

## Meeting of the Northampton Elected Officials Compensation Advisory Board

Monday, April 10, 2023 • 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

[Online Zoom Meeting](#) (Meeting ID: 848 0435 0600)

### Minutes

#### Board members present

- John Bidwell – Chair
- Tara Brewster
- Felicia Corbeil
- Deb Henson
- Sam Hopper – Clerk
- Javier Luengo-Garrido
- Peter Whalen – Vice Chair

#### Board members absent

- *None*

#### Additional attendees

- City Council Vice-President Karen Foster

#### Minutes

##### Call meeting to order

- Meeting called to order at 5:31 p.m.
- Announcement meeting is being audio and video recorded
- Roll Call
  - John Bidwell: Present
  - Felicia Corbeil: Present
  - Deb Henson: Present
  - Sam Hopper: Present
  - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Present
  - Peter Whalen: Present
  - Tara Brewster joined the meeting after roll call

##### Previous Meeting Minutes: Vote

- Peter Whalen moved to approve minutes from March 13, 2023 meeting, Javier Luengo-Garrido seconded
  - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
  - Deb Henson: Yes
  - Sam Hopper: Yes
  - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes

- Peter Whalen: Yes
- John Bidwell: Yes
- Tara Brewster: Yes
- Minutes approved unanimously

### Public Comment

- *None - no members of the public present*

### Discussion Items

#### *Team Updates*

- Survey responses update from Felicia Corbeil
  - Survey sent out about 2 weeks ago
  - Only able to obtain email addresses for current elected officials, not for previously serving elected officials
    - Missing historical data
  - 23 responses total as of today
  - Main takeaways from responses
    - About even split in responses positively and negatively responding to the fairness of compensation
    - Positive response to elected officials having access to health insurance
    - Many responses talked about the time commitment to be an elected official, including meetings being at night
    - Demographics of respondents mixed (with some declining to respond)
      - About 50/50 male and female
      - Ages, income, and education had varied responses demonstrating a variety of folks
      - Respondents self-identified race/ethnicity and majority respondents identify as white
      - Ages and annual household income reported spread out across the range
  - Group survey response discussion
    - Javier Luengo-Garrido shared history of racial and ethnic representation in Northampton's elected officials has been that 2 Black men, no Latino people, and 1 Black woman have served
    - Discussion on not having personal email addresses to invite former elected officials to take survey
      - Elected officials given city email but no longer have access to city email if no longer serving
      - Disappointing to miss information and perspectives of former elected officials

- Javier Luengo-Garrido stated would like to see Northampton gather demographic data of elected officials and include this recommendation in final report
  - At the time report findings initially shared with Board, 7 city councilors (out of 9 total), 2 Smith Vocational Trustees (out of 3 total), and 3 school committee members (out of 10 total) responded
    - 2 additional responses were not school committee members
    - Not all respondents answered all questions
  - Question if there was a correlation between number of dependents in household and satisfaction of compensation
    - Did not include question about dependents in survey
    - Seen correlation in other commission between satisfaction of compensation and dependents in the household
    - Don't have data points but have ability to include this point in our report
- Sam identified 6 benchmarking cities based off location (western Massachusetts - located in 4 western counties), Mayor/Council form of government, and similar population size and median household income to Northampton:
  - Agawam
  - Easthampton
  - Greenfield
  - Pittsfield
  - West Springfield
  - Westfield

<b>Geographic Area Name</b> US CB data	<b>Number of households</b> US CB data	<b>Median household income</b> US CB data	<b>Population</b> US CB data	<b>City budget</b> Mayor's office	<b>FY23 mayoral salary</b> Collins Center
Easthampton	7,796	63,098	16,120	\$48,500,000	\$83,000
Northampton	11,949	72,687	29,379	\$126,000,000	\$92,500
Greenfield	8,100	52,211	17,661	\$58,300,000	\$93,157
Westfield	15,292	73,692	40,922	\$161,000,000	\$100,000
Pittsfield	19,290	59,522	43,890	\$198,000,000	\$110,100
Agawam	11,785	78,619	28,715	\$104,400,000	\$110,424
West Springfield	12,734	60,023	28,814	\$113,100,000	\$120,000

