

# WHATCOM COUNTY COMMISSION ON SALARIES FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

## MINUTES

Thursday, March 16, 2017, 4:00 p.m.

Whatcom Transportation Authority Board Room  
4111 Bakerview Spur  
Bellingham, WA

### **A. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Brian Lydiard at 4:00 p.m.

### **ATTENDANCE**

Members Present: Mike Arbiter, Kristi Birkeland, Steve King, Brian Lydiard, Jason Russell, Diana Schmidt, Jon Sitkin, Wendy Wefer-Clinton

Members Absent: Justin Iverson, Todd Morris

Staff Present: Andy Rowson-WTA Director of Human Resources and Commission Facilitator, Vicki Esser-WTA Executive Assistant/ Clerk of the Board and Commission Administrative Assistant

Others Present: Kie Relyea - Bellingham Herald Reporter

### **B. PUBLIC COMMENT**

#### **B.1 Communication from Steve Oliver, Treasurer**

Mr. Rowson, Commission Facilitator, directed the committee's attention to the information submitted by Steve Oliver, Whatcom County Treasurer, which was provided in the meeting packet.

### **C. APPROVAL OF FEB. 16, 2017 MEETING MINUTES**

MOTION BY ARBITER, SECONDED BY BIRKELAND TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE FEBRUARY 16, 2017 MEETING.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **D. INFORMATION REQUESTS**

## **D.1 Review of Salary Options**

Andy Rowson, Commission Facilitator, reviewed the packet data with commission members. He covered different possible options for methods of determining future salaries.

The commission agreed they do not want to use the “Salaries as a Percentage of Highest Paid Elected Official” method because if the Prosecuting Attorney’s salary is tied to the State Superior Court Judge, as it is now, then they lose local control.

The main points of further discussion were:

- The Commission wants salary levels that attract and retain experienced, qualified people.
- The County currently pays above the average of the comparables for every position except County Executive.

## **D.2 Review of Salary Commission Questions**

- a. Should the Commission use the same compensation model as past Commissions or change it?

There was consensus that the former model will be used as a basis for discussion, but the commission wants to make some changes.

- b. Some elected officials lost their car allowance in 2011. Should this factor into adjusting current compensation?

There was consensus that the loss of the car allowance should not be considered as a factor since salaries for these positions are above the average of the other county comparables.

- c. Should the Prosecuting Attorney’s salary be tied to the State Superior Court Judge salary (as is the current and common practice)?

There was agreement not to tie the Prosecuting Attorney’s salary to the State Superior Court Judges any longer. The State is giving them a 2% COLA plus a 2% adjustment to keep up with federal judges. It was felt that 4% was too much of an increase. There was also concern that the tie limits local control.

- d. Is compression (a deputy making more than the elected official) something that should be addressed?

It was agreed that compression is something worth monitoring, but not an issue for the commission this year.

- e. Are salaries generally correct, or is a significant adjustment necessary for any one position?

It was agreed that a cost of living adjustment (COLA) is appropriate for all positions, and each position will be discussed separately.

## **E. DISCUSSION**

### County Council

It was agreed that the current County Council pay is appropriate. It was stated that the last commission gave them a significant increase to make sure we can get good people to run for office. It was also agreed that they should get a 1.9%-2% COLA along with the other positions.

### Sheriff

It was pointed out that the Bellingham Police Chief makes \$141,000 which is \$6,000 more than the Sheriff. It was noted that the Sheriff's pay is significantly above the comparable counties, but he is the only one in that group who is in charge of a jail. There were comments about the Sheriff's duties being far broader than the Bellingham Police Chief's. It was stated that the Sheriff is also dealing with a vast territory including the border, search & rescue, migrant farm workers, tribal relations, etc.

MOTION BY SITKIN, SECONDED BY KING TO INCREASE THE SHERIFF'S SALARY TO \$145,000.

After further discussion, Mr. Sitkin stated that he would be willing to amend his motion to raise the salary to \$145,000 over two years if that is more acceptable to the commission.

A vote was taken on the original motion. The motion failed 2 – 6.

MOTION BY SITKIN, SECONDED BY KING TO INCREASE THE SHERIFF'S SALARY TO \$142,000 BY 2019 WITH THE COLA APPLIED FIRST AND ADJUSTMENTS SPREAD EQUALLY OVER TWO YEARS.

The motion passed 5 – 3.

### Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer

It was pointed out that the salaries for these three positions have been tied together since at least 1981 and this practice is commonplace around the State.

It was stated that we can anticipate additional changes and challenges in the future for law enforcement and the Sheriff, but cannot see what will be significantly different for these positions.

It was restated that the group decided the loss of the car allowance is not a compelling factor for a significant adjustment.

It was agreed that since these positions are paid above the county comparables, only a COLA is appropriate.

It was decided to use a 1.9% COLA for 2018 because it matches the consumer price index average.

MOTION BY SITKIN, SECONDED BY ARBITER THAT THE COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA) BE SET AT 1.9% FOR 2018 AND 2% FOR 2019.

The motion passed 8 – 0.

MOTION BY ARBITER, SECONDED BY RUSSELL THAT THE TREASURER, ASSESSOR, AND AUDITOR RECEIVE A 1.9% COLA FOR 2018 AND A 2% COLA FOR 2019.

The motion passed 8 – 0.

#### Prosecuting Attorney

It was agreed to separate the Prosecuting Attorney's salary from the State Superior Court Judge salary because the tie to the State Superior Court Judge salary limits local control.

MOTION BY WEFER-CLINTON, SECONDED BY BIRKELAND THAT THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S SALARY BE SEPARATED FROM THE STATE SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE SALARY AND THAT THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY RECEIVE A 1.9% COLA FOR 2018 AND A 2% COLA FOR 2019.

The motion passed 8 – 0.

#### County Executive

Several counties were listed that pay their Executive more than their Prosecuting Attorney, while Whatcom's Executive is currently paid over \$7,000 less. It was pointed out that the County Executive oversees 400 employees and a budget of \$121 million.

MOTION BY SITKIN TO RAISE THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S SALARY TO \$170,000 IN 2018 AND GIVE A 2% COLA IN 2019.

A commission member commented that normally the COLA would be applied first and then an adjustment would be added.

The motion died for lack of a second.

MOTION BY ARBITER, SECONDED BY SITKIN THAT A 1.9% COLA BE APPLIED TO THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S SALARY IN 2018 AND THEN AN ADJUSTMENT BE ADDED TO MATCH THE SALARY TO THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S SALARY FOR 2018. IN 2019 THE 2% COLA IS TO BE APPLIED TO THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S SALARY AGAIN MATCHING IT TO THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S SALARY.

The motion passed 8 – 0.

#### **F. NEXT STEPS**

Mr. Rowson suggested that we create a document explaining these decisions, send it to Chairman Lydiard for review, then publish it as a draft document and set a Public Hearing for the April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. He stated that the document could be either adjusted or approved at the April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Upon request, Mr. Rowson agreed to send the draft document to the whole commission for review before publication, but he stressed the importance of a quick reply, before the deadline he will establish, so the document can be published in time to advertise the Public Hearing.

The group agreed to set the Public Hearing for the April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

There was a request that when the reminder goes out for the next meeting, commission members be reminded that approval of the final salary placement document requires six affirmative votes.

#### **H. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:57 p.m. by Chairman Brian Lydiard.

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Minutes approved by the Commission in open public meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ Date

**Whatcom County Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials  
Whatcom County, Washington**

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**Brian Lydiard  
Chairman**

**Attest:**

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**Vicki G. Esser**  
**Commission Administrative Assistant**

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