



MINUTES of the Snohomish County Citizens' Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials March 28, 2012

The March 28 meeting of the Citizens' Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials was called to order at 6:00pm in the 6th Floor Executive Conference Room of the County's West Administration Building, 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, Everett.

Commission Members Present

LaVerne Gemar, Chair
Todd Morrow
Dan Williams
Richard Harbert
Dat Nguyen
Jason Redrup
Dennis Peterson

Staff Members Present

Brian Parry, Executive Office
Sharie Freemantle, Council
Norma Middleton, Human Resources

The meeting was called to order by Chair Gemar at 6:00 PM.

The minutes of the March 14 meeting were distributed to members. **Commissioner Redrup moved adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Harbert seconded.** Chair Gemar asked that the minutes be amended to clarify that it was the Commission's intent that five members would constitute a quorum of the Commission. **The motion, as amended, passed unanimously.**

Chair Gemar asked if there were any elected officials in attendance who would like to offer their comments to the Commission.

Brian Sullivan, chair of the county council, addressed the Commission. He stated the council has two primary responsibilities: fiscal oversight of the county budget and policy setting. He noted the county has maintained solid fiscal health and maintained its credit rating while not increasing taxes during the recession. He noted various policy initiatives undertaken by the council, in cooperation with other offices, to protect the county's budget and stimulate the local economy. He also distributed to the Commissioners a list of the many external boards members of the council serve on and noted that the members of the council rarely send alternates to serve in their place.

Commissioner Morrow asked Mr. Sullivan his position on what should be done with regard to the salaries of elected officials. Mr. Sullivan stated that he did not wish to offer an opinion that might influence the Commission, but rather let the process take its course



and allow the Commission to review comparables and perform their duty. Discussion continued about the position of the county's budget.

Chair Gemar asked for the next elected official in attendance. Carolyn Weikel, County Auditor, addressed the Commission.

Ms. Weikel provided the Commission with a copy of the annual report of the Auditor's Office and described the duties of her office. She stated that the office is governed by local, state and federal law and provides regional services in three primary areas: elections and voter registration; licensing and animal control; and recording. She noted that, unlike in many other states, her office is responsible for voter registration and elections on behalf of the cities in Snohomish County and described the work that must be done to maintain the county's database of more than 390,000 registered voters. She stated that the recording division is the repository of all land transactions and detailed the division's work. She stated that the licensing division is an agent for the Washington State Department of Licensing as well as providing local licenses, and described the various types of licenses provided by her office and the effort that goes into that work. She also noted that she serves on various boards and commissions at different levels of government.

Mr. Morrow asked whether the functions of the Auditor's Office were divided differently in other counties. Ms. Weikel noted that King County does split the duties of her office into different offices and detailed the division.

Discussion followed relating to the budget of the Auditor's Office, particularly how it is affected by presidential election years.

Sonya Kraski, County Clerk, addressed the Commission next. Ms. Kraski provided the Commission with a written overview of the Clerk's Office. She stated that the Clerk is an independently elected official who serves as the ex officio clerk of the Superior Court who must maintain the Superior Court records in perpetuity and ensures the separation of powers among the three branches of government. She provided a detailed description of how records are maintained and the many responsibilities of the Clerk's Office. Including, but not limited to, being present at and recording details of court proceedings; serving as the financial officer of the court, managing court calendars, providing for jury summonses, providing assistance with protection orders and serving as family law facilitators. She identified the many different types of records that must be maintained in providing these services. She described statistics showing the annual workload of the office (contained in the report) and that these services are provided with fewer than 75 full-time staff.

Commissioner Harbert asked whether the Clerk's Office was adequately staffed. Ms. Kraski said no, and noted that four years prior the office had a full-time staff of 88. Further discussion ensued about the importance of maintaining well-trained staff, particularly in light of the wide variety of services provided by the Clerk's Office.



Steve Lightle, Residential Appraiser Manager, addressed the Commission on behalf of County Assessor Cindy Portmann.

Mr. Lightle provided a detailed presentation to the Commission describing the duties of the Assessor's Office. He stated that the function of the office is to administer the assessment and levy of property taxes for all taxable real and personal property within the geographic boundaries of Snohomish County, including its cities. He identified the general activities of the office, including appraisal of real and personal property; administration of tax exemption and other special programs; setting tax levies; maintaining the assessment roll data; and processing appeals. He gave further detail of how each of these functions is performed and what laws govern their performance. He stated that the office is responsible for assessing the value of nearly 300,000 real and personal property accounts and calculating 143 levies. He stated that the office has a staff of 62.5 employees.

