

Meeting of the Northampton Elected Officials Compensation Advisory Board

Thursday, May 4, 2023 • 6:00 p.m.

[Online Zoom Meeting](#)

Minutes

Board members present

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

Board members absent

- Tara Brewster

Additional attendees

- None

Minutes

Call meeting to order

- Meeting called to order at 6:04 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

Approval of Minutes: Vote

- Sam Hopper will amend minutes from the May 1, 2023 meeting to reflect Councilor Gore's presence and comments and vote on minutes at a subsequent meeting
- Sam Hopper moved to go into Report Review Subcommittee meeting, John Bidwell seconded
 - John: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes

- Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes
- Peter Whalen: Yes
- Sam Hopper moved to approve minutes from April 27, 2023 Report Review Subcommittee meeting, Deb Henson seconded
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - *Minutes approved*
- Sam Hopper moved to adjourn, Deb Henson seconded
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes

Public Comment

- None

Discussion Items

Review final recommendations document

- Recap of the numbers and potential recommendations the Board is looking at for a ward city councilor (current stipend: \$9,000)
 - 27% COLA adjustment + 2% recognition of increased work: \$11,610
 - Living Wage: 20 hours/week x Living Wage (\$16.28 Hampshire County - 1 adult, no children) = \$16,931.20 versus state average based on \$21.35/hour=\$22,204)
 - Massachusetts average: \$22,204
 - Hampshire County average: \$16,931.20
- If going with a COLA adjustment, it's equalizing the 2016 salary and stipend to current dollars and therefore not an increase
- \$21.35 per hour reflects the average living wage in Massachusetts for a single adult with no dependents, \$16.28 reflects the average living wage for Hampshire County for a single adult with no dependents
- Discussion of living wage in Northampton and how that compares to the Massachusetts average and the Hampshire County average and how Northampton has a high cost of living compared to the rest of Hampshire County, but lower than Boston
- Deb Henson reflected on conversation Monday and perspectives that were new to her and proposes the Board can do something radical in our recommendations that reflects the values in Northampton
 - Suggestion to split the difference between the Massachusetts average living wage and the Hampshire County average living wage to use that number as the hourly wage in the Board's formula
- Discussion on what numbers we recommend to City Council
 - Argument that what the Board recommends is the ceiling and lowering our ceiling too much could further lower our recommendations

- Argument that going too high shuts down a conversation or dismisses the recommendations
- Discussion on the stipend being more like an honorarium/token of gratitude or a wage that compensates folks for the time
 - Question posed: If we are recommending it's a wage and are "professionalizing" the work, how does the city hold elected officials accountable to the wage they're being paid when there isn't a typical job description or recourse for not doing the assigned responsibilities?
 - Question posed if the hours reported in the survey are accurate - it's hard to know - and/or are the correct amount of hours that should be spent on the responsibilities
 - Concern that compensation for work of part-time elected officials done on an hourly basis may not be the best way to determine
 - The Board's charge is to look at compensation whether it's a stipend or based on an hourly wage
 - Suggestion that based on the responsibilities of city council, 20 hours per week is accurate
 - There is a lack of information on elected officials and there aren't standards, it's not a typical job
- Discussion on the role of compensation as one of many tools and changes needed to address the lack of diversity in Northampton's elected officials
 - Also need more supports like education and support on the roles, additional supports like childcare
 - Increasing compensation won't solve everything but it is a start
- Question raised asking how stipends are paid - is there a monthly pay or is it a one-time lump sum?
 - The Board didn't ask
 - Argument that if it's a living wage but only paid once, the living wage is not accessible
 - Sam Hopper shared understanding that it's paid monthly
- Argument made that increasing the stipend increases the budget which leads to a higher tax that furthers the barriers to folks' ability to afford to live in Northampton
- Deb Henson moved to recommend Ward and At-Large City Councilor stipends to \$18,720 (\$18/hour at 20 hours/week) and City Council President stipend to \$23,400 (\$18/hour at 25 hours/week), Javier Luengo-Garrido seconded
 - John Bidwell: No
 - Felicia Corbeil: No
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: No
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes

