

Meeting of the Northampton Elected Officials Compensation Advisory Board

Monday, May 1, 2023 • 5:30 p.m.

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

Minutes

Board members present

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

Board members absent

- Felicia Corbeil

Additional attendees

- Ward 5 City Councilor Alex Jarrett
- Ward 7 City Councilor Rachel Maiore

Minutes

Call meeting to order

- Meeting called to order at 5:32 p.m.
- Roll Call
 - John Bidwell: Present
 - Deb Henson: Present
 - Sam Hopper: Present
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Present
 - Peter Whalen: Present
 - Tara Brewster: Present
- Announcement meeting is being audio and video recorded

Previous Meeting Minutes: Vote

- Deb Henson moved to approve minutes from April 24, 2023 meeting amending the spelling of Peter Whalen's name, Peter Whalen seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Tara Brewster: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes

- Peter Whalen: Yes
- Minutes approved unanimously

Public Comment

- Ward 5 City Councilor Alex Jarrett
 - Sees council work as professional job and suggests it be paid accordingly
 - Cites responsibility of councilors, including financial well-being of city and passing laws
 - Shared view that being compensated appropriately attracts qualified people
 - Current compensation makes role accessible to people of privilege
 - Proposes \$30/hour as appropriate wage and offers that on average, spends 15 hours per week on council work 52 weeks per year, then subtract for benefits with a suggested stipend of \$18,000-20,000 as an appropriate range for City Council stipend
 - Shared view that paying living wage would lead to more folks running
- Ward 7 City Councilor Rachel Maiore
 - Shared view there is a need for myriad of folks of different echelons representing the city in elected positions
 - In order to achieve this pool of candidates/representatives, must make change in how folks are compensated
 - Current stipend has an assumption of privilege in order for folks to serve
 - Desire for different representation and fuller representation of city
 - Council has an increase workload
 - Shared experience of an increase workload for councilors since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Also shared more work due to more residents being involved and engaged, which leads to more work for councilors and a higher expectation for councilors to interact with residents
 - Facing more compelling issues that require more time, such as housing, climate emergency, and school funding
 - Suggestion that even doubling stipend would still underpay councilors
 - Urges change in how folks think about compensation for councilors
 - Expressed desire for folks to run and need to retain to continue to serve

Discussion Items

Report Draft Discussion

- Discussion on statement in the Background section: *The majority of current elected officials in Northampton are white and identify as women.*
 - Discussion on what this is based on and is it representative of the current elected officials or all-time elected officials

- Point made that the city doesn't collect data on demographics which is an issue that should be addressed
- Point made that historically and currently, there is a lack of diversity in these positions, specifically racial and ethnic diversity
- Issue raised that not confident that historically it's been predominantly women serving in these positions and concern that without specificity, it may incorrectly portray the historical demographics of elected officials' gender
- Amend to acknowledge lack of demographic data collection of elected officials and note it is referring only to the current cohort
- Discussion of statement in the Background section: *As a representational governing body, the City of Northampton strives to be a model for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA)*
 - After murder of George Floyd, city committed to creating a position pertinent to this statement, and conversation recently restarted
 - Preference to amend statement to not attribute the idea to the city until there is clear evidence of this
 - View raised that the information in this paragraph is disconnected from the recommendations; the recommendations do not support the statements made in this paragraph - will continue this piece of conversation when we get to recommendations
- Health insurance eligibility source linked in report ([Eligibility for Group Health Benefits Policy](#)) looks old/potentially outdated
 - Document was from Mayor Higgins and includes two elected officials in Section 4 who are no longer elected positions in Northampton
 - Sam Hopper will ask the city's Human Resources department if there is an updated version of this to include in final report and share back with John
- Discussion on recommendations in report for compensation increases
 - Clarification on what the 29% increase is
 - Last increase for these positions was recommended in 2014 using 2014 numbers and the increase in salaries and stipend went into effect in 2016
 - 27% increase represents an average of 2.7% inflation rate over the span of 10 years (from 2014 when current salary was recommended to 2024 when ideally our recommendations would go into effect) - $10 \times 2.7\% = 27\%$
 - Addition 2% bringing it to 29% total recommendation acknowledges the Board's perception of an increased workload/work expectation for these positions
 - Mayoral recommendation: \$119,325 (29% increase from current \$92,500)
 - Using the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator](#), in 2023 dollars, the 2016 salary of \$92,500 would be \$117,846

and recommendation of \$119,435 does not acknowledge or compensate the position for what it's worth

