

**Erie County Salary Review Commission
Meeting #3 Minutes
September 9, 2014; 8:30am**

Meeting was held on September, 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

OTHER ATTENDEES

No members of the public were in attendance. However, reporter Jeff Preval from WGRZ arrived near the end of the meeting.

AGENDA

Old Business

- Approval of Minutes from previous meetings
- Feedback Reports

New Business

- Draft Report and Salary Thoughts
- Other Matters

OLD BUSINESS

Minutes from the previous two meetings were approved by a unanimous vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Bob Glaser began by indicating feedback he had received in talking with a few community leaders. Specifically, those leaders believed the information that this committee has been presented was compelling evidence for raises, especially noting that no elected official has had one in 18 years. They noted that organizationally, salaries need to be at a rate that will attract candidates who are independently

wealthy as well as those who otherwise could not afford to pursue public office without a commensurate salary.

New data was handed out. First was a current view of what each member independently has come up with as far as fair salaries for each position. Several members updated their numbers and gave their rationales. Thus far all members have made preliminary recommendations.

Next was a comparison of other increases that have occurred since elected officials last received a raise in 1996. Specifically, compared was the rate of inflation via Consumer Price Index, the compounding of salary increases for employees (CSEA) and the variation in the total county budget.

Additionally, Laurie Buonanno discussed some statistical analysis that she prepared which lead her to specific salary conclusions. She spent some time discussing her methodology which based her recommendations on median income/housing rates for comparable counties and performing regression analysis. She had confidence in the data for all positions except for Comptroller because of the limited sample size of only 6 elected positions across the state. A brief discussion ensued on whether or not a 'treasurer' was a comparable position, both in terms of job function and in being an elected office.

Jim Domagalski questioned that if the group was trending towards recommending raises do they want to include other recommendations to ensure that office holders do not take second positions as was noted by the Buffalo News in regards to the Sheriff. And if so, what are the parameters for what is ok for outside employment and what is not. Additionally, he felt there was an inherent tension between a rate of pay too low to recruit qualified candidates and one that he saw as too high to inadvertently recruit those looking for a career position. Jim also broached the topic term limits.

Bob Glaser indicated that such additional recommendations were within the scope of the commission and appropriate to make. He also indicated they may want to consider recommending more clarity in the official description of each job which hasn't been updated in decades.

Discussed next was the idea of lowering legislature salaries in order to make any increases to the other elected officials' budget neutral. A discussion ensued around whether or not to lower legislative salaries as well as stipends. Bill Ransom saw the stipends as perks for a part time body and only supports them for a full time body.

Laurie Buonanno offered the suggestion that a study be done to better make comparisons among legislatures, which she felt was currently lacking, and potentially refrain from making any decision until their next report in 2 years. She advocated for a 'mixed method' approach which uses quantitative data as well as qualitative interviewing processes to make determinations. She felt just as important as raw salary information, was size of legislatures, district population, amount of meetings, ect to address. Bob Graber agreed that more should be considered before reducing legislature salaries.

Jim Domagalski asked if they could recommend that raises not be made until the beginning of the next term for each office. Bob Glaser indicated that such a recommendation was within the scope of their considerations and a discussion ensued. Jen Persico endorsed the idea of holding any raises until following the next election for each position to try to take personal gain out of the equation. Laurie Buonanno noted that while she had no problem with current officeholders benefiting from raises, she was very hesitant to impose salary reductions on them. Her preference would be to make those take effect after an election. Bob Glaser believed that the legislature was more likely to act on recommendations if they aren't in a position to vote on raises for themselves.

Jim Domagalski believed that recommendations were ‘dead on arrival’ at the legislature and questioned what proposal they could make that might give them enough cover to approve. Bob Glaser indicated that he felt that was not a consideration of this committee. Their charge is to develop what the ‘people’ believe is fair pay for the positions in question and politics should be left to the politicians at the legislature; to develop a proposal that is fair, not one that will pass.

Dennis Jewell offered the suggestion to make raises more palatable they be spread over several years as opposed to one large increase. Glaser indicated that such a recommendation was within their scope.

Laurie Buonanno requested that a decision rubric be decided upon, while Glaser though their decision would be more a combination of various rubrics like comparisons to union wages, other counties, deputy pay ect and that information leading to their decision based on one rubric or another could be added in the form of appendices. Ie, if wages were increased to equal raises for union employees they would be x, but we ultimately decided on a lower rate at y.

Jim Domagalski expressed his frustration at the Buffalo News Editorial Board’s decision to inject their opinion into the process and muddy the waters. He cited the examples of consistently referencing their opinion and coming up with data to rebuff it. Bob Glaser indicated they have agreed to meet with the committee when their recommendations come out to learn more about their method before writing an opinion. Additionally, it was suggested to meet with business first.

Bob Graber indicated that one rubric they had not discussed in a while was trying to exceed the salary of higher paid deputies. Laurie Buonanno indicated that deputy pay was immaterial to her, which elicited agreement by several other members. She felt that the elected officials knew what the salary was for a position before they ran for office and once being elected it was their duty to find the best staff possible. Also noted that this was a question that came up frequently in the minutes of other salary review commissions and they chose to ignore it because it was a regular occurrence that deputies end up making more than the elected officials. Since they were in no position to reduce deputy pay, she wasn’t going to include their pay in any of her considerations.

Discussion returned to Laurie Buonanno’s analysis and a greater explanation of her assumptions. All members agreed that they believed her work was fair, except with regard to the comptroller because of the above noted issues.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

Certain information was requested in advance of next meeting:

- Mark Cornell will attempt to gather information on whether or not the position of “treasurer” is equivalent to “comptroller” in both scope of duties and in being an elective office.

NEXT MEETING

The next meetings of the Erie County Salary Review Commission will be September 16th and 23rd in room 1404 of the Department of Public Works.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 am.