<b>Geographic Area Name</b> US CB data	<b>Number of households</b> US CB data	<b>Median household income</b> US CB data	<b>Population</b> US CB data	<b>City budget</b> Mayor's office	<b>Council President Stipend</b> Municipal Code	<b>Councilor At-Large Stipend</b> Municipal Code	<b>Councilor Stipend</b> Municipal Code
Greenfield	8,100	52,211	17,661	\$58,300,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
Easthampton	7,796	63,098	16,120	\$48,500,000	\$6,500	\$6,000	\$6,000
Pittsfield	19,290	59,522	43,890	\$198,000,000	\$10,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Northampton	11,949	72,687	29,379	\$126,000,000	\$10,000	\$9,500	\$9,000
Agawam	11,785	78,619	28,715	\$104,400,000	\$12,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
West Springfield	12,734	60,023	28,814	\$113,100,000	\$12,500	\$10,000	\$10,000
Westfield	15,292	73,692	40,922	\$161,000,000	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$14,000

<b>Geographic Area Name</b> US CB data	<b>Number of households</b> US CB data	<b>Median household income</b> US CB data	<b>Population</b> US CB data	<b>City budget</b> Mayor's office	<b>School Committee Chair Stipend</b> Municipal Code	<b>School Committee At-Large Member Stipend</b> Municipal Code	<b>School Committee Member Stipend</b> Municipal Code
Pittsfield	19,290	59,522	43,890	\$198,000,000	n/a	\$0	\$0
Greenfield	8,100	52,211	17,661	\$58,300,000	n/a	\$2,000	\$2,000
Easthampton	7,796	63,098	16,120	\$48,500,000	\$4,250	\$4,000	\$4,000
Northampton	11,949	72,687	29,379	\$126,000,000	n/a	\$5,500	\$5,000
Agawam	11,785	78,619	28,715	\$104,400,000	n/a	\$5,000	\$5,000
West Springfield	12,734	60,023	28,814	\$113,100,000	\$6,250	\$5,000	\$5,000
Westfield	15,292	73,692	40,922	\$161,000,000	n/a	\$8,680	\$8,680

- Benchmarking data currently does not include information on additional benefits, like access to health insurance or retirement benefits
  - 2014 Board gathered much of this data through the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) but this information was not available through MMA this year
  - Sam compiled much of this data by reading municipal budgets and ordinances
- Information about the number of part-time elected officials enrolling in the municipal health care plans offered

### Part-Time Elected Officials Enrolled in Municipal Health Plan - FY23

	Number of Members in Body	Number of Members Enrolled	Cost to City FY23
City Council	9	6	\$86,282.76
School Committee	9	1	\$15,380.40
Trustees of Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School	3	2	\$19,528.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>\$ 121,191.36</b>

- Compared to 2014, seeing the same number of part-time elected officials enrolling however cost is higher because costs have risen
- Believe the city pays 80% and enrollees pay 20%
  - Significant benefit from a human resources perspective

#### *Elected Officials Comments*

- Ward 2 City Councilor and City Council Vice-President Karen Foster
  - Excited by the idea using compensation as a tool to increase diversity
  - Curious about sliding scale compensation and what that could look like
    - Raised at early Board meeting but given tight timeline of Board, was not pursued as the idea would need a lot of time and work, especially with a lack of precedent in the U.S.
  - Stipend can mean different things to different people depending on many factors, e.g., access to generational wealth
  - Noted it's difficult to capture information from a survey to gather evidence on what type/amount of compensation would attract more diverse candidates to run for elected office
  - Shared that some think councilors should have more power and authority than is currently delegated by the city's charter
  - Shared view that individual councilors decide how much research and work they do on their council work, including the city's budget, in relation to their responsibilities outside of council work
  - View that the council president's stipend should be more than it is as the work expected of and performed by a council president is significant
    - As Vice President, Councilor Foster filled in as Council President in the President's absence and this view has been expressed by others
    - Group conversation on the public's increasing expectation by councilors, especially in the age of social media
  - Shared curiosity about school committee work and how it's changed in recent years, including increasing number of meetings



