

Meeting Minutes for
Cowlitz County Commissioners Salary Commission Meeting Held on April 28, 2020

Salary Commission Members Present: Alan Engstrom, Rich Gushman, Roy Maier at Cowlitz County Admin. Building General Meeting Room. Robbin Fahn, Adena Grigsby, Marlene Jones, Leah McElyea, Chris Smith & Caren Teigen via phone.

Salary Commission Members Absent: None

General Public: Shawn Nyman via phone.

Cowlitz County Staff Present: Sabrina Fraidenburg, Human Resources Deputy Director, Cowlitz County

Chairman Alan called the meeting to order at 4:36 pm and asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the April 21st meeting. Chris Smith moved to approve, Roy Maier seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Engstrom summarized the April 21st minute and stated that he had had a discussion since that meeting with the County Prosecutor to confirm that if the Salary Commission doesn't pass a motion to increase, decrease or keep County Commissioner salaries for 2021 the same as 2020, the 2021 salaries will remain the same as the 2020 by default. He also stated that the Salary Commission is not setting salaries for specific people but for the commission positions.

Roy Maier then spoke and indicated that he had looked at the number of committees each commissioner is on. Commissioner Weber is on 18 committees, Commissioner Gardner is on 12 and Commissioner Mortensen is on 9. Commissioner Weber shared with Roy that the other 2 commissioners typically have more interaction directly with constituents which is one of the reasons he's on more committees than they are.

Roy then shared the IDP increase of 1.6% is the wage increase that public school employees will receive in 2021. The average increase in Seattle for 2021 is 2.14%. Roy also indicated that if Commissioner Weber was still teaching, he would make a little over \$91,000 in 2021.

Caren Teigen said she believes a wage increase for the commissioners would look bad in light of budget issues. She indicated the state legislature had agreed to not increase their salaries and she would like to see the commissioners do the same.

Chairman Engstrom stated that we shouldn't ask someone to decrease their salary become someone chose to do that. He then indicated that the commissioner's salaries are paid out of the County's general fund which is funded from property taxes and sales tax revenue. He indicated there are indications that sales tax revenue could decline by 25-35% due to reduced economic activity and property tax payments could be 5-15% lower due to people deferring payment of this due to COVID-19. Combined this could represent a drop in County general fund revenue of \$2.8-5.5 million in 2020. He also indicated that a small increase in the commissioner salaries wouldn't break the budget. He then discussed not increasing the commissioner salaries to give the commissioners flexibility in handling the budget and in having some leverage/credibility in potentially limiting other County wages. He then asked why other Salary Commission members would advocate for an increase in the commissioner's salary for 2021.

Roy then shared that the County corrections officers contract includes a 2.5% per year wage increase for the next 4 years and noted that some County positions are tied to the salaries of the Superior Court judges which are receiving significantly more than 2.5% increases for 2021. He said an increase for the commissioners of 1.5% would result in an increase of less than \$1,800 per year per commissioner.

Robbin Fahn asked what the commissioners make. Rich Gushman indicated their current wage is \$85,452 their wage is, and a 1.5% increase would be \$1,282 per year per commissioner.

Chairman Engstrom asked for the median income for all FTE County employees. Sabrina indicated median income for all FTE County employees for 2021 is \$55,536/year. Chairman Engstrom indicated the County could spend more than it has if revenue decreases end up being close to projections.

Chris Smith indicated he disagreed with Chairman Engstrom's proposition and that he believes property tax revenue will remain pretty static. He also indicated that from a labor management perspective he thinks it's important for the Salary Commission to work on maintaining both internal and external equity with other comparable counties and other labor groups within the County.

Chairman Engstrom clarified that property tax collections will likely result in a 5% revenue drop in 2021.

Shawn Nyman as a member of the public and a former labor council president who is advocating for community members asked if she could speak. Chairman Engstrom allowed her to do so. She indicated that contract negotiations with some County employee groups have been stopped which she believes is inappropriate. She also indicated it's bad timing to increase the commissioner's wages for a lot of reasons given the current situation and asked the Salary Commission to look at increasing the commissioners salary next year.

Adena Grigsby indicated that she had spoken with several of her neighbors about the commissioner's salary and that 100% of the people she had talked with were against a salary increase for the commissioners.

