



City of Tacoma
Citizen Commission on Elected Salaries

Ronald Malm, Chair
Richard Wilkinson, Vice Chair
Terry Mensonides
Robert Anderson
Dianne Conway
Randy Droppert
Shari Barrera

MINUTES

TIME: Monday, May 8th, 2017, 6:00 PM

PLACE: 733 Market Street, Room 12, Tacoma, WA 98402

PRESENT: Ronald Malm, Dianne Conway, Richard Wilkinson, Shari Barrera, Randy Droppert

ABSENT (Excused): Terry Mensonides, Robert Anderson

Call to Order:

At approximately 6:07 pm, Chairman Malm, called the meeting to order.

Roll Call:

At approximately 6:08 pm, staff liaison, Chantra Real did roll call.

Discussion of Mayor & City Council Salaries/Duties:

At 6:08 pm, staff liaison started conversation regarding questions for Mayor.

Richard: What type of questions we had for Mayor Strickland.

Staff informed difference between mayor and council member duties. How deputy mayor gets assigned. Mayor's perception of job & what roles were required or optional.

Richard: Surprised with passive acceptance of commission's decision on mayor's and council member's regarding salary decision.

Dianne: Tacoma's council members' salaries are much higher compared to surrounding cities and acknowledge that there are varying reasons such as size of city and form of city government. Randy noted that Mayor Strickland is consistently working.

Diane: Majority of city administrative work is done by the City Manager but Mayor Strickland is definitely a big promoter of the City but may be more of an elective choice.

Richard: A good mayor like Mayor Strickland is very much in demand, prominent position with more authority more political platform due to size of City.

At 6:13 pm, Mayor Strickland joined in the conversation.

Mayor Strickland: Where are we on the agenda and what does the Commission want to know?

Commission members introduced themselves.

Ron: Comparison between roles and cities?



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Richard: Comparison between size of City and role?

Mayor Strickland: What have you learned and how did you arrive with these numbers? In our form of government, this job is about how much effort you want to put in it. Looking from the past 8 years, and where the city needs to go, I think this job requires far more effort now than previous mayors may put into it. If you want to be the presiding officer, you'll need to be more active and this depends on your personality, skill sets. We are a different city today than we were prior. Our profile is much higher now than what it used to be. It depends on who has the seat.

Diane: Automatic pay raise implemented during a time when it made sense to do so. The City's conversation before council and mayor has gotten higher than before. It's different than other council member type of government. The council members' pays are all over the place. We've been looking for updated data. Survey was conducted. Is that similar for every city?

Mayor: From looking at the salary table, I would not consider some of these cities as mayor form of government from Yakima up. In some of these council member forms of government, the mayor may not be directly elected and was selected amongst themselves.

Richard: We were pretty aggressive on the reduction partly because we were under a short timeframe. We also set it to where it'll go into effect in 2018.

Mayor: Think about the context of where this came about. Charter review for changing form of government brought forth commission as a component piece. People wanted to change form of government and with that came examination of salary. Full time city council and a strong mayor form of government require salary examination.

Diane: Recalled a public comment insisting certain things regarding salary.

Mayor: There was an assertion that this was a move to raise people's salary. Sometimes when people hear that message in the community, there's pressure to address the issues.

Randy: Asked to move microphone closer to Mayor for clearer hearing.

Mayor: I looked at comparison between what Pierce County council gets paid and they make \$107,000 per year. I am pretty sure the number of hours put in compared to the number of hours that City of Tacoma city council puts in is not the same. Seattle City Council and King County City Council, they have parity in their salary, now granted Seattle has a strong mayor form of government. But those two things were interesting because of the different cities and form of government. Pierce County council makes \$107,000 and historically some of them had full time jobs because they had time to have full time jobs. The work load for them in comparison to the work load our City Council has here. Given the work load that we have here in Tacoma compared to the workload of other City Halls, how much of those work are in the papers compared to us?



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Randy: How much of that is elected time and how much of it is required time?

Mayor: My calendar for this month. I don't have the luxury of doing things just for fun because there's an expectation when you represent people that you show up for events. Even though some of these things are considered optional, you go to these events and are expected to write a check to these organizations. You have to show capacity, be acknowledged but I have the capacity to accept 30% of invitations that I get. The job is changing because Tacoma is different. There's no formula that determines exactly how much time someone puts into something. This week will be about 60 hours. Usually it's Mondays through Fridays and some events Saturday along with research on Sunday nights. Easy 7 day per week job. I have a Policy Analyst and a Staff Administrative person that assists me and the other members. So even when there's another one and a half person plus my time, my job is still very demanding. It's a cycle of demanding issues in front of us.

Richard: What is your role and relationship in terms of providing guidance to City Manager?

