SPOKANE COUNTY CITIZENS’ COMMISSION ON SALARIES

January 31, 2023
5:30pm – 7:00pm

ZOOM information:  https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6245391833

Meeting ID: 624 539 1833

Commission Members Present:
April Croft
Dana Nash
Jenae Ball
Nancy Williams
Debra Stewart

Spokane County Employees:
Ashley Cameron – Senior Director of Human Resources
Josh Groat – Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Sara Erb – Compensation & Classification Analyst

Other Attendees:
Rebecca White, Reporter

Welcome:
Meeting started at 5:30pm
Gerry Gemmill is out of town, not present for the meeting.

Compensation Information Review:
The group decided the information provided by Ms. Cameron, which included notes from 2021 presentations was sufficient for their review and they did not need the commissioners or electeds to do presentations in 2023.

As a group, the commission reviewed the compensation comparables spreadsheet. Ms. Cameron reminded the group it was in the same format as used in 2021. Ms. Ball asked the commission members if there was any interest in adding perks as part of the 2023 or 2024 compensation package. The group came to a decision they thought COLAs would be more impactful than perks for the commissioners and the electeds. Ms. Nash stated she agreed the perks weren’t what they should focus on and that she recommended higher increases than provided the last time the commission met in 2021. Ms. Ball reminded Ms. Nash part of the reason as to why a 0% COLA was decided for 2021 was due to the fact the non-represented employees were not awarded a COLA in 2021. Ms. Ball asked Ms. Cameron for a reminder of COLA increases for employees in 2022 and 2023. Ms. Cameron told the commission non-represented employees received a 3% COLA in 2022 and a 4% COLA in 2023. Mr. Groat explained to the commission, CBA represented employees received anywhere from 2% to 3% increase in 2023, but there had also been ratification bonuses, specialty pays, and other things negotiated with the various bargaining units. Ms. Ball confirmed the commissioner’s COLAs were 0% and 2.5% in 2021 and 2022,
respectively. She reminded the commission members, their job this year is to set the salaries for 2023 and 2024.

**General Discussion:**
The group then discussed the difference in salary between the commissioners and the electeds. Discussion occurred as related to other Counties in the comparable spreadsheet and how some commissioners made more than electeds, some made less, and some made significantly less. Ms. Cameron reminded the commission to review the section of the spreadsheet detailing the duties and authorities of each of those counties to help understand their requirements of work in their positions. Ms. Cameron also provided the 2022 salaries for the City of Spokane Mayor, City of Spokane Council Members and City of Spokane Chair Council member. Ms. Stewart inquired as to why the County budget increased substantially for 2023 as compared to prior years and if that meant there were more funds available to pay staff. Ms. Cameron explained a portion of that was due to the ARPA funds, that are required to be spent under certain rules, and that the funding would not continue after 2026.

Ms. Williams asked if the commission could decide on a COLA for 2023 and then tie the 2024 COLA amount to whatever non-represented employees are awarded by the Commissioners. Ms. Ball and Ms. Cameron reviewed the RCW as related to County Commissioners salaries, and both advised the committee not use that approach as in spirit, it appeared to violate the RCW because the commissioners would technically be setting their own salary through that approach.

The commission reviewed their notes and Ms. Ball asked the commission members if there was any additional information anyone wanted to review or attain? No member had any additional needs. Ms. Stewart recommended a 4% COLA increase for 2023 for the Commissioners. Ms. Ball said she agreed with the recommendation, but also wanted to see if there was any discussion to be had in the event the commission had an appetite to decide if there should be parody between the two groups (commissioners and electeds).

Ms. Ball asked Ms. Cameron if she had any history about why the elected positions are paid at 95% percent of the commissioners. Ms. Cameron explained to the group, when she reviewed past resolutions, it appeared the county has frequently used a percentage differentiator for elected official positions. For example, the County Prosecutor salary is 95% of the superior court judge. She informed the group she was not part of the discussion on why the commissioners awarded salary in this fashion, but it did appear to be a standard past practice. She let the group know she could get additional information on that topic if the commission thought it would be helpful.

The group inquired into whether the Commissioners have the ability to tell the electeds what to do when running their departments. Ms. Cameron explained, the Commissioners can set the salaries of the electeds, but through a past resolution, the Commissioners determined this citizens’ commission on salaries would provide that recommendation to them for the Assessor, Auditor, Clerk and Treasurer. She reminded the commission members, the Commissioners have budgetary authority for the county as a whole, but per RCW an elected official has the authority to manage and run the operations of their department. Ms. Stewart recommended all are paid equally moving forward. Ms. Williams asked Ms. Cameron to present the county org chart to the group. As the group reviewed the org chart, Ms. Williams recommended a 2.5% spread, rather than a 5% spread as many other counties compensate differently for commissioners vs. the Assessor, Auditor, Clerk and Treasurer. Ms. Cameron explained the other elected officials are at the same hierarchy level in the org chart, and the difference between the commissioners and other elected officials is the budget authority. Ms. Stewart stated she believed the
work done by the other electeds is a larger scope of work than the commissioners on a daily basis, but understands the different with the commissioners having authority for all county budget. Ms. Croft agreed with Ms. Stewart and Ms. William’s train of thought and recommended the spread be narrowed, but not to align salary across Commissioners and Electeds.

Ms. Ball asked the group if there was any further discussion on making the elected be same as commissioner. She restated what the commission members had been speaking to, that the Commissioners and Electeds should be closer in salary, but not necessarily the same. Ms. Croft and Ms. Williams stated they agreed there should be effort to bring them closer and minimize the gap between the two. Ms. Croft proposed moving the Elected from 5% of the Commissioner’s Salary to 2.5%. Ms. Nash stated she agreed with that recommendation.

Ms. Ball asked the committee what they believed the COLA should be for the Commissioners and asked if the commission thought there was value in aligning the number to what non-represented employees had received in 2023. Ms. Nash and Ms. Croft stated they thought that was reasonable. The commission then discussed being considerate of future budget availability as the economy changes and being mindful of what would be a reasonable 2024 COLA. Ms. Stewart recommended a consideration for a lower 2024 COLA adjustment and asked what any negotiated contracts had in place for 2024. Mr. Groat told the commission CBAs had ranges between 2.5% and 3% for 2024, but other contracts are coming open and we would be negotiating 2024 COLAs as part of those updated CBAs. Ms. Stewart reminded the commission, if the next commission on salaries found the 2024 increase was lower than it should have been as the economy stayed above average, that group could take that into consideration when setting the 2025 salaries. Ms. Nash agreed and stated a 3% COLA seemed reasonable for 2024. The commission members agreed.

Committee Salary Recommendations or Additional Information Need:
Ms. Stewart made a motion to change the salaries of the Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer and Clerk from 5% to 2.5% of the Commissioner’s salary.
Ms. Croft seconded the motion.
Vote was unanimous, motion passed

Ms. Stewart made a motion to increase the salary of the commissioners by a 4% COLA effective February 16, 2023
Ms. Williams seconded the motion.
Vote was unanimous, motion passed

Ms. Williams made a motion to increase the salary of the commissioners by a 3% COLA effective January 1, 2024
Ms. Croft seconded the motion.
Vote was unanimous, motion passed

Miscellaneous:
Ms. Cameron thanked those who were on their second term and would not be returning in 2025.

Close:
Ms. Ball thanked the commission members and County staff for their time and energy. Meeting adjourned at 6:51pm.