher rate. In such instances, the interest on the redeposit amount applied in each year between the withdrawal date and the redeposit date will be the greater of:

- the actuarial assumed rate of investment return; or
- the actual rate of investment return for the year.

When you have finished repaying your withdrawn contributions, you will be credited with your previous membership time. Your retirement benefit is based on the total years of membership. The more years of service credit you have, the greater value your retirement benefit will be. Therefore, it may be to your benefit to redeposit your withdrawn contributions.

7. **Portability Redeposit:**

As explained in the section on Retirement Portability, if you have ever worked for the City of Tacoma or City of Spokane or another organization covered by a Washington State Retirement System (PERS, TRS, etc.), or if you plan to do so at any time in the future, you may be eligible for portability benefits. If you leave City employment and leave your contributions in the Seattle Employees Retirement System to take a position in another jurisdiction or organization covered by a portable pension plan, your service credits under both retirement systems will be combined to ***qualify*** you for retirement and to determine the highest average rate of pay you earned in either system.

If you withdraw your contributions and interest, when you leave City employment and then become employed with other portable agencies/organizations, you may want to redeposit these funds in SCERS in order to recapture service credit for past City employment.

Funds withdrawn after your last period of employment with the City may be re-deposited ***within two years*** of you becoming employed by another employer in a plan with which SCERS has portability. During this two year period, you may redeposit an amount up to what you previously withdrew, plus compound interest at the assumed rate of investment return (currently 7.75% per year). Purchase contracts are not an option for non-City employees.

If you do not make the portability redeposit within two years of your hire date, you may still recover lost creditable service time; however, interest will be calculated at using the method described in the previous section for redeposit made after the two year window.

ESTIMATING YOUR RETIREMENT BENEFIT

As part of your planning process, you should have an estimate of your monthly retirement benefits. There are three different methods for estimating your benefits:

- The Quick Reference Chart at the end of this section (see page 19). The chart shows how determine the percentage of your highest final compensation that will be used in calculating your retirement benefit. The percentage is determined by years of creditable service (on the vertical axis) and age at retirement (on the horizontal axis). Assuming you have reasonably accurate estimates of your creditable service and your final compensation, the table will allow you to make a good estimate of your retirement benefit.

The On-Line Retirement Benefit Calculator can be accessed at any time from SCERS' website. It is available for both active and vested members. If you are planning on retiring at some future date, the on-line calculator requires that you project your pay rate and contributions into the future. The calculator is not suitable for those with portable service (see section Portability & Dual Membership on page 14).

- A SCERS-Prepared Retirement Estimate is the most accurate estimate available. It is based on an in-depth, pay period by pay period review of your service records and will include a summary of the amount of time loss during your tenure. If you request specific buyback information on your estimate request, you will receive information detailing the amount of service credit you have lost and the cost to buy it back.

The Retirement estimate is based on your projected retirement date, your projected retirement age, your final projected service credit, and an average of your projected highest consecutive 52 pay periods of pay. Your estimate will include what your "unmodified" or "Straight" monthly benefit will be as well as the monthly benefit for each of the different retirement options available to you. This should help you assess which one will best meet your needs.

To request a Retirement Estimate, download a "*Retirement Estimate Request*" form from SCERS' website (<http://www.seattle.gov/retirement/forms.htm>), fill out the top half and submit it to the Retirement Office. Alternatively, you may call the Retirement Office at 206-386-1293; the receptionist will fill out the request form for you over the phone. *If you want to know if you are eligible to buy back any lost service time, make a notation in the Comment section.* The Retirement Office will identify any lost service time you may buy back and calculate the cost. If you buy back time, the service time you purchase will be included when your Retirement Estimate is calculated.

Currently, it takes 6-8 weeks to prepare a Retirement Estimate so be sure to factor this timeline into your planning. If you have dual membership, it could take a little longer.

QUICK RETIREMENT ESTIMATE

For a quick estimate of your retirement benefits, you may refer to the following matrix or go on-line to use one of the benefit calculators available on SCERS' website.

Percentages increase with each day of service.

Maximum percentage factor = 60% with 30 years of retirement credit.

Average Salary = Average of Highest Consecutive 52 pay periods (excluding overtime).

If expected retirement date is two years or more from now, use today's salary as estimated Final Compensation.

