



# COUNTY OF ERIE CITIZENS SALARY REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

**Tuesday, January 23, 2024 Meeting #3**

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

Absent: Gregory Rabb

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.

Next, Chair Buonanno discussed potential interview questions or the Legislature interviews. M. Cornell advised that the minority caucus would like to meet as a group, and, as of yet, the majority caucus has not responded. F. Floss stated that during the last commission, both caucuses wanted to be interviewed as a group. M. Glasgow inquired if any of the Legislators would like to be interviewed individually. W. Ransom opined that during the last commission, he got the impression that both caucuses preferred to be interviewed as a group so as to all be on the same page. W. Ransom, C. Stone, D. Pietrowski, F. Floss, A. Burgos, and M. Glasgow volunteered to part of the interviews. Chair Buonanno stated that she would excuse herself as she has participated in these before but is willing to take part if necessary.

M. Cornell then asked about timeframes for the interviews, discussed the legislative schedule, and also inquired as to whether the interviews would take place simultaneously or sequentially.

Next, the potential interview questions were reviewed:

1. Do you think Erie County elected office(s) are compensated fairly?
2. Which ones are not? Why do you believe that is the case?
3. Do you consider the Legislator position to be Part-time or Full-time?
4. Do you think that the pool of qualified candidates for Erie County elected office would increase with higher compensation level(s)?
5. What do you believe is a fair compensation level for Erie County elected officials?
6. What data analysis do you need to make an informed decision on our recommendations?
7. Would raises be more acceptable to the legislature if step increases were recommended?

F. Floss suggested a list be provided with question number two so the Legislators know which positions are being referenced.

M. Cornell and Chair Buonanno discussed which Legislators are still in office that were present in 2018. It was established that Chair Baskin and Minority Leader Mills are the only two Legislators that were in office in 2018. D. Pietrowski inquired about the format of the interviews, i.e. if one person spoke for the group or if each person answered the questions. Chair Buonanno advised that one person spoke on behalf of each

caucus. It was then discussed which members of the Legislature were present at the interviews.

D. Pietrowski recommended adding clarifying questions to question number three, including how many hours worked on average a week, and if the position was made full time, would they maintain other employment? D. Pietrowski then asked if there was wording in the charter about full time positions and whether or not elected officials could have additional full time employment. Chair Buonanno advised there is nothing in the charter and discussed an article about a previous Sheriff. C. Stone mentioned that Onondaga County recently passed something. Chair Buonanno confirmed that the County Executive and the Comptroller of Onondaga County had a dispute, but both had outside employment. F. Floss brought up the issue of conflict of interest. M. Cornell then brought up the requirement of ethics forms.

Next a discussed took place regarding a question three-b. A. Burgos suggested asking how the Legislator's commitment might shift in their outside employment if their Legislative position became full time

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by A. Burgos, seconded by F. Floss; motion carried unanimously by all members in attendance. If it becomes full time, will they become contractors or per diem at their current full time jobs? D. Pietrowski expressed concern in that, if this becomes an explicitly full time position, they will ask about compensation. F. Floss presented the complications of this notion for business owners. Chair Buonanno recommended listening to what they have to say, discuss the findings, and then go from there.

M. Cornell inquired as to whether any of the other elected officials are going to be interviewed. Chair Buonanno initiated a conversation regarding Monroe County's salaries as well as other County Executives' salaries. Chair Buonanno suggested that the other elected officials may want the opportunity to discuss their salaries. F. Floss agreed that the opportunity should be given to the other elected officials to discuss their salaries.

Chair Buonanno advised there were no standard questions asked in 2018 during the interviews. It was just a conversation with the County Executive. The County Executive thanked his interviewers for taking the time to listen to him and to learn about his day-to-day. He talked a lot about his compensation compared to other counties.

F. Floss made a motion to interview the other elected officials; the motion was seconded by A. Burgos. All in favor of the motion. W. Ransom asked about the Commission's authority to change the positions from part time to full time, and confirmed the goal is to decide if they need a raise. W. Ransom also discussed the fact that they just got a raise as well as the need to remain cognizant of the constituency. He believes the Legislators want a raise, but will not vote for themselves to get one. A. Burgos suggested using the term "compensation adjustment" instead of "raise."

Next, Chair Buonanno suggested reviewing comparable counties. There are no full time Legislators in New York State. In the 2018 report, there is a table which shows Erie County has fewer Legislators than comparable counties. The mean pay is \$18,000, and Erie County is 2.5 standard deviations above the mean. Erie County is still well above the mean.

F. Floss inquired about what the Erie County Legislators do versus the rural counties. Do their jobs compare to City Council? M. Cornell stated that City Council members tend to be higher paid. F. Floss suggested looking at county budgets instead of population sizes. Chair Buonanno stated that looking at a county's budget is not indicative of what services are provided. A discussion around constituency income and the number of legislators in each county ensued. Erie County has one of the lowest number of legislators. G. Dickson mentioned that each Erie County Legislator has a full-time staff member, and the caucus has its own staff as well.

D. Pietrowski discussed the total salary for all Monroe County Legislators versus the total salary for all Erie County Legislators. He also asked if they Legislators were previously asked if they thought their positions were part time or full time. Chair Buonanno stated that the minority caucus insisted it was part time.

Chair Buonanno stated that she does not believe that rural counties are comparable. Monroe and Onondaga are comparable. Dutchess and Westchester are not comparable. F. Floss discussed that although the constituency median income may not be comparable, the type and amount of work they do may be comparable.

M. Cornell asked which metric is going to be used as the comparative metric, and once that is decided, which counties match and are part of that pool of comparison? Once that is done, it will whittle down “like communities.” W. Ransom inquired about which counties Erie County Legislator compare themselves to. M. Cornell advised they probably to do not. Erie County’s Budget Department look at counties with both urban and rural communities – Albany, Onondaga, and Monroe.

G. Dickson suggested starting with the three referenced-above counties. M. Cornell asked if the Commission wants to look at the total legislative budget or the total county budget. Chair Buonanno proposed researching the total county budget, legislative staff, and the number of legislators. There was concern expressed about finding the number of staff members. F. Floss offered to show M. Cornell and L. McKay to utilize census data for this information.

Chair Buonanno confirmed looking at Albany, Onondaga, and Monroe counties: (1) total county budget to show what kind of budget the Legislators are exercising their oversight on; (2) legislative staff; (3) number of legislators.

Next, Chair Buonanno discussed the Commission’s Google Drive and asked the members of the Commission to log in and write their own bios for the report.

M. Cornell confirmed he will reach out to both caucuses as well as the independent elected officials.

Motion to adjourn by F. Floss; W. Ransom seconded motion.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 3:15 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 30, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.