

**Erie County Salary Review Commission
Meeting #1 Minutes
August 12, 2014; 8:30am**

Meeting was held on August 12, 2014 at 8:30am in room 1404 (Department of Public Works Conference Room) of the Rath County Office Building at 95 Franklin Street.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Robert Glaser, chairman, Owen Patrick Brady, Laurie Buonanno, James Wagner, William Ransom, Jr., Jennifer Persico, Dennis Jewell, James Domagalski, and Robert Graber.

SUPPORT STAFF

Mark Cornell, Erie County Executive's Office and Julie Becht, Freed Maxick CPAs.

AGENDA

New Business

- Introduction of Commission Members
- Goals for the Commission
- Review and Discussion of Distributed Materials
- Points for Follow-up
- Other Matters
- Date for Next Meeting

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Glaser started the meeting by introducing himself and asked each commission member to introduce themselves and give some background.

Glaser gave a brief overview of the Erie County Charter language creating the commission noting that it is supposed to meet every even numbered year, but yet has not met since 2004. Next he gave a rough timeline of the commission process as it relates to the Erie County Budget, asking that their business be finished with a report submitted to the county executive and legislature by September 30, 2014. Also

noted the specific charge of the commission to determine the appropriateness of the current salaries for the independently elected officials other than the district attorney (county executive, clerk, comptroller, sheriff, and legislature). And, if said salaries are not appropriate to make recommendations as to what would be appropriate. Additionally, Glaser noted that there are several other areas in which they could make recommendations pertaining to these elected officials that are open for discussion by the group. However, the commission is only able to make recommendations, which the legislature does not have to implement.

Cornell then gave a synopsis of the Fact Sheet and Appendices that was passed out to each member which included information regarding various job comparisons both within Erie County government and across levels of government and the state.

There was some discussion about some information contained in the Fact Sheet package on a preliminary level. Members noted their surprise that there were 117 county employees making more than the County Executive. The incredible amount of overtime adding to total earnings was questioned. Cornell tried to explain how it is almost entirely within the Sheriff's Office and much of it is mandated by the DOJ or COC. Domagalski noted that if you take away overtime and other additions, only a handful of 'lawyers and doctors,' make more. In all there are a total of 25 employees who have a base salary higher.

There was also some discussion on how this all relates to the entire county budget and if any raises could be assured to be 'zeroed' out. Glaser noted that in relation to a \$1.3 billion budget the possible dollar amount of raises, if any, or so would be just a drop in the bucket and not really a material figure.

Cornell wrapped up his explanation of the Fact Sheet in noting that while all of the figures used are 'FACTS' what is a matter of opinion still is what of these facts are material to the discussions, which would be for the commission members to decide. Should any data be seen as irrelevant it most certainly could be amended as this is the beginning draft of some of the justification they might include in their final report.

There was a general dialogue around what the commission's process would be and the politics of giving raises or salary reductions was noted as the 'elephant in the room.' Consensus among the group was that they should try to stay as far above the fray of politics as possible and to do so would require a strong paper trail with equally strong research and analysis done regarding any recommendations made to bolster the legitimacy of the commission's actions. Additionally, they agreed that their mentality was less about whether the current officeholder 'deserved' a raise but whether the office in general compensated appropriately according and therefore could attract qualified candidates for it going forward.

At which point the current job descriptions for each office came under scrutiny as being woefully inadequate and needing of an update. Another point related to this was whether or not the legislature was a full-time or part-time body. However, the working assumption is that it is a part time body.

The commission decided the best way to establish a reasonable job description would be to review duties and responsibilities of the offices and interview current officeholders, in addition to reviewing salary information as developed for our Fact Sheet, and reviewing relevant salaries of counties and cities in New York State and WNY, and the private sector. Lastly, they'll review the County collective bargaining units and have discussions with the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority. Commission members were divided into smaller 'committees' to schedule meetings with officeholders to be completed before the next meeting.

COUNTY EXECUTIVE - James Wagner and Laurie Buonanno
CLERK - Robert Glaser and William Ransom, Jr.

COMPTROLLER - Dennis Jewell and Owen Patrick Brady

SHERIFF - Jennifer Persico, and Robert Graber

LEGISLATURE - James Domagalski, Jennifer Persico, James Wagner and Robert Graber

Additionally, the suggestion was made to potentially interview previous officeholders who have 'nothing to gain' from such a process in order to supplement information gathered in subsequent interviews.

Glaser believed the 2004 commission report would serve as a good template for their final product as far as structure of the report.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

In addition to the interviews scheduled, other information has been requested and will be made available before the next meeting. Specific items to be gathered include:

- Information submitted to NYS Comptroller from Legislators regarding their time and attendance for pension purposes;
- Breakdown of MC/Civil Servant for 117 employees making more than CE
- Research on what processes other like governments take when considering salaries for elected officials;
- Federal and private sector comparisons to elected offices;
- Information for NY Counties of Population, Median Income and real estate value for help in comparison;
- Whether commission members need to take an 'oath of office;' and
- If any conflict exists for commission members who may do business with the county.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Erie County Salary Review Commission will be September 2nd at 8:30am in Room 1404 (Department of Public Works Conference Room), Rath Building 95 Franklin Street. During the interim, members will work on assignments and either report orally or utilize email to update the group.

ADJOURNMENT