



COUNTY OF ERIE CITIZENS SALARY REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

Tuesday, February 13, 2024 Meeting #7

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

Absent: none

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

Non-Members Present: Nathan Lippit

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

Chair Buonanno discussed the prior meeting's minutes. G. Dickson motioned to accept the prior meetings minutes, and M. Glasgow seconded the motion.

Next, C. Stone and A. Burgos discussed their interview of the Sheriff. C. Stone discussed the base pay of the Undersheriff, the Chief of Administration, and the Superintendent of the Holding Center versus that of the Sheriff. The Sheriff pointed out that he controls one of the largest police forces in New York State and the second largest county jail in the State. The Sheriff indicated that he and the County Executive are on call 24 hours. The Sheriff receives calls in the middle of the night and knows what is happening in real time. The Clerk and the Comptroller do not respond to emergencies/disasters. The Sheriff feels his compensation should be commensurate with the County Executive and suggested the following base pay for the elected officials: County Executive - \$200,000; Clerk - \$125,000; Sheriff - \$175,000; Comptroller - \$125,000; and the Legislators - \$60,000-\$75,000. If those pay raises go into effect, the additional stipends current being received by the caucus leaders and chair should remain the same. C. Stone stated that he does not know how the Sheriff came up with these numbers. Chair Buonanno commented that she finds it interesting that the County-wide elected officials are commenting on the Legislator salaries.

A. Burgos then discussed his impression of the interview. The Sheriff gave a rundown of his responsibilities and duties. It is more work than what most people know. It involves various meetings and the oversight of two County jails. The sheriff mentioned equalizing County-wide positions. He proposed a salary range for the Legislature of \$75,000-\$85,000 to be more in line with City Council. A. Burgos advised he would recommend a significant raise for the Sheriff.

D. Pietrowski provided salary numbers for the Undersheriff. The budgeted pay for 2023 was \$138,784, but after overtime, etc., his actual pay was over \$222,207. The Sheriff was only budgeted for \$101,000.

A. Burgos mentioned that the Sheriffs are the primary police force for over half of the County, including the Seneca Nation.

Chair Buonanno suggested that the list of the top 25 highest paid County employees should be in the appendix of the Commission's report, which will show the disparity between the deputies and the elected officials.

Chair Buonanno asked if there were any questions regarding the Sheriff's interview and if there were any comments on any of the other interviews.

D. Pietrowski then discussed the budgeted 2024 salaries for the elected officials and their deputies: Sheriff

\$101,811/ Undersheriff \$170,723; Comptroller \$107,160 / Deputy Comptroller \$153,970; Clerk \$90,129 / Deputy Clerk \$138,613; County Executive \$139,932 / Deputy County Executive \$188,118. Chair Buonanno suggested providing a table in the narrative report with this information. M. Cornell discussed that the salaries of the deputies reflect steps and does not reflect any overtime they may receive. Chair Buonanno then suggested a footnote to the table indicating that information.

Next, Chair Buonanno provided a handout to the Commission. The first page was a table created by F. Floss to show wage growth in the County, both public and private sectors. It also demonstrates what the salaries would be for the County-wide elected officials if they had all experienced the same wage growth since 1996. The second document produced compares median household income and median real estate value in Erie County, Monroe County, and an average of the Big Four counties. Erie County is the lowest, but has the largest population.

The next table on the handout demonstrates each of the elected officials wages in Erie County as well as the averages for the Big Four and Big Five. There is also a table displaying Monroe County's same elected officials' salaries for 2024. The next table is from D. Pietrowski which shows the number of legislators/constituents ten different counties along with the salaries. D. Pietrowski will add the City of Buffalo Common Council to the table.

There was then a discussion about benefits. Erie County Legislators receive fulltime benefits. Monroe County does not receive benefits and are considered part-time. Monroe County also only lists one fulltime staff member. Chair Buonanno expressed that through conversations and interviews with the community, people feel that the staff at the Legislature does most of the constituency work. Chair Buonanno stated the Commission needs to find out about staffing in comparable counties' legislatures. M. Cornell discussed that it should not be difficult to locate staffing numbers.

