



# COUNTY OF ERIE CITIZENS SALARY REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

**Tuesday, February 6, 2024 Meeting #6**

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Present: Chair Lauri Buonanno, Alex Burgos, Gary Dickson, Mark Glasgow, Greg Rabb, David Pietrowski, Christopher Stone, and Bill Ransom.

Absent: Fred Floss

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

Non-Members Present: Nathan Lippit

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Meeting Notes: A quorum was present and meeting called to order by Chair Buonanno at 2:15pm.

Chair Buonanno discussed the prior meeting's minutes. C. Stone motioned to accept the amended minutes, and A. Burgos seconded the motion. All in favor of accepting the amended minutes.

G. Dickson inquired about Suffolk County Legislators' salaries. M. Cornell confirmed that in 2024, Suffolk County Legislators are making just \$111,333. D. Pietrowski advised that in 2023, the legislators earned about \$107,000. M. Cornell also advised that Suffolk County Comptroller and Clerk each earn over \$213,812, the County Executive earns \$241,409, and the Sheriff earns \$214,426. Chair Buonanno advised she would update the Google Drive. M. Cornell confirmed that Suffolk is not considered part of the big five.

Next Chair Buonanno asked the interviewers of the minority and majority caucuses if they have anything else to discuss relative to their interviews. C. Stone, D. Pietrowski, and G. Rabb all advised they were satisfied. Chair Buonanno suggested moving on to discuss the interviews of the Comptroller, Clerk, and County Executive.

G. Dickson, M. Glasgow, and W. Ransom interviewed the County Executive. G. Dickson noted that some of the Legislators work a lot of hours, and some do not. Some have outside jobs, and some do not. He is in favor of raises for them; he does believe more people will be attracted to the officer with a higher salary. M. Glasgow stated that the County Executive believes the salary should be double. W. Ransom stated that the County Executive advised six of the Legislators would like a raise, and he believes that the other four county-wide elected officials need raises. He stated that City Council make double what the County Legislators make. G. Dickson agreed that the County Executive feels the county-wide elected officials are underpaid.

D. Pietrowski and C. Stone interviewed the County Comptroller. D. Pietrowski stated the County Comptroller thinks the County Executive needs a raise of around \$20,000, and the Clerk, Sheriff, Comptroller, and Legislators between \$10,000 - \$15,000 increases. C. Stone as well as modest stipends for the leaders and chair, but mostly the especially the majority leader. L. Buonanno acknowledged that is seen in other counties. D. Pietrowski asked that City-comparable positions also be added to the Google Drive.

C. Stone asked the Comptroller if these kinds of raises would make a bump in the budget, and the Comptroller explained that it would not really have a large impact. M. Cornell explained that if the rate per thousand increased, raises are not allowed to go into effect. L. Buonanno stated that is in the charter.

A. Burgos advised that the Sheriff has been out of town; there is a virtual call with him set up for Friday, February 8, 2024 at 12:00. Chair Buonanno asked for this interview to be conducted in person for

continuity purposes. C. Stone volunteered to accompany A. Burgos on the interview.

Chair Buonanno and G. Rabb interviewed the County Clerk. G. Rabb then discussed the County Clerk's interview. The Clerk believes that none of his employees are earning enough, and he states his office is the "financial engine" of the County. The Auto Bureau is open six days a week; therefore, the Clerk works six days per week. His office also deals with filing of mortgages and pistol permits. The Clerk believes that all of the big four County-wide elected officials should have the same salary. Chair Buonanno stated that he provided other County Clerks' salaries: Albany - \$138,000; Suffolk - \$213,000; Monroe - \$115,000; and Westchester - \$213,000. When asked about comparing himself to other counties, the Clerk advised the Erie County Clerk does more than some other counties. In some other counties, the Clerk does not run the Auto Bureau. He does believe that all four of the elected officials are underpaid. He believes the Legislature is a part-time job and that the Legislators do not deserve raises. G. Rabb indicated that the County Clerk feels his office is the stepchild of County government and is underappreciated.

Chair Buonanno stated that the Clerk felt the cost of living adjustment ("COLA") helped him and made him feel appreciated. She asked if any of the other interviewees mentioned the COLA. C. Stone discussed that the Comptroller likes the idea of the COLA, but would like to see it capped. M. Cornell discussed how the Budget office comes up with CPI. The County Executive did not discuss the COLA.