Mayor: Conversation about leadership, vision, direction, policy making and actual implementation of what you want. Of all the elected officials, I spend more time with the City Manager because I'm physically here every day if not in meetings. My relationship with the City manager is to keep track of specific big issues that we're trying to advance and make progress. Part of my job is also to manage relationship among my council and gain consensus; managing process, how we move forward with my colleagues similar to how we move things with City Manager. I also have meetings with Department Heads and address our City visible problems. City Manager address direction she would like to take and what we need to do to move forward in this process. As a person representing Pierce County, we need to ensure that every solution is equitable.

Richard: Surprised with non-response from council regarding pay change and commission's decision.

Mayor: There were reaction but not made public. Whenever the public believes that elected officials are benefiting something, it doesn't go well with the public. Standing up publicly and stating I should be paid more gives off an undesirable appearance. There are some council members who rely solely on this job as their full on wages and others only work part time. The purpose of this commission is to have citizen policy makers but what it does inadvertently it makes it unaffordable for some people to want to do this work. Sometimes when you do things with salary or benefits, it serves as a disincentive for people to want to put in that much time and effort and you end up not getting the government that people deserves. After the next election cycle, who knows what issues will be brought forth to the City Council.

Ron: You've mentioned 3 different time periods. What are the most significant changes in those time periods?

Mayor: We went through the recession, because we're not a tax rich city, it hit us really hard. Having to get rid of City Manager, hiring a new one, fighting our way back to fiscal sustainability,



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credibility of this council, and it's not just one person. We address minimum wages, address sick leaves, our planning for our neighborhood to get private investment. Depending on what you're trying to accomplish, you can put a lot of work into it. Historically, you rely heavily on staff and the expectation from the public now is that the council is more active and accountable than in the past. The expectation of government has changed. Social media has changed the way that you have to govern because people send you an email and they expect immediacy which means more tension and more focus. Every district is different. You're also the ambassador for the City. Every chance I get to speak and promote Tacoma is good for us. The relationship that we had with the Obama administration for federal funding was built through building relationships.

Randy: Mayor is like a CEO. You're more hands on.

Richard: Vancouver, WA. The mayor in Vancouver gets roughly \$27,600 annually. It's a council manager form of government; the mayor has lots of demands. Roughly fifteen percent fewer population and one-third less than our salary, how do you decide on the value of the mayor's role?

Randy: Maybe we need to look at employee size within City of Tacoma.

Mayor: Going back to Pierce County salary in comparison to what our Council does and it's pretty comparable. We're part of the big metro. We have higher expectations. Mayor in Bellevue may not be elected but selected amongst themselves.

Richard: What is the relationship between the City of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU)?

Mayor: If you work for TPU, your paycheck says City of Tacoma but it's a bifurcated system because utility is revenue generated. They deliberately kept it bifurcated so general government wouldn't bring utility funds to pay for basic services.

Richard: What is your relationship to the utility?

Mayor: My relationship to the utility has changed because during this charter review process, we put something on the ballot that says the reconfirmation of the utility director and the confirmation of a new one has to go through city council which was agreed upon by the voters. There's this sentiment that City of Tacoma is different from TPU. There's ongoing tension but we're trying to do a better job of working together.

Staff: Some cities have not touched or made any changes to council members and mayor salaries in years. As cost of living increases, these salaries remain the same.

Mayor: There are a few cities that because of what is paid for mayor and council, they're not getting the good level of leadership for the challenges that they're facing. There are some big



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issues that are happening within these communities that are not receiving the type of leadership that they should.

Randy: Pay limits the playing field.

Mayor: Being mayor is a full time job. That is a fact. There are council members who have full time job but the job still spend a lot of time trying to get caught up and require a lot of time deep study and analysis that I just want to be able to pay people for their time and effort.

Randy: When you consider how many hours you put in, their contributions are higher than what we've agreed to pay them.

Mayor: The expectation of the public has changed for the policy makers of the city. If you compare the body of work to this council that I've served with compared to my predecessors, we put in far more time and the expectations are far higher. People do it willingly because they want to get involved and they want to roll up their sleeves.

Randy: We're paying the mayor slightly more than what we're paying firefighters.

Richard: Let's just say the mayor doesn't have as good of a union as the firefighters. We should all be so lucky.

Mayor: When I first ran for city council, I was making a calculus of whether I could afford being an elected official. You just think about whom you inadvertently leave out of some of these decisions, the ability to run for office when you look at some of these salaries and I think having the benefit there is really helpful. I say it's a full time job with a part time salary.

Ron: I know the sensitivity regarding salary, I think the role of this body is really important because it filters the naysayers and for you to have the understanding that this body is the filter and the one to bring down this reality. I think a second look would be appropriate.

Mayor: I haven't heard anyone who's running for office during this municipal election year say I don't know about that salary. So, we're lucky that people do still want to serve and be excited about it. When you think about long term, when you compensate people fairly, you'll get more work out of it. You're getting the leadership you're paying for.

Ron: I think a piece of this is passion for service but there's an economic piece to keep people afloat and allowing them to do what they do.

