

# WHATCOM COUNTY COMMISSION ON SALARIES FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

## MINUTES

Thursday, February 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, Jon Sitkin, Wayne Tomlinson, Wendy Wefer-Clinton

Members Absent: Lisa Karlberg, 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: Steve Oliver (Whatcom County Treasurer), Debbie Adelstein, (Whatcom County Auditor)

### A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jon Sitkin at 4:04 p.m.

### B. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

### 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

**Steve Oliver, Whatcom County Treasurer:** Mr. Oliver referenced the written comment he provided. He stated that he serves as the public Treasurer for the County and about 70 other public entities in the County including school districts,

fire departments, water districts, cemetery districts, WTA, etc. He said his department provides those entities with banking services, investment services, and collects taxes on their behalf. His department also forecloses on property for delinquent taxes and audits revenue streams to ensure appropriate collection. The Treasurer's department receives the State funding for education and distributes it to the districts. He keeps extra funds invested to earn as much investment income for the districts as possible. The department produces documentation for the State Auditor for all districts as they are audited throughout the year.

**Debbie Adelstein, Whatcom County Auditor:** Ms. Adelstein said the Auditor's office handles elections, recording, land documents, motor vehicle licensing including boats and motor homes, etc. She asked that commission members review the Annual Report she provided. She said her main concern is that elected officials generally function as a department head, but their salaries are not usually compared to the most similar department heads and they are often paid significantly less.

### **C.3 Written Comment**

Andy Rowson, Commission Facilitator, reviewed written comments received from other elected officials. Those comments are included in the meeting packet.

## **D. APPROVAL OF JAN. 17, 2019 MEETING MINUTES**

MOTION BY WEFER-CLINTON, SECONDED BY IVERSON TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 17, 2019 MEETING.

The motion passed unanimously (8 – 0).

## **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. Main points of the discussion were:

- On the Association of Washington Counties (AWC) spreadsheet, the highlighted four counties above and below Whatcom County in each category may not reflect similar locations, industries, economic situations, and issues dealt with in Whatcom County.

- Looking at the counties that Whatcom County staff uses for comparables might be helpful. (The list is on page 105 of the packet and includes: Benton, Cowlitz, Kitsap, Skagit, Thurston, and Yakima).
- Chairman Sitkin considers these counties as comparable: Thurston, Kitsap, Clark, Yakima
- Most elected officials have no education or certification requirements like other jobs do, except the Prosecuting Attorney which requires a law degree and Washington State Bar Association membership, but citizens usually look for relevant qualifications when voting.
- Elected officials have a different accountability process (recall election vs. being able to be fired)
- Chief Deputies are appointed by the elected official. Why would they want to run for the office if it pays less than they make as the Chief Deputy?
- Commission is considering salaries for the positions, not the individuals currently in the positions.
- There aren't many comparable counties with a County Executive. Some correlation was made in the past with the Prosecuting Attorney.
- Commission members should educate themselves, get some feedback from the private sector, and check the pulse of the people.
- Exact numbers are required in the commission's final work product, not a percentage of what some other County group may get in the future.

**There was consensus to request and consider the following information:**

- Re-sorted data based on both comparable counties lists above.
- Do other counties' elected officials get a deferred compensation match? (Whatcom County gets a maximum of 2% of salary.)
- Compare unrepresented staff Cost of Living Allowances (COLA's) to COLA's for elected officials beginning with 2014 salaries. (For the Sheriff, it will need to be the Sheriff's department unrepresented staff, not the general unrepresented staff.)
- Cost of living data (housing, etc.) for comparable counties if a source can be found providing data that is not too deep or time consuming.
- Elected officials salaries compared to top deputy at comparable counties (compression issues)

**Philosophical Considerations:**

1. Should elected officials make more, less, or the same as their Chief Deputy?
2. County comparisons – use for validation (differences in other counties).
3. Responsibility / Accountability
4. Presume Good
5. Attract Talent

**Concern / Caveat:**

- Cost of living not equal to CPI
- Use of unrepresented numbers for compatible offices (need hard numbers)

**G. NEXT STEPS**

- Create a document of agreed upon philosophy (based on whiteboard work)
- Create a worksheet for commission members showing previous work product for each position with blanks to fill in.
- Next meeting is Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 p.m. at the Whatcom Transportation Authority, 4011 Bakerview Spur, Bellingham.

**H. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:02 p.m. by Chairman Jon Sitkin.

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Minutes approved by the Commission in open public meeting on 3-21-19.  
Date

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

  
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**Wendy Wefer-Clinton**  
**Vice-Chairperson**

**Attest:**

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