Chair Buonanno moved on to the question: Do you think that the pool of qualified candidates for Erie County's elected offices would increase with higher compensation levels? W. Ransom advised that the County Executive feels the pool would increase with more pay. Someone young cannot survive on the current salary. G. Dickson mentioned that the County Executive feels the pay is not appealing to someone who is qualified. M. Glasgow stated he is really focused on the Legislature needing a raise. The County Executive stated that there are qualified individuals sitting in senior-level positions and are not willing to take a pay cut. Chair Buonanno then asked if he explained why the raise is so important. W. Ransom explained that it will lead to better candidates, and there has not been a raise in 25-30 years.

D. Pietrowski asked if the Legislature voted for no raise or if the Commission did not recommend it. Chair Buonanno explained that the Commission was told, by the Legislators, that if the Commission recommended a raise for the Legislature, they would vote all raises down. C. Stone reminded the group that the Legislature has the power to adjust or change the Commission's recommendations. M. Cornell also advised that the Commission was on the fence about giving the Legislators a raise.

Chair Buonanno then asked what the Comptroller's thoughts are on attracting new kinds of candidates. C. Stone expressed that the Comptroller believes the elected official jobs are public service jobs and cannot be compared to the private sector.

Next, Chair Buonanno discussed the Clerk's response to this question. Initially, the Clerk said he did not think the salary matters, but then stated if there were to be a raise, there would be less turnover and more candidates. G. Rabb stated that some of the Legislators run unopposed because of their salary.

G. Dickson discussed being an elected official and the flexibility it affords. Elected officials do work on the weekends and at night, but you set the hours you want. People should only run for office because they enjoy interacting with constituents and serving the public. You cannot be fired except every four years. On the other hand, you can be fired through no fault of your own. All of the county-wide elected are qualified despite what they say. There are non-monetary reasons they do these jobs. G. Dickson also expressed that he believes these positions are underpaid.

G. Rabb discussed part-time versus full-time. \$42,500 is too low for a full-time job but not a part-time job. D. Pietrowski stated that no one in the legislature would go on records saying they work less than 37 hours

a week. Chair Buonanno next broached the topic of the role of the Legislature in the modern era. She believes the Legislators are full-time positions and deserve raises. G. Rabb discussed his experience in Jamestown's City Council and how much time was spent on the annual budget. The primary duty of a Legislator, other than constituency, is staying on top of the budget. If the Legislators are doing the budget correctly, \$42,000 is too low. G. Dickson suggested that is why there is full-time staff at the Legislature. M. Cornell there are 33 staff members at the Legislature.

Next, M. Cornell wished to address the Commission's timeline and the need for posting additional meetings. G. Dickson inquired about deadlines. Chair Buonanno advised the report has to be completed in 2024.

W. Ransom brought up that the County Executive compared himself to the County Executive of Oneida County which has both the cities of Rome and Utica as well as rural and urban areas. M. Glasgow stated that the population of Oneida is smaller, but their officials are making more money.

Chair Buonanno suggested a "tour of the table" to gage everyone's leanings on raises. +

C. Stone believes the Legislators and the big four do need raises but is undecided on how much.

G. Dickson stated that he is not against a modest raise and that the Comptroller, Sheriff, and Clerk should be more equal.

M. Glasgow supports an increase for the Legislators and the other county-wide elected officials.

A. Burgos also supports a raise for the Legislators to an annual salary of \$80,000 to \$84,000 as well as raises for the other county-wide elected officials.

D. Pietrowski stated that he believes the four elected are deserving of a raise of \$10,000 - \$20,000, and the Legislators are deserving of a significant raise.

W. Ransom is on the fence. He believes the big four deserve a raise, but the County Executive should make more than the other three. He does not believe more money will attract more candidates, so the he is mixed on the Legislature.

G. Dickson believes the county-wide elected officials should be more evenly paid. The Legislature is a full-time job with a part-time salary and deserve a modest raise.

Next, Chair Buonanno asked the Commission to come to the next meeting with their best analysis, i.e., is it the "big five" or all 62 counties, is it Fred's analysis or Dave's?

G. Dickson asked if this Commission should recommend an algorithm for future Commissions. Chair Buonanno advised they tried to do that with the last commission. Different Commissions have different ideas and feel differently about how to compare. M. Cornell then discussed the Sheriff, Comptroller, and Clerk salaries and CPI.

There were no public comments.

Motion to adjourn by G. Dickson; A. Burgos seconded motion. Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.