Eligibility for Retirement	
5 to 9 years of service – and are 62 or older	
10 to 19 years of service – and are 57 or older	
20 to 29 years of service – and are 52 or older	
30 years of service – any age	

Percentage of Average Salary

Years of Retirement Service Credit	AGE															Years of Retirement Service Credit	
	Any	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65		
30	60	60.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	60	30	
29		58.0	58.0	58.0	58.0	58.0	58.00	58.00	58.00	58.00	58.00	58.00	58.00	58.00	58	29	
28		56.0	56.0	56.0	56.0	56.0	56.00	56.00	56.00	56.00	56.00	56.00	56.00	56.00	56	28	
27		51.3	54.0	54.0	54.0	54.0	54.00	54.00	54.00	54.00	54.00	54.00	54.00	54.00	54	27	
26		46.8	49.4	52.0	52.0	52.0	52.00	52.00	52.00	52.00	52.00	52.00	52.00	52.00	52	26	
25		42.5	45.0	47.5	50.0	50.0	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50	25	
24		38.4	40.8	43.2	45.6	48.0	48.00	48.00	48.00	48.00	48.00	48.00	48.00	48.00	48	24	
23		34.5	36.8	39.1	41.4	43.7	46.00	46.00	46.00	46.00	46.00	46.00	46.00	46.00	46	23	
22		30.8	33.0	35.2	37.4	39.6	41.80	44.00	44.00	44.00	44.00	44.00	44.00	44.00	44	22	
21		27.3	29.4	31.5	33.6	35.7	37.80	39.90	42.00	42.00	42.00	42.00	42.00	42.00	42	21	
20		24.0	26.0	28.0	30.0	32.0	34.00	36.00	38.00	40.00	40.00	40.00	40.00	40.00	40	20	
19							28.88	30.02	31.16	32.30	33.44	34.58	35.72	36.86	38	19	
18							27.36	28.44	29.52	30.60	31.68	32.76	33.84	34.92	36	18	
17							25.84	26.86	27.88	28.90	29.92	30.94	31.96	32.98	34	17	
16							24.32	25.28	26.24	27.20	28.16	29.12	30.08	31.04	32	16	
15							22.80	23.70	24.60	25.50	26.40	27.30	28.20	29.10	30	15	
14							21.28	22.12	22.96	23.80	24.64	25.48	26.32	27.16	28	14	
13							19.76	20.54	21.32	22.10	22.88	23.66	24.44	25.22	26	13	
12		Not Eligible To Retire						18.24	18.96	19.68	20.40	21.12	21.84	22.56	23.28	24	12
11							16.72	17.38	18.04	18.70	19.36	20.02	20.68	21.34	22	11	
10							15.20	15.80	16.40	17.00	17.60	18.20	18.80	19.40	20	10	
9												16.38	16.92	17.46	18	9	
8												14.56	15.04	15.52	16	8	
7												12.74	13.16	13.58	14	7	
6												10.92	11.28	11.64	12	6	
5												9.10	9.40	9.70	10	5	

Example: If your Final Compensation is \$2,000 per month and you have 25 years of creditable service, the chart shows that at age 58 your factor is 50%. Thus you would multiply your Final Compensation by .50 and your monthly benefit would be \$1,000 per month.

The table is intended to provide a general approximation of a pension calculation.

READY TO RETIRE

VOLUNTARY SERVICE RETIREMENT

Your application for *voluntary* retirement must be signed and filed with the Retirement Office **at least 30 days prior to the date you wish to retire.** You will receive the form at an in-person retirement transition meeting with a Retirement Specialist. You must schedule this meeting with the Retirement Office. If you are married or have a domestic partner, she/he needs to sign the form also. If your spouse/domestic partner does not attend the meeting, the returned form with her/his signature will need to be notarized.

Prior to scheduling a retirement transition meeting, you should request an estimate of the benefits you are eligible to receive when you retire. Estimates usually take 6-8 weeks to process; processing time may be longer for members with dual membership in other portable jurisdictions. Therefore, you should request an estimate at least 90 days prior to your retirement date. If you have requested an estimate in the previous 12 months, you do not need to request a new estimate before scheduling your retirement transition meeting.

If, for some reason, you change your date for retirement after you have completed your retirement transition meeting and signed/filed your application for voluntary retirement, do not worry. Your retirement date can be changed *anytime up to the date designated by you on your Retirement Application*. Please note: if you decide to delay your retirement it is your responsibility to ensure your extended employment with your work unit.

RETIREMENT ELIGIBILITY

You are eligible for retirement if you have attained:

- 5 years of service and 62 years of age;
- 10 years of service and 57 years of age;
- 20 years of service and 52 years of age;
- 30 years of service and any age.