Richard: Question of balancing act. No problem revisiting numbers. People serve on non-profit boards and serve for free. We have to be fair. We need to think long term. To agree with Randy, you're not the CEO but obviously we're sticking with the council management form. Mayor helps set the agenda, set the vision but it's not the same as managing the entire workforce.



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Mayor: If we had a strong mayor form of government, the first thing for the mayor would do is to hire the chief administrator which acts the same as a city manager. Whatever you call it, the structure is not that greatly different because there are people who become mayor who have not had a minute of administrative experience. I'm not here to advocate that we should have some outrageous salary but if you present something to a group of people in public and say that you're going to take away something from them, they're not going to stand up and say what are you doing, here's all the reasons that's wrong. Plus you took the time to interview people, survey.

Diane: We purposely didn't make our decision effective in 2018 because we didn't want to have different salaries for different council members.

Richard: We also had such a short time frame and needed more facts for a better decision.

Mayor: I admit that there's an automatic inflation here that makes the pay goes up but maybe come up with a policy for people to get their raises according to CPI; something more symbolic.

Ron: What's really telling here is that Mayor will not be around for 2018 and this is information for the future.

Mayor: I want really good, qualified people to serve in office.

Mayor: One thing that I think is interesting is that we have council districts and every council district has different population size and issues but we all vote on everything together. We all have an equal voice in every policy decision that comes before us. But when I think about the amount of work and I do and the money I make, I want people to feel confident that they're getting their money's worth from me. I'm also conscientious that people know how much money I make and they see me out there, doing things, effective and bringing resources here. You might want to look at what has changed over the last eight years with this particular elected body because that's really how you mark effectiveness. What resources have happened, what has passed and what policies are in place that really weren't in place eight years ago?

Randy: I think we should bring in some more council members to discuss something similar to what we're discussing now with Mayor.

Mayor: Maybe talk to someone who does not have a job that's working as a council member now. If you took the mayor salary and raised it, you would get more people interested in the job but I'm not advocating for that.

Mayor: What I appreciate about the way Tacoma is set up is that you don't have the political class who can only afford to do the job and you have the geographical dispersion.

Staff: What are some of the drawbacks?



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Mayor: Benefit and drawback. You can tailor this job to put in as much time as you want as well as little time but as little time is still not considered little because the demands are so great. The drawback to this job is not related to this salary but it's the demands and expectations that come with it. The political climate is just a lot different than what it was when I got elected in 2010.

Diane: David Boe mentioned that you're never not working.

Mayor: That is what you sign up for. It's part of public life.

Richard: Overnight his ethics are questioned because the moment he became elected official, suddenly his integrity was questioned.

Ron: Boe also mentioned how much personal relationship strain was also put while serving as an official.

Mayor: So much of your ability to do this job well and how much time you can put in is how supportive your partner is when you're in that situation. Even campaigning, ideally they have to be supportive because this is hard work. The hardest thing for some people is that for example, my husband has to resist defending me when he hears certain things that are not very kind. You can be an elected official in many cities but there's so much good stuff happening in Tacoma that I think this is a really fun job right now.

Commissioners thank Mayor for her responses.

At 6:58 pm, Mayor leaves meeting.

Additional information provided by City staff per Commission's request:
2017 updated salaries provided.

Richard: I think revisiting the numbers is appropriate for us to do. I still don't have a good basis for judging what the right number is. I was surprised salaries jumped according to our updated salary.

Diane: We're still high in comparison.

Shari: But if you look in population, Tacoma has a bigger population. Olympia is only a quarter population of Tacoma and their salary went from 19k to 43k.

Richard: Every City has a plan for some uniqueness, distinctive issues that they face but we do too.

Randy: One of the things that bother me is that the fire chief makes more than mayor.

Diane: TPU director makes a ridiculous amount also.



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Randy: It's a competitive job.

Diane: Yes I agree.

Richard: How do you want to approach the numbers?

Diane: We've purposefully set them at the lower end and needed more time.

Shari: Everybody except for Lakewood has had an increase of some sort.

Randy: We also will need to look at time commitment.

Shari: Which of these cities that has a council member form, which are elected members? Do we know?

Ron: On the level of issues like Sound Transit is huge. Someone to keep an eye on the dial on that is a full time job on itself.

2017 Decision – Salary recommendation due by September 1st:

Diane: Food for thought. We'll need to make decision end of August.

Future meeting dates:

Richard: August 28th, he'll be out of time. Is it possible to move the August meeting up? August 14th?

Staff: We haven't done a formal special meeting request so we still have time to decide on the rescheduled date.

Randy: August 14th may not work.

Staff: August 7th?

Commissioners agree on reschedule for August 7th.

Monday, August 21st is moved.

Review & approval of February 13th, 2017 minutes
All in favor.

Adjournment
(7:07 pm)



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Chantra Real, HR Assistant, Human Resources


Ron Malm, Chair