



# COUNTY OF ERIE CITIZENS SALARY REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

**Tuesday, January 9, 2024 Meeting #2**

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Present: Chair Lauri Buonanno, Alex Burgos, Gary Dickson, Frederick Floss, Mark Glasgow, David Pietrowski, Gregory Rabb, William Ransom, Christopher Stone.

Absent: None

Support Staff: Mark Cornell, Lindsay McKay and Natalie Nitsche.

Non-Members Present:

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Meeting Notes: A quorum was present and meeting called to order by Chair Buonanno at 2:00pm.

Chair Buonanno welcomed the newest members of the Commission, Gary Dickson and Bill Ransom. Each member of the Commission introduced themselves.

Next, Chair Buonanno discussed focusing on the Legislators who have not had a raise since 1996 and a deeper dive being needed to see what their day to day looks like, what their constituents expect, and whether or not they are full time or part time. The Legislators have much larger districts now than when the salaries were set.

Motion made by F. Floss, seconded by C. Stone to approve the minutes of December 8, 2023; motion carried unanimously by all members in attendance.

There was a concern about meeting agendas being posted seven days in advance. Deputy Budget Director Mark Cornell stated that only the meetings need to be noticed, and all meetings have been noticed. If any meetings need to be rescheduled or added, those will need to be noticed. Minutes will be finalized Thursday following the meetings, and meeting packets will be sent out on Fridays.

Next, public participation policy was discussed. The public will be given an opportunity to participate with a level of decorum that will not disrupt the meeting. Any public participation should be in a gallery scenario: witnessing the meeting and speaking at the end. G. Dickson suggested allowing constituents an opportunity to comment via email. M. Cornell confirmed that would be added as an amendment to the public participation policy. Comments can be read aloud during the public comment period. G. Dickson and F. Floss requested basic contact information on commenters to ensure they are Erie County Residents and ability to follow up (i.e. name, address, phone number, email). F. Floss motioned to accept the amended policy, and A. Burgos seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

G. Dickson inquired about a public hearing. M. Cornell advised that a public hearing will be done by the Legislature.

Each member of the Committee then discussed what their individual priorities and concerns are and what they would like to focus on.

C. Stone stated that he would like to ensure the Committee is in compliance with the Charter and the Open Meeting Law. Mr. Stone would like to establish if the Legislators are part-time or full-time. Finally, Mr. Strone proposed a cap on pay increases considering the Consumer Price Index ("CPI") increased so rapidly.

G. Dickson discussed the question of part-time versus full-time is critical for the Legislators as well as the relationship of the salary to the public/income in that municipality. Mr. Dickson also expressed concern about the Sheriff, Comptroller, and Clerk's salaries being so much lower than the County Executive.

(M. Cornell explained the staggering of the salary increases upon the beginning of a new term for the office holder, and why CPI is used.)

G. Rabb expressed that the Committee should be sensitive to the salaries of the people who live in the community. He also agreed that the Committee needs to determine if the Legislators are part-time or full-time. Mr. Rabb would also like clarification on what benefits the Legislators receive and if there is a minimum expectation to receive them. If salaries are raised, the retirement benefits will also be raised. The current salaries may still attract people who want the jobs.

F. Floss articulated a concern regarding wages in a community – an unintended consequence could be officials in a rich suburb would make more than a representative in a poorer community. The Bureau of Economic Analysis has a formula that adjusts income for salary. Another concern Mr. Floss had was the type of professional that can accept this job (i.e. college professors and lawyers) and not the mainstream person who cannot take a pay cut.

M. Glasgow discussed the idea of a comparable city and the impact of the salaries on viable candidates.

A. Burgos was recently on the Salary Committee for Buffalo. The majority of people do not have the ability or access, because they are just trying to survive today. Other county legislators are exploring the idea of raises. Mr. Burgos also expressed concern regarding income per capita and what is considered a livable wage. The number is defined at \$34,000 for a single adult. He asked where the number came from.

(F. Floss stated that he was one of the people who calculated the living wage for the City of Buffalo. There is a commission that calculates the living wage each year.)

Mr. Burgos then stated he would like to look at the living wage and quality of life. He was also interested in speaking with Legislators to get an idea of their day-to-day duties. He believes it is a full-time job – all districts have grown, constituency affairs, meetings, budgeting, community engagement during weekends and evenings. Historically marginalized communities and those with disadvantaged backgrounds are losing out.

D. Pietrowski expressed his belief that the Legislative positions are limited to the wealthy that can afford to take the job. He would like to determine if this is full-time or part-time, and if there are any restrictions as to whether the Legislators can have a second job if this is found to be full-time.

B. Ransom stated he believes you can get good people for the salaries being offered. Benefits do need to be taken into consideration. Mr. Ransom also believes comparisons should be done within New York State. He believes that the Legislature will not recommend giving themselves a raise due to political implications.

A discussion then took place regarding comparing Erie County salaries to other counties within New York State and outside of New York State. Chair Buonanno stated that she believes Erie County should be compared to other charter counties within New York State. L. McKay stated that most comparisons that the Budget Department does is with Monroe County. M. Cornell stated "Erie County is probably more

similar to an unlike-sized county is New York State than it is to a like-sized county in another state.”

A. Burgos then discussed the population being served in Western New York and how important it is to keep in mind the increasing population and emerging populations that the Legislature will represent. There will be a lot of new Americans, immigrants, and refugees. They will have more constituents, and they will have to learn and adapt to the needs of the constituency. Constituency affairs will become more demanding. Chairwoman Buonanno stated that upstate New York dynamic is changing.

Chairwoman Buonanno stated that in 2018, the Committee was trying to get the Legislators’ salaries to be comparable to other counties in New York State. Some of the Legislators are going to tell you they are full time, and some are going to tell you they are part-time. If the Committee truly feels this is a full-time job, and we look at comparables, the Legislators will not get a raise. B. Ransom suggested interviewing the Legislators and get their opinions.

M. Cornell confirmed the Legislators do qualify for New York State retirement, full-time retirement benefits as well as full-time health benefits. M. Cornell then gave a description of full-time, regular part-time, and part-time employees.

Chairwoman Buonanno recommended examining other charter counties where the County Executive heads a separate branch of government and the Legislature does the checking, which is a lot of work. Reading a budget requires financial expertise.

Next, a discussion ensued regarding meeting with the Legislators one-on-one for interviews. G. Dickson suggested interviewing the chiefs of staff as well. F. Floss also suggested interviewing all elected officials.

Chair Buonanno proposed circulating the previous committee’s interview questions and finalize next meeting. F. Floss volunteered to work on the living wage for the next meeting.

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by A. Burgos, seconded by F. Floss; motion carried unanimously by all members in attendance.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 3:40 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.