Commissioner Harbert asked what criteria were available for ascertaining how well the office performed its duties. Mr. Lightle identified various professional standards identified by the International Association of Assessing Officers and Washington State. He stated that the Snohomish County Assessor's Office always meets or exceeds these standards. Mr. Harbert asked what factors drive the workload of the office. Mr. Lightle stated that the primary driver is land use activity and the number of parcels. He noted that parcel numbers are always increasing, so the workload of the office continually grows while staffing has decreased in recent years.

Brian Haseleu, Budget and Systems Manager, addressed the Commission on behalf of County Executive Aaron Reardon. Mr. Haseleu described the duties of the Executive Office. He stated that the office is responsible for supervising 15 departments consisting of more than 1,200 employees at a budget of \$540 million. He stated the office is responsible for a wide variety of duties including overseeing all executive departments, presenting an annual budget and statement of county affairs, presenting the county's comprehensive land use plan, vetoing ordinances, nominating members to serve on county boards and commissions, collective bargaining within parameters set by council and serving on various external boards.

Discussion ensued about details of the budget contained in the 2012 budget summary. Commissioner Harbert asked what measures could be used to assess the job performance of the Executive Office. Mr. Haseleu noted the wide variety of services performed by departments under the supervision of the Executive Office and that each would have its own standard of review. Mr. Haseleu also noted the fiscal health of Snohomish County in comparison to other governments; economic growth and investment; capital projects completed by the county; various efforts undertaken to streamline county services; and various awards and recognition earned by the county from national and regional organizations. Further discussion ensued before the Commission moved on to the next agenda item.



Mr. Parry noted that County Treasurer Kirke Sievers indicated he would address the Commission at a future meeting. He provided handouts containing information requested at the first Commission meeting. He also noted that the Salary Comparison packet should be updated to show that the King County Director of Elections is an elected position rather than appointed.

Mr. Haseleu was asked to give a presentation of the county's budget and financial outlook. He provided the Commission with a copy of the county's five-year financial plan. He described the elements of the plan including expected expenditures and revenues. He noted that the plan does not assume an increase in general property taxes, but does assume a small improvement in the local economy resulting in greater sales tax collection. He noted that the growth shown was very small and that the budget would be tight in future years.

Commissioner Redrup asked for a comparison of benefits for elected officials and other county employees. Mr. Parry provided a handout created by the Human Resources department. He noted that the benefits package for elected officials is the same as that of any employee in the county's largest bargaining unit, AFSCME, in almost every area. The only exception, he said, is that elected officials have the option of receiving a vehicle allowance. The vehicle allowance allows officials to be reimbursed for vehicle cost at an amount less than what it would cost the county to provide a vehicle. He noted that other employees are reimbursed on a per mile basis.

Mr. Haseleu provided an overview of the total full-time employee count in Snohomish County over the previous several years. He noted that the county has nearly 400 fewer full-time staff than it did in 2008. Further discussion ensued relating to details of the county's staffing levels. Commissioner Harbert asked a question related to the budgetary impact of any change in elected official salaries. Mr. Haseleu noted that the elected officials represent only 12 of the nearly 1,500 employees funded by the county general fund. As a result, he said any change up or down would have a limited impact on an overall mathematical level.

Commissioner Morrow asked whether the Commission had been provided a listing of the pay for top department deputies. Mr. Parry indicated they had not, but that in many cases those salaries are higher than the elected officials. Chair Gemar asked why that was. Norma Middleton, Human Resources System Manager, discussed how the county identifies salary levels and stated that it is common for deputies or directors to be paid more than the elected officials they work for in other governments, including Washington State government. Mr. Parry stated that a listing would be provided at the next meeting of the Commission per Commissioner Morrow's request.

Chair Gemar suggested the Commissioners digest the materials so far presented to them and come to the next meeting with proposals for the Commission to consider. Mr. Parry noted that the meeting on April 11 would be a public hearing. Chair Gemar asked if there was further discussion. Hearing none, Chair Gemar adjourned the meeting at 9:20 PM.