CALCULATING RETIREMENT

Retirement benefits are calculated in one of two ways:

1. Service Retirement Formula: Based on Age, Years of Service, and Final Compensation (up to 60%); or
2. Contribution-Based Formula (TwoTimes Match): Two times the employee contribution with interest, in the form of a lifetime annuity.

Your benefits will be calculated using each of these methods. The retirement benefit reflected on your estimate as the ***“Straight or Unmodified Benefit”*** will be the higher of these two calculations.

The term ***“Final Compensation” (also referred to as the Final Average Salary)***, used in the benefit calculation, is defined as the *“average of your highest 52 consecutive pay periods of pay, regardless of when that compensation was earned”*. Overtime and/or vacation payouts are not included in the Final Compensation calculation; premium pay, shift differentials and/or out-of-class pay are counted in most cases.

See page 19 for a simplified chart and an example to aid you in calculating your ***“Unmodified Monthly Benefit”***. Your “Unmodified Monthly Benefit” will be reduced slightly depending on the specific Retirement Option you select.

You may also estimate your future benefits by using the online benefit calculator on the Retirement Department’s website. However, please be aware that the formula in the on-line calculator uses an average credited interest rate of 5%, which means the resulting estimate may be higher or lower than the benefit you might be eligible to receive. Also, if you have close to 30 years of service credit in SCERS, we recommend you request an estimate from the Retirement Office since it will be a more accurate reflection of your benefits.

RETIREMENT OPTIONS

The maximum monthly retirement benefit you can individually receive for the rest of your life is the ***Unmodified Monthly Benefit***, which is usually referred to as the ***“Straight Benefit”***. This benefit does not provide for a beneficiary after your death and if you die before you have exhausted your employee contributions/interest (annuity), any remaining balance in your account is forfeited and goes back to the Trust. Retirement Options A through E, detailed below, provide for a beneficiary by modifying the amount of your monthly benefit. Options G and/or Option F must be combined with a Straight Benefit or one of the Standard Options (A-E). Review your options carefully before you schedule a Retirement Transition meeting.

Option A: Provides a slightly reduced monthly benefit for the rest of your life. A portion of this monthly check comes from your ACWI account (accumulated contributions with interest) and a portion from the City’s contributions/Trust. Even if you exhaust the accumulated contributions and interest in your account, you will continue to receive your full monthly benefit from the Trust for the rest of your life.

When you pass away, your beneficiary will receive a lump sum refund of any remaining balance in your ACWI account.

Option B: This Option pays a slightly higher monthly benefit than Option A for the rest of your life. A portion of this monthly check comes from your ACWI account (accumulated contributions with interest) and a portion from the City’s contributions/Trust. Even if you exhaust the accumulated contributions and interest in your account, you will continue to receive your monthly benefit from the Trust for the rest of your life.

Option B is similar to Option A, except that when you die any remaining balance in your ACWI account is refunded in ***monthly payments*** rather than in a lump sum, as provided in Option A. When you pass away, your beneficiary will receive monthly (annuity) payments until the total payments made to you ***and*** your beneficiary equals your total contributions/interest at the time of retirement.

Option C: Provides a modified monthly benefit to you until your death and the payment of a retirement allowance to your beneficiary after your death up to a guaranteed period of years from the date of your retirement. This is also known as “term certain”. You may select a term of five (5) years, ten (10) years, fifteen (15) years, or twenty (20) years. As with all of our retirement options, payments are guaranteed to you for life, even if you live beyond the guaranteed period chosen for this option. However, if you live longer than the selected term-certain period, there will be no payments to your beneficiary.

In the event you pass away before the term-certain period ends, your beneficiary will receive a monthly payment equivalent to the benefit amount you were receiving for the remaining term-certain period. So, if you pass away 5 years after you retire and you selected a C-20 Retirement Option, your beneficiary would receive monthly benefit payments equivalent to what you were receiving for the next 15 years.

Option D: Provides a modified monthly benefit for life. After your death, your spouse or domestic partner will receive **one-half** of your benefit each month for life. If you retired on or after March 24, 1997 and your spouse or domestic partner dies before you, your monthly benefit will be adjusted to the original unmodified benefit (Straight Benefit) amount. This option provides no further benefit to another beneficiary after the death of your spouse or domestic partner. Only the spouse or domestic partner **designated at the time of retirement** is eligible for benefits under this option due to the state of Washington's community property laws. Should you remarry after retirement, regardless of the reason, your new spouse or domestic partner is not eligible for this benefit.