- Peter Whalen: No
- *Motion not approved*
- Javier Luengo-Garrido moved to recommend Ward and At-Large City Councilor stipends to \$16,931.20 (\$16.28/hour at 20 hours/week) and City Council President stipend to \$21,164 (\$16.28/hour at 25 hours/week), John Bidwell seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: No
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes
 - Peter Whalen: No
 - *Motion approved*
- Recap of current School Committee and Trustees of Smith Voc stipends
 - Ward School Committee Member: \$5,000
 - At-Large School Committee Member: \$5,500
 - Trustees of Smith Voc: \$5,000
 - 27% COLA adjustment + 2% recognition of increased work for Ward School Committee Member: \$6,450
- Agreement to equalize the ward and at-large positions in the same way done with the council ward and at large positions
- Discussion on how to determine how many hours School Committee Members and Trustees of Smith Voc work on average per week
 - Survey responses to the question asking how many hours folks work is not differentiated between type of elected position
 - Context comparing School Committee and City Council and the difference in their stipends
 - Regular full-body meetings (not subcommittee meetings): School Committee typically meets once per month except during their budget time compared to City Council typically meeting twice per month
 - School Committee decides an approximately \$35 million budget compared to City Council deciding an approximately \$130 million budget
 - Sam Hopper stated belief that the survey responses from School Committee members stating the high number of hours is not a reflection of time spent on work they should be doing given the responsibilities set in law and therefore should not be compensated for those hours
 - Agreement that School Committee compensation formula should not use the same weekly hours applied to City Council
 - Suggestion to come to recommended stipend by using the same percentage difference as the current difference between Ward City Councilor stipend and Ward School Committee Member stipend ($\$5,000/\$9,000 = 55\%$ difference)

- 55% of Ward City Councilor recommended stipend of \$16,931.20 is \$9312.16
- Deb Henson moved to recommend Ward and At-Large School Committee Member stipends to \$9,312.16 (55% of \$16,931.20 Ward and At-Large City Council recommended stipend), John Bidwell seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes
 - Peter Whalen: No
 - *Motion approved*
- Sam Hopper moved to recommend Trustees of Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School stipend to \$9,312.16 (55% of \$16,931.20 Ward and At-Large City Council recommended stipend), Javier Luengo-Garrido seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes
 - Peter Whalen: No
 - *Motion approved*
- Recap of numbers and potential recommendations for mayoral salary previously discussed (current \$92,500)
 - 27% COLA adjustment: \$117,475
 - 27% COLA adjustment + 2% recognition of increased work: \$119,325
 - The average current mayoral salary of the 6 benchmarking cities/towns for which we have data: \$102,700.
 - Last night's working salary including a greater recognition of increased work: \$130,000
 - 50 hours/week x Living Wage (\$16.28 Hampshire County - 1 adult, no children), which is the same calculation used as an option for part-time elected official's salaries = \$42,328
 - \$115,070
 - 21.6% COLA + 2% recognition of increased work: \$114,330
- Deb Henson moved to recommend Mayor salary to \$130,000 (\$50/hour at 50 hours/week), Javier Luengo-Garrido seconded
- Discussion
 - 50 hours/week doesn't seem accurate and too low - Mayor is always on call, always the public face

- There is no “Vice Mayor” so if the Mayor wants to take time off, there isn’t a position that can fully fill the role
 - The charter notes the City Council President is next in line if the Mayor is not available which applies in things like emergency situations for who makes the decision, but they are not doing what the Mayor regularly does in their absence for something like time off
 - The Chief of Staff position offers support, but again is not permitted to do the same role and make the decisions that only the Mayor can
- John Bidwell: No
- Felicia Corbeil: Yes
- Deb Henson: Yes
- Sam Hopper: Yes
- Javier Luengo-Garrido: Yes
- Peter Whalen: No
- *Motion approved*
- Discussion on recommendation for a 2% increase in stipends and salaries in years the Board does not meet
 - Sam Hopper raised concerns of an automatic increase for elected positions and how that can contrast to tough financial years where unions negotiate to not take an increase or a lower increase
 - E.g., If teachers are not getting a raise in a year, it doesn’t feel right for elected officials to
 - Discussion on tying elected official increase to something, like increases only in years when non-union employees have an increase
 - Desire to build increases in to avoid large gaps in pay again
 - Desire to have something built in, but open to what that may look like
 - Question raised on how non-union employees in the city get increases - unsure
- Peter Whalen moved to recommend a 2% annual increase in elected officials’ stipends and salaries; Felicia Corbeil seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: No
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido: No
 - Peter Whalen: Yes
 - *Motion approved*

Vote on final recommendations document

- Deb Henson moved to approve the report as amended only to reflect the salary and stipend and rationale for each approved tonight change final report as discussed and approved tonight, John Bidwell seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Peter Whalen: yes
 - *Motion approved*
- John Bidwell will check with City Solicitor how the Board approves minutes for this meeting

Adjourn

- Peter Whalen moved to adjourn meeting, Deb Henson seconded
 - John Bidwell: Yes
 - Felicia Corbeil: Yes
 - Deb Henson: Yes
 - Sam Hopper: Yes
 - Peter Whalen: Yes
- Meeting adjourned at 7:51 p.m.