- At this recommendation, only a \$2,000 raise after adjusting for inflation and argument that the role was underpaid in 2016 therefore this recommendation is too low
- Discussion on what's a fair/appropriate increase to recommend
- Discussion pulling apart 2 types of suggested increases:
 - 1) Adjustment factoring inflation increase
 - Argument made that this type of increase alone is not sufficient because the starting salary was not appropriate
 - Conversation on what the percentage should be:
 - 27% based on 10 years at 2.7% starting in 2014 when last Board began work, or
 - 8 years x 2.7% because current salary went into effect in 2016
 - 2) Increase based on understanding of more work as well as right-sizing the value and responsibility of what these positions do
- Discussion on Board's methodology from the question asking if we are supposed to make a decision based on a comparison to similar cities
 - There is not a defined methodology; the Board decides what we look at and how we make a decision
 - Argument that current compensation for surrounding councils and all other elected positions are underpaid, therefore benchmarking against them is not appropriate
- Recommendation to remove information tying our recommendations to increased diversity in elected positions if the Board does not increase compensation significantly
- Discussion on how to create a formula to calculate an increase to the part time elected official positions
 - Context: Using the example of a Ward Councilor making \$9,000 per year
 - Survey responses indicated the majority of respondents spend 10-20 hours per week on their elected duties - Board assumes average is 15 hours per week
 - At 15 hours per week for 52 weeks in a year, a stipend of \$9,000 per year comes to \$11.54 per hour
 - Massachusetts minimum wage is \$15 per hour, therefore in this context, councilors are being paid less than minimum wage
 - Discussion on using minimum wage or a measure of a living wage

- Per the [Living Wage Calculation for Massachusetts created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology \(MIT\)](#), the living wage for 1 adult with no children in Massachusetts is \$21.35 per hour
 - With this hourly wage multiplied by the average of 15 hours per week for 52 weeks a year comes to an annual stipend \$16,653
- Discussion on what number to use for average hours spent a week on elected duties backed by both elected officials commenting at Board meetings as well as responses to the Board's survey
 - Survey responses:
 - 0-5 hours per week: 2 responses
 - 5-10 hours per week: 4 responses
 - 10-20 hours per week: 6 responses
 - 20-30 hours per week: 4 responses
 - 30-40 hours per week: 0 responses
 - 40+ hours per week: 1 responses
 - Decision to use 20 hours per week as the baseline
 - 20 hours per week for 52 weeks per year at \$21.35 per hour comes to \$22,204
- Question raised in context of the Board's responsibility to consider the city's budget within the context of recommendations
 - Sam Hopper raised personal feeling of irresponsibility to not consider the budget
 - Instructed by Council President Nash to not take budget into account because the Board does not have the full context, understanding, and specific numbers of the city's budget and it's the council's role to look at those specifics
- Suggestion to recommend review should happen sooner than every 10 years
- Discussion of pay differences between positions within same body, e.g., ward councilor, at-large councilor, and council president
 - Suggestion for ward and at-large positions to be same, and president to have more pay
 - Suggestions for President increase:
 - \$24,204 - providing \$2,000 increase
 - \$27,755 - basing 25 hours per week (increase of 5 hours more per week compared to other council positions)
 - \$24,671 - same pay ratio compared of the current \$9,000 ward to \$10,000 council president

has been adopted during the first 18 months of the term for which the mayor is elected and unless it provides that the salary increase is to take effect upon the organization of the city government following the next regular city election.

- Council needs to make decision by July 3 (double check date) 2023
- Currently Board aiming to get report to council next week
- Decision to get a number for the Mayor's salary recommendations then take time for Board members to think on change in recommendations before final vote
 - Discussion on how to get to a number and/or formula to decide a Mayor's salary increase that feels fair and appropriate
 - Discussion on how many hours the Mayor works
 - Current mayor reported to John Bidwell over 40 hours per week
 - Previous report shared 60-80 hours per week
 - At 50 hours per week at \$50 per hour for 52 weeks/year is \$130,000

Determine The Next Steps

- Need for one more meeting, ideally this week, to both vote on a final report/recommendations and approve minutes from last week's Report Review Subcommittee meeting
 - Quorum can be present for a meeting this Thursday at 6:00 p.m.
 - Finish report discussion & vote on final report
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Adjourn

- Javier Luengo-Garrido moved to adjourn meeting, Deb Henson seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Tara Brewster: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes
 - Peter Whalen: Yes
- Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Upcoming Meetings

- Thursday, May 4 at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom