



WHATCOM COUNTY COMMISSION ON
SALARIES FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS
Thursday, February 16, 2023, 4:00 PM
Virtual Meeting

ATTENDANCE:

Members Present: Linda Stone, Lance Calloway, Dewey Desler, Karen Funston, Lori Province, Rebecca Shaddix, Michael Anderson (joined at 5:00 pm)

Members Absent: Beth Vonnegut; Jeremy Irwin

Staff/Guests Present: Stacey Carroll, Facilitator;
Kaylee Galloway – invited guest
Kathy Kershner – invited guest
Rebecca Xczar – invited guest
Steve Oliver – invited guest
Diana Bradrick – invited guest
Brandy Reed – public; “observer” – public

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair Dewey Desler at 4:02 pm.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Desler called for a motion to approve the Minutes of 1/31/23. The motion was made by Lori Province and seconded by Karen Funston. The vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously 6-0. Noting also that all members have completed their OPMA training.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

4. DISCUSSION WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Chair Desler welcomed the elected officials who are in attendance today.

- Councilmember Galloway was invited to make remarks. She briefly spoke about the role of councilmembers related to policy crafting and legislative process. Constituent contact and representation; working with other elected officials and state and federal agencies; and addressed the time commitment of councilmembers. In her first year she has worked the equivalent of full-time hours.

- Councilmember Kershner was invited to make remarks. She reiterated the comments made by Councilmember Galloway regarding the roles and demands on time for a councilmember. She added there are also several standing committees as well as other citizen groups in the community. Constituent services is a large role that councilmembers engage in: phone calls, emails, writing policy, letters of support, etc. Lori Province asked about county comparisons and Ms. Kershner said she believes our county is more akin to King County as opposed to Yakima County in terms of urban issues and problems that are being addressed. Chair Desler asked what would be a fair salary for a

councilmember. Councilmember Kershner commented that the salary should be enough to support the councilmember without having to have additional jobs. Councilmember Galloway said she believes the salary is fair for half time but doesn't think it's an accurate reflection of time served and would prefer a ¾ time salary.

- County Treasurer Steve Oliver was invited to make remarks and his written comments were acknowledged. Mr. Oliver spoke of the highlights from his written comments; he made some recommendations on the salary comparisons and commented that there is plenty of internal as well as external data available to commission members to work with this year. Questions were raised and discussion ensued regarding wage gaps, unrepresented employees, bargaining agreements, second in command wage matching, etc. Mr. Oliver compares his responsibilities to that of the Finance Manager, a salaried employee who he believes is his closest peer in the organization.

- County Auditor Diana Bradrick was invited to make remarks and her written comments were acknowledged. Ms. Bradrick concurs with many of the comments of the County Treasurer, and wants to highlight pay equity. The Auditor's office is very unique with three different sub-set departments within the Auditor's office. She also addressed more recent changes and challenges facing the Auditor. There are no other comparable county departments, so its difficult to compare her position except to say that other administrative department leads do somewhat comparable work and they are making higher salaries. The Auditor provides essential services and it is important to compensate fairly and ensure that highly qualified and highly skilled people are attracted to the position.

- County Assessor Rebecca Xczar was invited to make remarks. Ms. Xczar had provided written comments as well, and she gave an overview of the services her office provides, with a staff of 31 employees. She agrees with the comments of Ms. Bradrick and Mr. Oliver and that this commission has a robust amount of data to work with this year, especially as far as what the county has already done with salary studies and restructuring. She also commented on the compression issue with her second in command (at 6%) as well as the comparable counties discussion and her agreement that the commission should not include eastern counties in the deliberations (she recommends Kitsap County as closer comparable due to parcel counts, median home prices and cost of living).

5. COMMISSION UPDATES

Mr. Calloway noted he needed to leave the meeting. Chair Desler raised the issue of the open position on the commission and he let everyone know that the two alternates did not accept the open position. This means there are nine commission members and he wanted to change the quorum number (previously set at 6 for majority) to five members because this would result in 5 out of 9 becoming the majority for adoption of any motions. Mr. Anderson made the motion to change the quorum to 5 members. There was discussion and it was then decided to table the issue for further discussion at the next meeting. Mr. Anderson's motion was withdrawn.

Ms. Carroll took a few moments to provide some background regarding the resignation of Commission member James Runyon and the subsequent process of staff reaching out to alternates (whom had previously been identified by the County Auditor). The alternates were contacted by staff and neither opted to accept the position, thus leaving the commission membership at 9 total.

Ms. Carroll also let the commissioners know that two other elected officials have requested extra time in order to prepare written comments and may want time on the agenda in order to address

commissioners at the next meeting: County Prosecutor Eric Richey and County Sheriff Bill Elfo. They will be afforded the same courtesy as the officials who spoke today and will be provided the same time period in which to speak.

6. INFORMATION REVIEW

Chair Desler invited Ms. Carroll to address the commissioners regarding the data that is being reviewed. Ms. Carroll said it would be helpful to pause and provide an opportunity to review and ask questions about terminology and methodology, especially for new commissioners. Terms like “comparable counties” and “tied to non-elected management staff” and “living wage” etc. She wants to review these and other terms and orient everyone around the documents and issues that have been raised. The various data salary comparison tables were brought on-screen and she pointed out how there are variable comparison points that are highlighted (i.e., full-time employees, assessed value, annual expenditures, etc.). She also pointed out that the comparison of counties idea is very important. The last Salary Commission used an eight-county comparable set in their review process. The data set that was included for this years’ review is actually a six-county data set which is actually the same data that is used for the bargaining units in the county, and is also from an arbitrator’s decision. There was a request that the date created and the purpose for each data document be included on the document for context.

The next topic that was raised by Ms. Carroll was the COLA adjustment and history table. To provide context here, it’s important to understand what happened with unrepresented employees in 2022. At the start of 2023, these employees received a 4% COLA plus a salary adjustment based on a salary survey conducted earlier in the year (0% to 9% increase, based on position and results of salary survey). Also the CPI numbers from the last five years. Other materials were reviewed briefly, including elected and seconds salary comparisons (comparable data for other management positions within the county). Chair Desler commented that it would be helpful to have all these data sets/tables organized and perhaps numbered in such a way that it’s easy to pull them up instantaneously. Lastly, Ms. Carroll pointed to another agenda attachment which consolidates some of the prior information as well as outlines the methodology of how decisions were made during the last cycle of the Salary Commission.

7. NEXT STEPS

Chair Desler encouraged commissioners to review all of the data they’re receiving from Stacey, also review the website, and noted we will be forging some common objectives in order to build consensus for the recommendations that will be produced. The next meeting is March 2nd.

8. ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Lori Province, seconded by Michael Anderson; the vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously 6-0 – meeting adjourned at 6:04 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Mildner,
Executive Boards and Committees Clerk
Whatcom County