

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

**MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 21, 2019, 4:00 p.m.**

**Whatcom Transportation Authority  
Board Room  
4011 Bakerview Spur  
Bellingham, WA**

**ATTENDANCE**

Members Present: Bonne Broadway, Justin Iverson, Steve King, Todd Morris, Karen Peila, Wayne Tomlinson, Wendy Wefer-Clinton

Members Absent: Lisa Karlberg, Jon Sitkin, Martin Watterson

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: Eric Richey (Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney)

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Facilitator Andy Rowson at 4:00 p.m.

**B. ELECT VICE-CHAIRPERSON**

Mr. Rowson stated that the commission needs to elect a Vice-Chairperson to run the meeting as Chairperson Sitkin is unable to attend.

**MOTION BY BROADWAY, SECONDED BY TOMLINSON THAT THE COMMISSION ELECT WENDY WEFER-CLINTON AS VICE-CHAIRPERSON.**

Ms. Wefer-Clinton indicated that she is willing to serve in this capacity.

The motion passed unanimously (7 – 0).

**C. APPROVAL OF FEB. 21, 2019 MINUTES**

**MOTION BY WEFER-CLINTON TO AMEND THE FEB. 21, 2019 MEETING MINUTES AS DESCRIBED BELOW:**

- Page 3, bullet 3 should be amended to clarify that although citizens may look for relevant qualifications for elected officials, none are required except for the

Prosecuting Attorney which requires a law degree and Washington State Bar Association membership.

- Page 3, bullet 9: Add the word “County” in between “other groups” so it will read “other County groups...”

The minutes were approved, with the recommended amendments, by unanimous consent.

## **D. PUBLIC COMMENT**

### **D.1 Article from Steve Oliver**

Mr. Rowson drew the commission’s attention to the Bellingham Herald article submitted by Treasurer Steve Oliver as well as information submitted about elected officials in Thurston County.

### **D.2 Eric Richey – Prosecuting Attorney**

Prosecuting Attorney Eric Richey submitted a written statement and also verbally explained to the Commission why he thinks the Prosecuting Attorney’s salary should be tied to (equal to) the Superior Court Judges’ salary which is set by the State of Washington. He stated the Prosecuting Attorney is responsible for everything that happens in the Prosecutor’s office. He said a lot of time and personal money is required to become an elected official. He commented that the Prosecuting Attorney is the balancing counterpart of the judicial branch. He said RCW 36.17.020 states Prosecutors jobs are the same in every county, so they should be treated the same. He informed the Commission that the State pays half his salary and the County pays the other half.

The commission asked for historical information, and Mr. Rowson said the Prosecuting Attorney’s salary was tied to the Superior Court Judge salary for a couple of Commission cycles. However, in 2017, the State planned to raise the salary 4% and the 2017 Commission chose to instead give the Prosecuting Attorney the same Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) as the rest of the elected officials, which was 1.9% for 2018 and 2% for 2019.

The main points of discussion about the Prosecuting Attorney’s salary were:

- We lose local control if we tie the salary to the Superior Court Judge salary which is set by the State.
- About one-third of Washington counties tie their Prosecuting Attorney’s salary to the Superior Court Judge salary, but two-thirds do not.
- The salaries for the other attorneys working in the Prosecutor’s office are determined by looking at the six comparable counties that Whatcom County uses for other employees.

**E. INFORMATION REQUESTS**

**E.1 Review of Information Requested**

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

**F. DISCUSSION**

**F.1 Salary Placement Draft**

The commission discussed the information. Main points of the discussion were:

- All County bargaining units use the same six counties as comparables. These are also used for the unrepresented staff.
- For the Sheriff’s group, the arbitrators determined that using the same six counties was appropriate.
- Clark County may not be comparable. Its population and annual expenditures are much higher. The arbitrators say they like to use three counties above and three below.
- The commission should use the same six counties for comparables as all other county employees.

**MOTION BY MORRIS, SECONDED BY BROADWAY TO USE THE SAME SIX COUNTIES USED BY WHATCOM COUNTY AS A GUIDELINE.**

The motion passed unanimously. (7 – 0)

Vice-Chairperson Wefer-Clinton provided the following data analysis comparing elected official salaries to the top step salary of their Deputy:

<u>Comparable Counties Average</u>		<u>Whatcom County</u>
Assessor	6.13% above (top step of Deputy)	1.08% below (top step of Deputy)
Auditor	5.84% above	1.08% below
Treasurer	?	1.08% below
Pros. Attorney	23.56% above	22.61% above
Sheriff	6.38% below	5.21% below

There was discussion about whether the Commission should make adjustments to keep elected officials’ salaries above their Deputies’ salaries. There was consensus that they should.

The Commission concluded the Consumer Price Index (CPI) data for recent years reflects what is happening today better than the ten year average.

## **Conclusions for Draft Salary Placements**

### **Assessor, Deputy, Treasurer**

Adjust to \$300 more than top step of their Deputy  
Verify this is more than the average of the six comparable counties  
COLA: Based on last five years CPI (which is 2.23%)

### **Prosecuting Attorney**

No adjustment  
COLA: 2.23%

### **County Executive**

No adjustment  
COLA: 2.23%

### **Sheriff**

Adjust to \$300 more than top step of Deputy, not including longevity pay  
COLA: 2.23%

### **County Council**

No adjustments  
COLA: 2.23%

## **G. NEXT STEPS**

- Mr. Rowson will prepare a draft salary placements document based on these conclusions. It will be sent to the Chair and Vice-Chair for review and then distributed to the Commission for consideration.
- Next meeting date is Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m. at WTA.

## **H. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 p.m. by Vice-Chairperson Wendy Wefer-Clinton.

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Minutes approved by the Commission in open public meeting on April 18, 2019.

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



**Jon Sitkin  
Chairperson**

**Attest:**



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