



# COUNTY OF ERIE CITIZENS SALARY REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

**September 11, 2018, 11:30 a.m. Meeting**

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Present: Chair Laurie Buonanno, Donald Allen, Owen Patrick Brady, Michael Lukasik, Jerry Newman, Louis Panzica, Tiffany Perry, William Ransom, and Christopher Stone.

Absent: None.

Support Staff: Scott Bylewski and Mark Cornell, both from Erie County Division of Budget and Management.

Non-Members Present: Brian Poliner.

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Meeting Notes: As all Commission members were in attendance, a quorum was present and meeting called to order by Chair Buonanno at 11:30 a.m.

Motion made by C. Stone, seconded by D. Allen to approve the minutes of August 30, 2018; motion carried unanimously.

Commission members, including Louis Panzica for his first meeting, Staff, and guest in attendance introduced themselves.

Chair Buonanno then entertained discussion on developing questions to ask Legislators. C. Stone prepared a list of questions for the Commission to review.

D. Allen and J. Newman mentioned the Part-time or Full-time question concerning Legislator duties and it was felt that the Commission could not impact the actual nature of full time versus part time, but could obtain the individual legislator's anonymous feelings regarding the work of the position and not the work of certain legislators. In other words, the Commission members expressed an interest in objectively looking at each position.

L. Panzica questioned what has changed since 2014, because the 2014 Recommendations seemed well thought out and the Legislature unanimously rejected them. Additionally, in his review of the 2014 Commission materials and 2018 updates that he was particularly struck by the internal inequities (subordinates with higher salaries) in compensation for elected officials (more so than the external inequities – i.e., comparable positions in other jurisdictions with higher pay). Specifically, he pointed out that the Deputy Comptroller – Audit's salary is approximately 40 percent higher than the elected Comptroller, and that similar disparity exists with the other office holders.

O. Brady indicated that the economic environment has changed positively for the County and those in the private sector doing similar work to the County Executive are compensated much greater.

J. Newman stated that references to “officials” in the questions be changed to “position” to again focus on the position objectively and not individuals.

W. Ransom discussed and presented the idea of increasing salaries similarly to labor contracts where smaller yearly percentage raises are given that compound rather than a much larger raise in a single year. Specifically, he offered an example of having 4 percent annual increases occur over a 4-year period of time rather than a one-year increase of approximately 16 percent.

J. Newman indicated that in his experience, underpaid positions are labeled as “Red Circle” positions and increases to give those positions greater pay occur over a period of time to bring them in line with other comparable positions.

Discussion then occurred detailing the need for updated research numbers and providing more narrative around and explanation of recommendations in their yet-to-be-written 2018 report than that provided in 2014.

Chair Buonanno stated that the Commission should ask the Legislators what data they would like to see to help Legislators make a decision on their upcoming recommendations, or to address concerns they may have had with regard to the 2014 Commission recommendations. In other words, what else should the Commission study.

Additionally, it was felt that interviews/discussions with Legislators should be done individually to ensure Legislators feel that they can speak freely and in confidence. It was noted that a Legislator has already gone on record to reject the possibility of pay increases even before the Commission has done its work and that in a group setting one Legislator may dominate discussion in the assumption that they speak for their colleagues.

It was also noted that in 2014, some elected officials refused to even meet with Commission members during their fact-finding efforts and that they hoped that this would not be the case this time.

J. Newman would like the Commission to obtain County populations and budget sizes for comparable Counties.

C. Stone will work in conjunction with Chair Buonanno to develop the questions to ask the Legislators. The questions would be provided to the Legislators in advance, and hopefully the interview-meetings would be conducted on September 20, 2018. The following Commission members indicated they would be available to meet with Legislators: Chair Buonanno, D. Allen, M. Lukasik, and C. Stone. Further, O. Brady, T. Perry, and W. Ransom may be available to also meet with the Legislators.

For other variables to consider in evaluating compensation data across New York State Counties, J. Newman indicated that he would like to see additional data points he believed relevant to their work. Specifically, he was interested in obtaining population and budget sizes for comparable counties and to ascertain whether those counties have or have not increased the salaries of elected positions since 1996 (when Erie County elected officials last received a pay raise). Further, what has occurred overall since 1996. C. Stone provide the Commission a prepared list of some cost/inflation related items for 1996 such as the

minimum wage, gasoline prices, and how the cost of living via Consumer Price Index would increase a 1996 salary in 2018 dollars.

L. Panzica mentioned including comparable tables to set forth internal equity and compare junior positions with elected positions in their respective departments.

W. Ransom and T. Perry discussed the 4 percent increases discussed as an alternative earlier in the meeting.

L. Panzica questioned what the Commission's role is, or what strategy should be taken. Specifically, whether their charge is to recommend salaries that are "fair" or to recommend salaries that they believe may have a possibility of being adopted by the Legislature – understanding that these are not necessarily the same thing – and the best path to get there. This led to a significant amount of discussion.

Chair Buonanno described the theory of "New Public Service" where citizen commissions need more decision making and teeth because all too often the good work done by such commissions is done in vain with recommendations being rejected outright by those charged with implementation.

Commission Staff will look at comparable counties and provide budget and population information.

L. Panzica and Chair Buonanno discussed the possibility of appearing before the Buffalo News Editorial Board or otherwise taking the case for their upcoming recommendations directly to the public at large because the public discussion surrounding the 2014 Commission's work was clouded by misinformation. Specifically, Chair Buonanno questioned the widely reported results of a Legislature Minority online opinion poll considering the unscientific manner in which it was conducted. She noted that it purported that "85 percent was against giving pay raises," and questioned who constituted this 85 percent and whether anyone could reasonably take the purported sample as being representative of Erie County residents at large.

Chair Buonanno said that the only public input she was specifically aware of was that given at the Legislature's public hearing on the recommendations and that of the four members of the public that came to give comment, three were in favor of the pay raises.

O. Brady quipped that this must mean 75 percent of County residents were actually in favor of the raises, instead of 85% percent against from the poll. Finally, in discussing the Commission timeline, Chair Buonanno proposed that the Commission meet on each Tuesday up to and including October 9, 2018, to complete the Commission's charge. Additionally, Commission members offered to work independently on various aspects of analysis that were of particular interest to them and report back with their findings at the next meeting.

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by T. Perry, seconded by D. Allen; carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:40 p.m.

Next Meeting: September 18, 2018, at 11:30 a.m.