Robbin Fahn indicated she was concerned about property taxes, people being at home, many have lost jobs and are not sure they'll get their jobs back and that property tax revenue could easily decrease by more than 5%.

It was noted that many people currently are making more from unemployment benefits with the federal benefit added to the state benefit than they were on their jobs.

Rich Gushman then summarized the pros and cons of increasing the commissioner's salaries as he sees it and said that it would look good politically if the commissioners turned down an increase if the Salary Commission approves one.

Roy Maier then made a motion to increase the commissioner's salaries for 2021 by 1.5% above the current 2020 salaries.

Chris Smith seconded the motion.

No further discussion on the motion occurred and the vote was called for.

A vote was held on the motion and it passed 7-2. Those voting in favor were: Chairman Engstrom, Robbin Fahn, Rich Gushman, Marlene Jones, Roy Maier, Leah McElyea, and Chris Smith. Those voting against were: Adena Grigsby and Caren Teigen.

Roy Maier then discussed Cowlitz County Resolution 08-019 that created the Salary Commission (copy attached). This resolution includes operating rules for the Salary Commission including the requirement that a change in the commissioners' salaries shall be by an affirmative vote of not less than six (6) members of the ten (10) member Salary Commission.

Roy made a motion that the Salary Commission request the County Commissioners modify Cowlitz County Resolution 08-019 to change the requirement that commissioner salaries can only be changed by the Salary Commission with six affirmative votes of the 10 member Salary Commission because Robert's Rules of Order allow for motions to pass with a majority of members voting affirmatively when a quorum is present at a meeting. His motion would request the County Commissioners to change the first paragraph and to add a new paragraph after the first paragraph of Resolution 08-019, Section 5: Rules And Regulation And Assistance to read as follows (proposed changed/new language in bold type):

The Commission shall be subject to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, RCW Chapter 42.30. The commission shall keep minutes of all meetings and shall further adopt rules and regulations for the transaction of business. The setting of salaries shall be by an affirmative vote of not less than six (6) members when the BOCC Salary Commission is fully staffed with ten (10) members present.

Otherwise, when a quorum is present at any meeting called to set salaries for the Cowlitz County Commissioners the motion to set Commissioner's salaries will pass with a majority affirmative vote of the members in attendance as provided in Robert's Rules of Order.

Leah McElyea seconded the motion.

Rich Gushman indicated he was concerned about a 4-2 or 4-3 vote passing a change in commissioner salaries and thought that a minimum of 5 affirmative votes should be required to change the commissioner salaries.

Roy Maier indicated he was open to a friendly amendment to motion. Rich Gushman then asked for the motion that had been made and seconded to be modified to have the proposed language to be added to Resolution 08-019 be as follows:

The Commission shall be subject to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, RCW Chapter 42.30. The commission shall keep minutes of all meetings and shall further adopt rules and regulations for the transaction of business. The setting of salaries shall be by an affirmative vote of not less than six (6) members when the BOCC Salary Commission is fully staffed with ten (10) members present.

Otherwise, when a quorum is present at any meeting called to set salaries for the Cowlitz County Commissioners the motion to set Commissioner's salaries will pass with an affirmative vote of not less than five (5) of the members in attendance as provided in Robert's Rules of Order.

Roy Maier made a motion to request the County Commissioners modify Cowlitz County Resolution 08-019 as stated above.

Leah McElyea seconded.

No further discussion occurred, and the vote was called for.

The motion passed by a vote of 7-2. Those voting in favor were Robbin Fahn, Rich Gushman, Marlene Jones, Roy Maier, Leah McElyea, Chris Smith and Caren Teigen. Those voting against were: Chairman Engstrom and Adena Grigsby.

Chairman Engstrom indicated he would send the request for the County Commissioners to modify Cowlitz County Resolution 08-019 as stated above to the County Commissioners.

Chairman Engstrom will also prepare and submit a letter to the Cowlitz County Auditor indicating the Salary Commission has approved a 1.5% increase to the Cowlitz County Commissioner salaries for 2021. This letter is to be submitted to the County Auditor by May 15, 2020.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:48 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by



Richard A. Gushman, Secretary
2020 Cowlitz County Salary Commission