

Independent Salary Commission
Meeting Minutes
August 28, 2024

PRESENT: Chair Lori McRea Keller, Byron Rodriguez, Mona Shen, Claire Sumadiwirya

ABSENT: Vice Chair Kan Liang

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m., with Chair Keller presiding.

2. Roll Call

City Clerk Charmaine Arredondo called the roll and all commissioners except Vice Chair Liang were present.

3. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Shen moved to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rodriguez and carried by a vote of 4-0.

4. Oral Communications

City Clerk Arredondo said all communications must relate to the work of the Independent Salary Commission and all speakers are given three minutes to speak, for a total maximum of 30 minutes for oral communications.

Alex Tsimerman said Councilmember salaries are too high. He said City staff completes much of the work and provides information and recommendations for the Council's consideration. He said the Council is currently on recess.

Betsi Hummer noted that she lives near Bellevue College and thanked the commissioners for volunteering. She said she applied for a position on the commission but was not appointed. However, she trusts they will make the best decision for everyone. She encouraged the commissioners to treat Bellevue Councilmembers fairly because they do a lot of work and juggle many priorities. She suggested that automatic periodic salary adjustments might alleviate the need for future salary commission reviews.

5. Staff and Consultant Reports

- (a) Introduction of Gallagher Consulting, Survey and Project Timeline, and Supplemental Discussion of City Manager Duties

Chair Keller welcomed the Gallagher consultants and introduced discussion regarding their role, the project timeline, city manager duties and the overall review process.

Michael Burton said Gallagher is an independent third-party group that will help evaluate the compensation provided to City Councilmembers. He has a master's degree in public administration and has been a compensation and benefits consultant for more than 35 years, including 15 years experience in the private sector.

Mary Gauthe, Gallagher, said she has approximately six years of experience as a compensation consultant, with five of those years working in higher education.

Mr. Burton said Gallagher will conduct a customized survey of comparator cities and engage in other data mining while waiting for the survey results. He said the overall review covers a three-month period and the process is currently in the second month. The consultants will start sending the customized survey to comparator organizations on September 9. Gallagher will close the survey on September 23 and begin to place the findings into a benchmark summary to be shared with City staff and the commission. Gallagher staff anticipates providing final copies of their findings to the City by the end of September before setting up the final presentation.

Mr. Burton presented the list of the 18 comparator cities that will be asked to complete the survey. He said they need at least five cities to respond to provide adequate data to guide the review and recommendations.

Responding to Commissioner Shen, Mr. Burton said they focused on comparing Bellevue to other cities in this region. Ms. Gauthe noted that most of the cities on the list also have part-time councils.

Commissioner Rodriguez suggested comparing to Portland and potentially other Pacific Northwest cities outside of this region. Mr. Burton noted the benefit of comparing Bellevue to other cities located closer geographically.

Matt Smith, Assistant Director, Human Resources Department, said some of the comparator cities have a different form of government. However, the data will be refined later after it is collected and analyzed.

Mr. Burton referenced a question previously posed by the commission: What other research/salary studies have the consultants supported? Mr. Burton said Gallagher works with cities nationwide, including in Washington state. Responding to a previous question about what makes a meaningful salary adjustment, Mr. Burton noted that most individuals view a minimum three percent salary increase as a significant change. A third question previously raised was: Would the consultants have recommendations for bonuses or incentives to remain competitive? Mr. Burton said bonuses and incentives are rare in government, especially for part-time positions. He suggested focusing on keeping the salaries competitive as they relate to cost of living and other market factors.

Mr. Burton said a link to the online survey will be sent to comparator cities. Questions address the number of Council meetings and other meetings, number of hours worked and other factors.

Responding to Chair Keller, Mr. Burton said the surveys are completed by City staff and not by Councilmembers.

Ms. Gauthe said the survey requests information including compensation data for the three Council positions, number of incumbents, current salary, longevity pay, part-time versus full-time, city population, budget, city services, last pay increase, inflation increases, other types of compensation, etc.

Responding to Commissioner Sumadiwirya, Mr. Burton said they typically like to send the survey to potentially 25 organizations and they usually receive about five responses. He acknowledged that it is a challenging way to gather information. However, it tends to produce the most reliable information.

The consultants responded to questions of clarification regarding the survey and the information that will be presented later to the commission.

Ms. Gauthe highlighted elements of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councilmember job descriptions. Joy St. Germain, Director, Human Resources Department, said the job descriptions will be provided to the commissioners.

Responding to Chair Keller, Ms. St. Germain confirmed that the mayor has the authority to declare certain emergencies.

Moving on, Mr. Smith said the City is currently recruiting to fill the city manager position. Ms. St. Germain said the Council sets the general policies for the City while the city manager and staff implement the policies and Council direction. The city manager is the top executive of the organization and reports directly to the City Council. The city manager directs and oversees the planning, design and development of policies and executes the policy direction received from the City Council.

Responding to Commissioner Shen, Assistant City Attorney Kathleen Kline said a City Council is allowed under state law to adjust its own salaries by ordinance. However, in that situation the adjustments are not made for positions until after the incumbents leave office. In further response, Mr. Smith said there is no required minimum number of work hours for Councilmembers beyond the required meetings and Councilmembers may vary in terms of their level of involvement.

Responding to Commissioner Rodriguez, Ms. St. Germain said staff will provide information to the commission regarding the Council's accomplishments over the past year or so.

Chair Keller thanked the consultants, participating remotely, for working late to accommodate Bellevue's local time. The next meeting is scheduled for September 23.

6. Other Business: None.

7. Approval of Minutes

(a) Minutes of July 31, 2024 Meeting

Commissioner Shen moved to approve the minutes of the July 31, 2024 meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sumadiwirya and carried by a vote of 4-0.

8. Adjournment

At 6:58 p.m., Chair Keller declared the meeting adjourned.

Charmaine Arredondo, CMC
City Clerk

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