Next, Chair Buonanno presented her salary recommendations. She does not believe that the Legislators are undercompensated and agrees with the standing stipends. She did advise that she can be persuaded and believes that D. Pietrowski makes the most compelling case on the budget impact of raises.

G. Dickson inquired about timing of pay increases and confirmed these do not go into effect until the beginning of a new term. He asked why this discussion was taking place when there will be a new Commission in 2026, and the County Executive, for example, would not see a raise until 2028. Chair Buonanno confirmed this is the case unless the Charter changes.

Annual raises were also discussed. Chair Buonanno confirmed the prior Commission recommended annual raises. C. Stone confirmed that these are based on CPI (Consumer Price Index). M. Cornell advised there are two factors which have influenced the current-day salaries: the initial recommendation of the Commission that was put into effect, and the aggregate compounding of the COLAs (Cost of Living Adjustment).

G. Dickson confirmed that all of the County-wide elected officials are four-year terms, and the Legislators are two-year terms with a new term beginning on January 1, 2026. He also confirmed there will be no changes in salary for 2025 for any of the elected officials. Chair Buonanno verified that this is the case. The Legislature does not receive COLAs. Chair Buonanno stated that unless this year's Commission changes something, the 2018 report will stand.

W. Ransom pointed out that it is not that they "didn't get raises," but they rejected raises. Chair Buonanno agreed that they did not use their super-majority power to change the 2018 Commission's recommendations.

G. Dickson then inquired as to the frequency of this Commission meeting. Chair Buonanno stated it is supposed to meet every two years per the Charter. Under the current administration, the Commission has met in 2014, 2018, and now, 2024. Prior to that, there was a Commission under Joel Giambra – possibly 2004.

G. Dickson proposed that, for discussion's sake, the Commission recommends raises, in 2026, the County Executive will be compensated \$180,000, that does not mean anything, because there should be a new commission and it would not take effect until 2028. Meanwhile, the County Executive is receiving CPI and, with those, he will not reach \$180,000 in 2026. D. Pietrowski confirmed this.

Chair Buonanno then discussed that it is a hurdle to get the Legislature to accept the Commission's recommendations, and she does not believe that, if this year's Commission gets the Legislature to approve the recommendations, the recommendations will be overturned by future Commissions.

M. Cornell discussed the new terms for the Comptroller, the Sheriff, and the Legislators will begin in 2026. There was discussion of about the Clerk's new term.

G. Rabb suggested not making salary recommendations beyond 2026 as this Commission is supposed to meet every two years. C. Stone asked if it would be the same group since the appointments are for three years. M. Cornell advised this Commission was appointed in 2023 so this would be the last Commission for this group.

G. Rabb asked Chair Buonanno if the reason her salary recommendations for the Legislature were not higher was because of the amount of support staff the Legislature has. Chair Buonanno advised it was due more to the comparison to comparable counties. Chair Buonanno feels that she does not have enough information about support staff in the comparable counties. She said she more considered the interview with the Comptroller, because he was a Legislator for so many years, and he knows the budget.

Next, G. Rabb inquired about whether the eligibility for benefits was part of the analysis when comparing Monroe County. Chair Buonanno advised it was not a major factor. G. Rabb thinks that the eligibility for fulltime benefits is a major factor that should be looked at.

D. Pietrowski asked again about the higher salaries of the deputies even after potential salary increases for the elected officials. He stated that, in sports, the assistant coach does not make more than the head coach. G. Rabb also suggested that deputy salaries should be considered. Chair Buonanno stated that it will always be that way, which was echoed by B. Ransom. Chair Buonanno suggested a table in the report to show the reader the disparity in salaries so that, when they see the recommended salaries, they do not look so high. G. Rabb stated that he thinks the Commission should take note of it and does not think the Commission should take the stance that "it is the system, and we cannot do anything." G. Rabb notes that he is bothered by the disparity and knows the Commission cannot do anything about it, but we want to make note of it. Chair Buonanno asked G. Rabb to write this portion up for the draft report – a paragraph. F. Floss pointed out that the fulltime staff at the Legislature make double or more than what the Legislators make.

