

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

MONDAY, April 5, 2021 -- 4:00PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86551674979?pwd=L2t5K3R4TDdzTFhYOCTEdVdiOGpHdz09>

ATTENDANCE

Members Present: Jill Bernstein, Lance Calloway, Dewey Desler, Jim Farmer, Tracie Gultit, Karen Peila, Beth Vonnegut, Matthew Williams

Members Absent: Lori Province, Philip Howell

Staff Present: Kara Turner, Turner HR Consulting and Commission Facilitator, Pat Elwell Commission Administrative Assistant

Guests: Whatcom County Prosecutor Eric Richey, Whatcom County Assessor Rebecca Xczar, Whatcom County Treasurer Steve Oliver

It was announced that Philip Howell submitted his resignation from the Commission.

A. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Dewey Desler called the meeting to order at 4:07PM.

B. **APPROVAL OF MARCH 15, 2021 MINUTES**

Commissioner Calloway moved and Commissioner Bernstein seconded to approve the minutes of the March 15, 2021 meeting. The Motion passed unanimously.

C. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Whatcom County Treasurer Steve Oliver

- commented on the additional information provided to the commission regarding current salaries of county department heads; and
- encouraged the commission to articulate their intentions around compensation for elected officials as a service for future salary commissions.

Whatcom County Assessor Rebecca Xczar

- referenced the additional information provided to the Commission regarding current salaries of county department heads and noted that in her experience, department heads generally never start at Step 1. As an example, the new Health Director was hired mid-range.

Whatcom County Prosecutor Eric Richey

- expressed his concern that the 2015 salary commissioner relied on faulty data and stressed the importance of the current commission to carefully review accurate current data;
- encouraged the commission to acknowledge the work the state salary commission accomplished around comparability;
- noted that the county prosecutor position runs the largest law firm in the county and has no sick leave nor safety net/access to unemployment benefits; and
- encouraged the commission's decisions reflect respect for the county prosecutor position as it is respected in other areas of the state.

The Chair thanked the elected officials for their intensity and participation in the process and noted that the commissioners have listened carefully to comments provided. Moving forward, he asked the commissioners to exclude any comments that might be considered confrontational and to base their decision-making on good data, with respect for all elected officials, and with recognition that the purpose of compensation is to attract and retain qualified individuals. Referencing Assessor Xczar's comments, Commissioner Bernstein asked a clarifying question.

The Chair requested members to review the agenda and requested each commission member to reflect on the data received, reminding them that for motions to be approved, six of the present eight members will need to agree.

D. ADDITIONAL DATA TO REVIEW

Commission Facilitator Kara Turner presented the following additional data for the commission's review and comment.

- SCD-7 Dept Head Salary Steps
- SCD-8 Dept Head Actual Salaries
- SCD-9 HR Email

In addition, the following materials submitted by Whatcom County Prosecutor Eric Richey, had been provided to the commission for review.

- EOS6 – Letter from former Whatcom County Prosecutor David S. McEachran
- EOS7 – Email from Kirsten Baron requested by Eric Richey

E. CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON SALARY SCENARIOS

A lengthy discussion followed with each commissioner providing their perspective around various issues raised including

- lack of "job security" for elected officials,
- attracting and retaining qualified individuals,
- wage compression,
- department head compensation vs elected official compensation,
- comparability,
- county government structure,
- fair compensation,
- fiscal future of county,
- whether to anchor elected official salaries to a particular position and provide a designated percentage to determine compensation.

The Chair reminded the commission that their task is to “provide a salary number” for each elected official’s compensation for 2022 and 2023.

The commission discussed whether to define a process in which to obtain a number, which could then be used by future commissions or to “get to a number.” It was noted that future commissions would have the freedom to define their own process and request their own data.

F. MOTIONS AS APPROPRIATE

Commissioner Calloway moved that the Whatcom County Prosecutor monthly salary match that of the of the Superior Court Judge monthly salary, effective January 1, 2022 for twelve months. Commissioner Peila seconded. Discussion followed. Calculated out, the 2022 annual salary would be \$199,675, which is a 2.6% increase. Effective January 1, 2023 the annual salary would be \$203,169, which is a 1.7% increase. Some commissioners felt a modest margin between the Superior Court Judge and Whatcom County Prosecutor was appropriate. Others were persuaded by the recommendation of the state legislator to match these positions.

The commission took a break of approximately five minutes.

The commission resumed. The Motion was re-stated that the prosecutor’s salary for 2022 be \$199,675 and for 2023 by \$203,169. There were no further comments.

The Motion passed six in favor and two opposed.

Commissioner Calloway moved that the Whatcom County Executive salary be 3% above that of the Whatcom County Prosecutor salary, effective January 1, 2022. Commissioner Vonnegut seconded. Calculated out, the 2022 salary would be \$205,665, a 5.7% increase and the 2023 salary would be \$209,264, a 1.7% increase. Discussion followed.

The Motion passed unanimously.

The commission-reviewed and discussed data received regarding the Whatcom County Sheriff’s salary, as well as his letter to the commissioners and discussed a method by which to determine salary. Commissioner Bernstein suggested the commission make clear their intention is not to tie the sheriff’s compensation to that of the prosecutor’s salary.

Commissioner Peila moved that effective January 1, 2022, the Whatcom County Sheriff receive a 2.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), bringing the annual salary to \$176,756. Commissioner Calloway seconded. Discussion followed. It was noted that the 2.5% COLA is a five -year average of the Consumer Price Index (CPI.)

The Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Desler moved that effective January 1, 2023, the Whatcom County Sheriff receive a 2% increase, bringing the annual salary to \$180,291. Commissioner Farmer seconded. Discussion followed. The 2% increase is a 10-year average for inflation. Some commissioners felt the data called for a different percentage increase.

The Motion failed, four in favor and four opposed.

Commissioner Calloway moved that effective January 1, 2023, the Whatcom County Sheriff receive a 2.5% COLA, bringing the annual salary to \$181,193. Commissioner Williams seconded.

The Motion passed seven in favor and one opposed.

Commissioner Calloway moved that effective January 1, 2022, the Whatcom County Assessor, Auditor and Treasurer positions receive a 5% increase above Step 13 of the Whatcom County Administrator Manager's salary (Step 13 of the Administrative Services Range 440). Commissioner Peila seconded. Discussion followed. This would result in a 2022 annual salary of \$139,998, a 10.9% increase and a 2023 annual salary of \$143,149. Justification for this adjustment was discussed.

Commissioner Calloway amended his motion to read that effective January 1, 2022, the Whatcom County Assessor, Auditor and Treasurer positions receive a 5.6% increase above Step 13 of the Whatcom County Administrator Manager's salary (Step 13 of the Administrative Services Range 440) and effective January 1, 2023 a 2.4% increase above Step 13 of the Whatcom County Administrator Manager's salary (Step 13 of the Administrative Services Range 440). Discussion followed. This would result in a 2022 annual salary of \$133,332 and a 2023 salary of 136,532.

The Motion passed unanimously.

G. NEXT STEPS

Board members were instructed to come prepared to discuss compensation for county council members as well as any other issues such as COLAs. The next meeting of the board will be Monday, April 19, 2021, beginning at 4:00PM.

H. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 6:15PM

Minutes approved by the Commission in open public meeting on April 19, 2021.

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

Dewey Desler

Dewey Desler Chair

Attest:

Patricia F. Elwell

Commission Administrative Assistant