

**WHATCOM COUNTY COMMISSION ON SALARIES
FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

MINUTES

Thursday, February 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, Justin Iverson, Steve King, Brian Lydiard, Todd Morris, Jason Russell, Diana Schmidt, Jon Sitkin

Members Absent: Wendy Wefer-Clinton

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: Debbie Adelstein, (Whatcom County Auditor), Steve Oliver (Treasurer), Keith Willnauer (Assessor)

C. ELECTED OFFICIAL COMMENT

C.1 Letter of Invitation to Elected Officials

Mr. Rowson, Commission Facilitator, informed the commission that elected officials received the letter of invitation included in the packet inviting them to provide comments to the commission verbally or in writing.

C.2 Verbal Comment

Debbie Adelstein, Whatcom County Auditor: Ms. Adelstein said that there have been no major changes to her office since the last commission. She suggested that the commission consider looking at Auditors for counties of comparable size and duties. She commented that there is no internal equity within the County. She said the Auditor, Assessor, and Treasurer salaries are often set the same, but they have very different duties. She asked the commission to consider that many of the department heads make more than the elected officials, although in many ways, the elected officials function as a department head.

In answer to questions from commission members, she stated that the elected officials are accountable to the voters, and her oversight comes from the State Auditor, although she does send reports to the County Executive. She said she works around 45 hours per week, but more, as needed, during election season.

Steve Oliver, Whatcom County Treasurer: Mr. Oliver stated that he serves as the public Treasurer for the County and 70 other public entities in the County including school districts, fire departments, cemetery districts, WTA, etc. He said his department is basically the bank for those entities which would make them the second or third largest bank in the County on a market share basis. His department collects property taxes, operates a \$450 million investment pool, and manages a debt portfolio.

Mr. Oliver referenced the written comments he submitted previously along with Assessor Keith Willnauer. He said losing the supplemental pay and car allowances in late 2011 had a significant financial impact on him and the Assessor and this change also affects their retirement contributions. He said he and the Assessor are making only \$198.92 more than they did seven years ago and he does not think this is true of any other elected officials.

Mr. Oliver answered questions from commission members stating that he supervises 12 FTE's which is down from 17 when he started. He said although activity has grown, they have utilized technology to do more with less people.

When asked how he makes his investment decisions, Mr. Oliver said he has a clear policy of investment priorities which include protecting the public's money, having enough liquidity, and earning a return.

Keith Willnauer, Whatcom County Assessor: Mr. Willnauer referenced the written material submitted previously along with Mr. Oliver. He said his longevity on the job is a value to his position, and the continual election process is a consideration. He stated that he has been the Assessor for 29 years and worked in the Assessor's office for ten years prior to that. He stated that he will probably consider retiring sometime soon and PERS retirement is based on your two highest years. He said he is concerned with what those two highest years look like. He said he administrates a department of 26 employees and two specific divisions. He commented that his Deputy now has a higher salary than he does, plus those employees can cash out paid leave, but elected officials don't have that option. He said the Assessor's office is under the direct oversight of the WA State Dept. of Revenue and the State Auditor.

A commission member asked all three elected officials what they believe fair compensation would be for their positions. Mr. Willnauer stated around \$115,000 - \$120,000, Mr. Oliver said a range between the County Finance Director and the City Finance Director, and Ms. Adelstein suggested that her

salary should compare with other department heads, which she thinks may be around \$115,000 although she did not have exact figures.

C.3 Written Comment

Andy Rowson, Commission Facilitator, reviewed written comments received from other elected officials. Those comments are included in the meeting packet. He pointed out the County Executive's submission shows that the County Executive used to be paid the same or more than the County Prosecutor, but is now \$7,000-\$8,000 behind.

Commission members discussed the verbal and written comment received.

D. APPROVAL OF JAN. 19, 2017 MEETING MINUTES AND VICE-CHAIR ELECTION

MOTION BY IVERSON, SECONDED BY ARBITER TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 19, 2017 MEETING.

The motion passed unanimously.

Kristi Birkeland nominated Mike Arbiter for Vice-Chairman. Jon Sitkin seconded the nomination.

Mike Arbiter was elected Vice-Chairman unanimously.

E. INFORMATION REQUESTS

E.1 Review of Requested Information

Mr. Rowson reviewed the information that had been requested by commission members and provided in the meeting packet.

F. DISCUSSION

The commission discussed the information. There was consensus about the following:

- Salary decisions should not be based on the individual, but rather on the appropriate salary for the position.
- The compression issue, where deputies make more than the elected official, is worthy of consideration.
- Salaries should be sufficient to attract quality candidates.

Mr. Rowson pointed out that the deputies for the Treasurer, Assessor, and Auditor do have the ability, at top step, to earn slightly higher salaries than the elected officials according to the information in the table provided by the County.

Mr. Rowlson stated that he believes the current questions are:

- Is compression an issue for this group?
- Do you want the County Executive to have the same salary as the County Prosecutor?
- Is the loss of supplemental income/car allowance in 2011 a factor to consider in setting compensation?

After further discussion, the commission asked Mr. Rowlson to create a table of what the salaries would be if the determinations were made the same way the last commission made them.

Commission member Sitkin summarized his observations, as follows:

- Consumer Price Index (CPI) is at 1.9%
- Most Governments are at around 2% for their Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA's)
- The department head salaries seem high compared to the elected officials.
- He would tie the County Executive salary to the Prosecuting Attorney's salary.

Mr. Rowlson stated that he would look at the work of the previous commission and provide a place to start the discussion for the next meeting.

G. NEXT STEPS

Chairman Lydiard asked commission members to come to the next meeting with an idea of what they think the salaries should be and also come with the ability to compromise. He stated the commission will talk it through.

Mr. Rowlson stated that commission members should think about whether they believe the salaries are generally right and we are just making minor adjustments or whether they believe any salaries need significant adjustments.

Chairman Lydiard stated that we want to provide good solid rationale for whatever the commission does.

H. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 6:02 p.m. by Chairman Brian Lydiard.

Minutes approved by the Commission in open public meeting on 3-16-17.
Date

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



**Brian Lydiard
Chairman**

Attest:



**Vicki G. Esser
Commission Administrative Assistant**