- Suggestion: Because it's been a time consuming process, including that the Board members had to gather own data which has been difficult and time consuming, considering how the process can be more efficient in the future by recommending Northampton plays part in data collection
- Suggestion: Recommend 2.5% cost of living adjustment in years that the Board does not convene
  - Built in raise has precedent - Sam Hopper shared that when gathering benchmarking data, at least one benchmark city had it in their ordinance setting the stipend that raises were built in for each year
    - Believes it was Easthampton that did this
- John Bidwell shared both ideas with both City Council President Jim Nash and City Solicitor Alan Seewald, who both noted these types of recommendations are within the Board's purview to include in report
  - Peter Whalen agrees with both suggestions
  - Deb Henson agrees with both suggestions
  - Tara Brewster agrees with both suggestions
- Tara Brewster offered suggestion to also include a former board member be part of the next board
  - Composition of Board is in the city's charter so would need to amend charter to mandate, but can certainly encourage
  - Alternatively, can make a recommendation to suggest future Boards start work by inviting a presentation from the previous Board
- Tara Brewster offered suggestion to recommend exploring a way to offer benefits based on household income or dependents
  - Felicia Corbeil noted the complexity of basing benefits off number of dependents, what types of benefits are used vs. not used, and other factors
- Sam Hopper agreed with John's two suggestions
  - Would not suggest advocating for less time to do work, rather believes more time is needed
    - For example, it would have been nice to explore a sliding scale for stipends, however Board began substantive work in January and provided a timeline of having report ready in April - 4 months isn't enough time to dive into complex but potentially meaningful issues and recommendations
  - Concerned that asking the city to do data collection is asking city employees to do more work amidst all they're already doing, and suggests alternatives:
    - Recommend the city advocate with MMA to return to thorough collection and tracking of municipal benchmarking data

- Recommend the city advocate with state officials to explore things like sliding scale for municipal elected official compensation
  - Suggestion that appealing to larger bodies with potentially more resources to gather data that will benefit all Massachusetts municipalities
  - John Bidwell clarified suggestion for city to collect data was along the lines of the city budgeting money to contract work to a group like the Western Massachusetts Employers Association and outsourcing work to folks who gather this type of data
- Group discussion on why more folks have not been engaged in this process
  - Survey respondents indicated many folks are motivated to be elected officials because they like the civics involvement and serving the public
    - Sam Hopper responded that while this is true in the survey results, it's missing both former elected officials opinions as well as the opinions of folks who haven't been represented in government in Northampton thus far and therefore not necessarily representative of city residents as a whole
  - Hard to advocate for pay increases for elected officials as elected officials, therefore incumbent on city to have process
  - More time could have resulted in more in-depth outreach to gather feedback from current and former elected officials as well as the general public to solicit their opinions and feedback
- John Bidwell shared initial draft of report is completed but will need to incorporate benchmarking data Sam Hopper compiled and shared
  - John Bidwell and Peter Whalen will connect with Sam Hopper to incorporate
  - Report subcommittee will review draft
  - Board as a whole needs to find agreement on recommendations, e.g., dollar amount of recommended stipends
  - Report on track to complete when last stated we would complete, however will need an additional meeting prior to the next scheduled meeting on April 24, 2023
    - Goal to get report out on 4/17
    - Board will meet next on Monday, April 17 at 6 p.m.
      - Sam Hopper will not be able to attend, Felicia Corbeil will take minutes for April 17 meeting

### Adjourn

- Deb Henson moved to adjourn meeting, Tara Brewster seconded
  - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
  - Sam Hopper: Yes
  - Deb Henson: Yes
  - Peter Whalen: Yes

- John Bidwell: Yes
- Tara Brewster: Yes
- Meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

- April 17, 2023 @ 6 p.m. via Zoom
- April 24, 2023 @ 5:30 via Zoom
- May 1, 2023 @ 5:30 p.m. via Zoom