Option E: Provides a modified monthly benefit for life. After your death, your spouse or domestic partner will receive **the same monthly benefit** for life. If you retired on or after March 24, 1997 and your spouse or domestic partner dies before you, your monthly benefit will be adjusted to the original unmodified benefit (Straight Benefit) amount. This option provides no further benefit to another beneficiary after the death of your spouse or domestic partner. Only the spouse or domestic partner **designated at the time of retirement** is eligible for benefits under this option due to the state of Washington's community property laws. Should you remarry after retirement, your former spouse/domestic partner, not your new spouse /domestic partner is eligible for this benefit.

Option F: Option F must be taken in combination with a Straight Benefit or one of the Standard Retirement Options (Option A-E). This option is available to members who retire before they are eligible to receive Social Security benefits, and is intended to create a level income stream by inflating the amount of the City retirement benefit up until the point the member is eligible for Social Security. At retirement your Social Security benefit is estimated, assuming that you will continue to work up until the time of your Social Security eligibility. The pension amount is inflated by the projected Social Security benefit multiplied by an adjustment factor based on the number of years until you are Social Security eligible. When you reach your Social Security age your retirement benefit will be reduced by your full Social Security benefit. This reduction occurs **regardless of when you actually start collecting your Social Security benefits**. Although the goal is to create a constant income stream, this often does not turn out to be the case because of differences between the Social Security amount estimated at retirement and the actual amount earned once you reach your Social Security age. Members might end up with a smaller monthly retirement benefit than anticipated. If you are interested in this option but are unsure how it will impact you, you can go to the "Planning for Retirement" presentation on SCERS' website and scroll to the section on Retirement Options, Option F Example (<http://www.seattle.gov/retirement/class.htm>). This will provide you with a step by step example of how Option F works.

Option G: Option G must be taken in combination with a Straight Benefit or one of the Standard Retirement Options (Option A-E). Option G allows you to withdraw a lump sum payment at retirement which is equivalent to either 100% of your employee accumulated contributions with interest, or 50% of this amount. Taxes will be withheld on the amount withdrawn unless the lump sum is rolled over into a qualified IRA. Your monthly benefit will be reduced by an amount to actuarially compensate for the annuity funds (your contributions plus interest) withdrawn. You will continue to receive a reduced monthly benefit based on your pension.

INCOME TAX ON YOUR RETIREMENT BENEFITS

Before you retire, this office will provide you with your cost factor and the amount of your monthly benefit that is taxable and non-taxable. This information is provided for your convenience. It is quite important, so please keep it as part of your tax records.

Also, each year you will receive a copy of the Internal Revenue 1099-R form on which we will report the gross total of your retirement income for the year. The taxable and non-taxable portions of your pension will be shown on this form.

If you wish, the Retirement Office will automatically withhold taxes from your monthly retirement check and deposit them with the Internal Revenue Service. However, we need written permission from you to do this. Please contact our office for the appropriate tax withholding form.

Once You Retire

RETIREMENT CHECKS

Pension checks are issued on the last day of each month. If the last day of the month falls on a holiday or weekend, check issuance may vary slightly. The amount of your monthly benefit will not be the same as the amount on your Estimate. The dollar figure on your Estimate is *before* taxes and does not reflect reductions for medical, dental or death benefit costs. If you have questions once you receive your first check, do not hesitate to call the Retirement Office to speak to a Retirement Specialist.

If you signed up for direct deposit of your retirement check, your first check will be mailed to your home; thereafter, it will be directly deposited into your checking or savings account.

POST RETIREMENT COST OF LIVING INCREASES

Each November, your monthly retirement benefit will be increased to provide the highest benefit calculated under one of the following cost of living adjustments:

- A 1.5% annual compounding COLA
- A COLA which would provide 65% of the purchasing power which the member's original retirement allowance could purchase.

WORKING AFTER RETIREMENT

In the event you retire and at some later point have the opportunity to return to City service, there are specific guidelines about which you should be aware. If you return as a temporary, there will be no impact on your pension and annuity retirement benefit as long as you ***do not exceed 1,040 hours*** of work in any calendar year. However, if you exceed this threshold or if you are appointed to a regular full-time or part-time position, your benefits will be impacted. You will only receive the annuity portion (based on your contributions and interest) of your retirement benefit; the pension portion of your benefit will be frozen until your City service ends.

