



MINUTES of the Snohomish County Citizens' Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials April 25, 2012

The April 25 meeting of the Citizens' Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials was called to order at 6:00 PM 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
Dennis Peterson
John Beal
Harry Heathman
Jason Redrup

Staff Members Present

Brian Parry, Executive Office
Marcia Isenberg, Council
Tina Larsen, Human Resources

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

The minutes of the April 11 meeting were distributed to members. **Commissioner Morrow moved adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Harbert seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

Chair Gemar noted handouts provided by Commissioners Harbert and Peterson outlining a salary schedule proposal and information about change in the Consumer Price Index respectively.

Brian Parry provided a handout showing a draft salary schedule and questions for the Commission to consider while deliberating on its decision.

Commissioner Harbert made a motion to adopt the salary schedule as printed on the handout he provided to Commissioners. Commissioner Morrow seconded the motion for purposes of discussion.

Commissioner Harbert addressed the Commission. He stated he felt there are serious inequities when comparing the salaries of elected officials in Snohomish County to their subordinates, job responsibilities and their peers in other counties. He noted that under his proposal only two positions, council member and prosecuting attorney, would have salaries exceeding those of their peers in Pierce County. He noted that Snohomish



County elected officials had not seen any increases in recent years while cost of living had been increasing. He said he felt the elected officials were underpaid when compared to the private sector and that it was necessary to provide adequate pay to attract the right people to run for office. He noted that the salaries of the elected officials comprise a very small percentage of the overall budget. He also stated he felt the only way to address the inequities he saw was to do so individually rather than through any across-the-board adjustments.

Commissioner Morrow stated that he liked that the proposal would bring Snohomish County salaries more in line with what was currently being paid to those in Pierce County. He said he had concerns about changing the method of setting the Prosecuting Attorney's salary which had been set for the past decade as the same as Superior Court Judges, but otherwise thought the proposal shared was a good one.

Commissioner Harbert gave further description of the specifics as outlined in his written motion.

Commissioner Beal said that he had taken the time between Commission meetings to speak with other elected officials outside of the Commission's responsibility. He said that each had stated they felt elected officials were not adequately compensated for the personal and financial risks they take by running for office, but that it was not currently the appropriate time to increase salaries. He said he ran into much the same sentiment when speaking with members of the community as well. He said he felt the Prosecuting Attorney, Sheriff and Clerk were specifically underpaid, but that he would be reluctant to increase the salaries of any of the other elected officials.

Commissioner Heathman stated that he opposed any salary increases. He asked that a letter provided by a citizen to the 2010 Commission, expressing opposition to salary increases, be distributed to the Commission. He said that in speaking with business leaders and average residents the response he received was that increasing salaries would send the wrong message. He said that he could not support increasing salaries while the economy was still in bad shape.

Commissioner Peterson said that he agreed with Commissioner Harbert that there were inequities in the salaries that should be addressed. He said he was sensitive to the general state of the economy and would prefer that any increase in salaries be in line with recent changes to the cost of living index only.

Commissioner Nguyen said that he agreed some salary increase should be granted. He said that he was considering something across-the-board and more in line with the cost of living adjustment that had recently been agreed to with the county's largest bargaining unit (AFSCME).

Commissioner Williams said that he had initially liked the proposal but was having second thoughts as the conversation continued. He noted that the proposal was higher



than what he had proposed at the previous meeting of the Commission. He said he continued to support some level of salary increase.

Commissioner Redrup stated that he was concerned about maintaining fairness. He said that his view of fairness included keeping in line with what other employees had recently received. He said he didn't feel salaries should continue to be frozen and that looking at something in line with inflation or changes to the consumer price index would be fair.

Commissioner Harbert said that he would like to address some of the concerns raised by other Commissioners. He noted that any across-the-board changes wouldn't resolve the inequities he had outlined. He addressed concerns about the economy and noted that Snohomish County was doing better than many other local governments in terms of its economy and budget forecast. Brief discussion followed.

Chair Gemar asked if there were any other comments. Hearing none, she called for a vote on Commissioner Harbert's motion. **The motion failed 8-1 with Commissioner Harbert voting for the motion.**

Chair Gemar asked if there were any other proposals or if each salary should be reviewed one-by-one.

Commissioner Morrow made a motion to increase salaries for each elected official, except for the Prosecuting Attorney whose salary would continue to be determined by that set for Superior Court Judges, by 1.5% in 2013 and an additional 1.5% in 2014; and to continue providing an additional 10% salary for the chair of the County Council. Commissioner Nguyen seconded the motion.

Commissioner Harbert noted that the amount proposed was lower than the rate of inflation and that the process for negotiating a contract with the union involves more factors than salary.

Discussion continued among Commissioners regarding employee benefits as well as the overall state of the economy in Snohomish County.

Commissioner Beal suggested the Commission consider establishing some form of benchmarks using economic indicators to tie to potential salary increases. Discussion followed.

Commissioner Redrup stated that in his work he often works with jurisdictions in dealing with wage and contract issues. He noted that when the county was negotiating salaries and benefits with its employees it would have conducted an economic projection. He said that the salary increases granted to employees is a good indicator of what the county believed is reasonable and affordable. He said that going away from what had been agreed to with the employees would also be inequitable.



Chair Gemar asked if there were any additional comments from any of the Commissioners.

Hearing no additional discussion, Chair Gemar called for a vote on the motion. The motion was approved 6-3. Commissioners Morrow, Redrup, Williams, Nguyen, Peterson and Chair Gemar voted for the motion. Commissioners Beal, Harbert and Heathman voted against.

Chair Gemar thanked the members of the Commission for their work in accomplishing a challenging task.

Chair Gemar asked if there were any remaining items of business or discussion. **Hearing none, Chair Gemar adjourned the meeting at 7:20 PM.**