



**MINUTES of the Snohomish County Citizens'
Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials
April 11, 2012**

The April 11 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

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 March 28 meeting were distributed to members. **Commissioner Peterson moved adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Heathman seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

Chair Gemar asked if there were any members of the public in attendance who would like to offer their comments to the Commission.

Kirke Sievers, County Treasurer, addressed the Commission. Mr. Sievers outlined the many duties of the County Treasurer's Office (detailed handout included in packet). He noted that the Treasurer's Office is the central point for the collection of taxes and distribution to many local entities and described the high volume of customer service calls. He noted that he personally responds to many calls on a daily basis during the Office's busiest times of the year and lauded his staff for their hard work and professionalism.

Commissioner Harbert noted that in many offices the deputy has a higher salary than the elected official and asked if that was also the case in the Treasurer's Office. Mr. Sievers said that it was. Chair Gemar asked about retirement benefits and Mr. Sievers explained that the County participates in the state-managed public employees retirement system. Additional discussion ensued about office workload and the Treasurer's fiduciary responsibility on behalf of the County.



Commissioner Gemar asked about Mr. Sievers' history of public service in Snohomish County Government. Mr. Sievers described that he first ran for Treasurer in 1974, and later served on the Council for 12 years before returning to the Treasurer's Office. He also pointed out to the Commission that the salary history showed that the Treasurer and other elected officials previously had higher salaries than the Council, but that had changed in the past decade. Commissioner Beal asked him whether being Treasurer or on the Council was more difficult. Mr. Sievers stated that the duties were very different. Discussion wrapped-up and Chair Gemar thanked Mr. Sievers for his testimony.

Chair Gemar asked if there were any members of the public who wished to address the Commission. Ms. Colleen Myers addressed the Commission. Ms. Myers identified herself as a County employee, but noted that she would be addressing the Commission as a citizen of Snohomish County not as an employee of the County. Ms. Myers stated that the Commission needed to compare the salaries of elected officials to what average people are earning in Snohomish County. She stated that there is not a risk of people not running for office due to salary level, particularly in light of the current level of unemployment. She noted that any increase in salaries would have to come by cutting some other area of service or cost. She said that there are fewer taxpayers today due to the economic slowdown and that the Commission should not expect a quick economic recovery. She said that any raises would be premature. She also said the Commission should not consider a comparison to King County elected officials because of the different sizes of the counties and the responsibilities of the offices.

Chair Gemar thanked Ms. Myers for her testimony and asked if there were any other community members who would like to address the Commission. Seeing none, she moved the Commission to the salary discussion portion of the agenda.

Brian Parry provided a handout detailing the salary ranges for various elected office and other department deputies as requested at the April 11 meeting. Commissioner Morrow and Chair Gemar each noted that the lower salary could be a disincentive to seek the elected position. Commissioner Morrow stated that the disparity in salaries raised issues of fundamental fairness. Commissioner Nguyen noted that it is fairly common in public entities that professionals within offices make more than the head of the office or department. He noted that some of the deputy positions require specialized skill sets while the director may only be required to have management experience. He also noted that salaries were lower than those in Pierce County, which is similar sized, and that the lack of cost of living adjustments in recent years was a concern. Commissioner Morrow noted that when he served on the Commission two years ago things were different, and that at that time the elected officials came before the Commission and specifically asked that they not be given any salary increases.

Commissioner Heathman stated that he didn't think the economy had gotten any better. He stated that he had wanted to decrease salaries when he last served on the Commission and that he felt some of the salaries still looked too high.



Commissioner Harbert said that if the County wanted a high-quality job done, it would need to compensate its elected officials accordingly. He noted that the Treasurer is responsible for managing an investment portfolio of more than a billion dollars as an example of the high level of responsibility entrusted with elected officials.

Commissioner Beal noted that County Auditor Carolyn Weikel was in attendance and asked her opinion about the comparison between her salary and those who work for her. Mrs. Weikel noted that she has the ability when hiring someone to decide what level within the salary range for their position they earn. She also discussed the different responsibilities and the efforts she made during the recession to maintain employee costs.

Commissioner Harbert stated he would like to look at salaries individually rather than across the board. He also stated that the Commission should consider what the represented employees had negotiated in comparison what was granted to elected officials.

Commissioner Heathman stated that he felt it was the wrong time to consider any increases. He noted that he had received a letter of thanks after speaking against any increases as a Commissioner in 2010 and offered to bring the letter to the next Commission meeting. He stated that any increase would send the wrong message and that the current salaries would not deter people from pursuing elected positions.

Commissioner Nguyen stated that it was important for the Commission not to base its decisions on public perception or the media. Rather, the Commission should look at the unique sets of skills needed for each office and set salaries accordingly. Chair Gemar stated that it was also important for the Commission to focus on the offices, not on specific performance of those holding any office. Discussion continued about the philosophy the Commission should consider when setting salaries.

Commissioner Harbert noted that elected officials in Pierce County, which is similar in population, are compensated significantly more for many of the positions. Commissioner Morrow stated that he found the comparisons helpful, but that he was not sure now was the right time to make any major changes or corrections. He also noted that the represented employees would be getting cost of living adjustments closer to one or one-and-a-half percent.

Commissioner Beal noted his surprise that there were not more members of the public in attendance to voice their opinions. Commissioner Heathman asked what notice had been provided. Mr. Parry explained that ads had been placed in the Everett Herald and several local weekly papers, and press releases were sent resulting in multiple news media outlets picking up the story. Commissioner Heathman continued to express concerns about public perception of any pay increase.



Commissioner Williams stated that he had initially started out on the Commission expecting to want to cut salaries. He said that hearing the many responsibilities of the elected officials moved him to believe that perhaps they were under-compensated. He said he did not believe salaries could be brought up to the level of Pierce County, but that some increase may be warranted.

Chair Gemar asked if any Commissioners had any proposals that they would like to bring forward for consideration. **Commissioner Williams moved that all of the elected officials under the purview of the Commission receive an increase of 2.25% in 2013 and another 2.25% increase in 2014. Commissioner Harbert seconded the motion for discussion purposes.**

Discussion of the motion followed. Chair Gemar stated that she felt 2.25% was too high considering the state of the economy but that she would support a smaller increase. Discussion continued as to whether an increase should be across-the-board or exclude some elected officials with members offering differing viewpoints. **A vote was called for and the motion failed unanimously.**

Chair Gemar noted the time was 8:15 PM and proposed the discussion be continued at the next meeting on April 25. Hearing no opposition, the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.