Please note: if you start working in a regularly appointed position or if you work more than 1,040 hours per year in a temporary assignment, touch base with your Department Human Resources staff to ensure the retirement code is disabled in your records. You will not be eligible to rejoin the retirement plan and you should not have contributions deducted from your paycheck. When you separate from City employment again, be sure to notify the Retirement Office. At that point, your full retirement benefit (both annuity and pension) will resume with the same retirement option you originally selected.

POST-RETIREMENT MEDICAL AND DENTAL COVERAGE

When you retire you may continue self-paid medical coverage through the City Retirement System by either electing COBRA or one of the retiree health plans. ***Generally, you must be on the City's payroll the day prior to your retirement date to be eligible for this medical coverage.*** There are a couple exceptions to this policy.

- If you retire from City service on or after December 1, 2009 to start a job with another employer and receive *group medical* coverage from that employer, you will be eligible for

medical or dental coverage under the City's retiree health plans when you leave your subsequent employer as long as you have been continuously covered under an employer-sponsored plan. A *Certificate of Coverage*, which you can request from your employer, will be required when you apply for coverage through the retirement system.

- If you are married and have continuous coverage through your spouse's active group medical plan, you may decline coverage through the Retirement System until your spouse no longer has employer group coverage.

If you retired from the City on or before November 31, 2009, you must pay for retiree medical coverage continuously to hold open the option of having retiree coverage in the future.

You are eligible for up to 18 months of coverage under COBRA, a Federally-mandated medical program open to anyone leaving City service. This is normally a cheaper option if you want to continue coverage of your spouse and children under 26. At the end of 18 months, you may switch to the medical program available through this office, or you may choose to find your own medical coverage. Dental coverage is also available under COBRA or you may elect at the time of retirement to receive coverage through a plan that is offered to City retirees. Whether you elect to continue medical coverage through COBRA or the City's plan, the cost is the responsibility of the retiree, though accrued sick leave converted through VEBA or Deferred Comp may be used to cover these costs.

Medical coverage is available at a group rate for retirees under age 65, and a Medicare supplement is available to retirees age 65 and over. However, not every medical provider offers a Medicare supplement at a group rate, please review the Retiree Medical Benefits section of the FAQs or contact our office for more information. Premium rates and a comparison of plan highlights are available for review on SCERS' website.

Note: Retirees, particularly those eligible for Medicare, are encouraged to consider securing medical and dental insurance on their own, independently of the insurance available through the City of Seattle. Independent plans might be more suitable. However, retirees should be certain that such plans are appropriate for them, as they will not be able to return to a City of Seattle plan once they have switched to a non-group plan.

DEATH BENEFIT PROGRAM

As an active employee, you are an automatic member of the Death Benefit Program. When you retire, you may elect whether or not to retain this benefit. The intended purpose of the benefit is to help cover burial costs. The benefit is \$2,000 and payable only to your named beneficiary on file with the Retirement Office at the time of your death. The premium at this time is \$12.00 per year, deducted in February from your pension payment. This policy has no cash value for the retiree.

BENEFIT OVER- OR UNDER-PAYMENT

If you ever receive an over payment of your monthly retirement benefit, you will be required to repay it. This normally only happens in the event of a retiree's death. If there was a slight delay in notification, there could be an overpayment. If this occurs, the beneficiary is notified of the overpayment and must submit a repayment check. If the deceased retiree opted for the death benefit, the beneficiary may opt to have the overpayment reduced from the death benefit rather than submitting a personal check.

The primary situation in which a retiree may have an underpayment could occur when a retiree's spouse dies before the retiree. If the retiree in this situation selected Option D or E on or after March 25, 1997, their monthly benefit should increase to a straight or unmodified benefit. This change in benefit cannot occur until SCERS is notified of the spouse's death. Once notified, SCERS may determine there has been an under-payment. In such instances, SCERS will make an adjustment in the next monthly check.

POST-RETIREMENT OPTION/SURVIVOR BENEFIT CHANGES

A number of SCERS' Retirement Options provide for a beneficiary. These include Option A, B, C, D, and E. Once you retire, there are only two instances in which your monthly retirement payments may change:

- If you selected Option D or E on or after March 25, 1997, which would provide survivor benefits for your wife at the rate of 50% or 100%, and your spouse dies before you. Should this occur, your retirement benefit will be recalculated and increased to the Straight or Unmodified monthly benefit amount.
- If you return to work full-time with the City after you retire, the pension portion (City) of your monthly benefit will cease, but the annuity portion (your contributions) will continue to be paid, thereby reducing that portion of annuity money available to provide your beneficiary with a survivor's benefit.