D. Pietrowski observed that the Commission is looking at other counties and ignoring what is happening here, in Erie County, where subordinates are making 30%-40% more and focus on what Monroe County elected officials are making. G. Dickson asserted that he agrees with B. Ransom, that it is just a fact that deputies make more. Chair Buonanno stated it is the same in every county as well as at the State and Federal level.

W. Ransom noted that this Commission, as well as the elected officials, keep comparing to other counties. Similar to what D. Pietrowski stated, what is going on in Erie County and Buffalo? The Legislators are working as hard as City Council. M. Cornell stated that Erie County elected officials and other county-wide elected officials are contemporaries. The City of Buffalo likely compares itself to other cities.

Tour of the Table:

A. Burgos stated he would like to equalize the Countywide positions with an increase of around 15%; for the Legislature the salary range of \$75,000 - \$80,000 base.

G. Dickson agrees with Chair Buonanno's Legislature numbers; County Executive at \$170,000; \$155,000-\$160,000 for the Sheriff; Comptroller and Clerk at \$140,000 for 2026.

(M. Cornell asked if the Commission would like to see the CPI continue. C. Stone suggested a cap on CPI. Chair Buonanno asked C. Strone to write up his suggestion for the draft report.)

G. Rabb proposed the Clerk and Comptroller at \$140,000; the Sheriff and County Executive at \$170,000; Legislature at \$48,000 base with the same stipends proposed by Chair Buonanno for 2026.

M. Glasgow would like to see the County Executive and Sheriff in the range of \$190,000 - \$210,000; the Legislators at \$55,000 with the caucus leaders at \$60,000 and the chair at \$75,000; Clerk and Comptroller at \$130,000 for 2026.

M. Cornell suggested, if the committee is looking to equalize pay, starting with a base year of 2026. The Comptroller, the Sheriff, and the Legislature will all see their pay in 2026. If you put in a placeholder number for the County Executive for 2026 and 2027, and the real number is 2028; it would be the same for the clerk – there is a 2026 number, but 2027 is the real number.

G. Dickson stated that he believes that people who vote on a raise, the raise should not take effect until the election which is the public's chance to speak. The Sheriff, Clerk, and Comptroller do not vote on their raise. Why do we make them wait? Chair Buonanno suggested that G. Dickson write up a blurb for the report with that point of view.

C. Stone expressed that he believes the Sheriff and County Executive should be at \$175,000; Comptroller at \$130,000; Clerk at \$120,000-\$130,000; Legislature at \$52,888 and maintain the current stipends.

F. Floss' ideal numbers are reflected on the handout: County Executive at \$191,504; Sheriff and Clerk at \$146,700; Comptroller at \$149,521; Legislators at \$78,992 with caucus leaders at \$88,266 and the chair and \$97,355.

D. Pietrowski would like to see the County Executive at \$180,000; Sheriff at \$170,000, Clerk at \$130,000; Comptroller at \$140,000; Legislature at \$60,000 with caucus leaders and chair keeping their current stipends in 2026.

B. Ransom feels that revenue generated by the county should go to serving the public and not paying salaries. He expressed that the committee will receive negative press by the Buffalo News no matter what. He believes that for **2025**, the County Executive salary should be \$150,000; Sheriff, Clerk, and Comptroller should be at \$115,000; and the Legislature at \$45,000 the same, keeping their stipends the same. He believes the Legislators will turn down the raise.

M. Cornell again suggested picking a base year to start with to help normalize the numbers. By the end of the meeting, the group should pick which theoretical year to make the base year and extrapolate out all recommendations from there. G. Dickon suggested starting at 2025 and bank the CPI so that when the term takes effect, the officials will be equal. M. Cornell also suggested having this plan go into effect prior to the Election Law changing all elections to even years. Legislature, Comptroller, and Sheriff will go into effect in 2026; Clerk goes into effect in 2027; and County Executive goes into effect 2028.

Chair Buonanno asked F. Floss to take everyone's numbers and create a formula and spreadsheet reflecting the CPI over the course of the years until the new elected position terms.

There were no public comments.

Motion to adjourn by C. Stone; D. Pietrowski seconded motion. Meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 20, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.