

**WHATCOM COUNTY COMMISSION ON SALARIES
FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

AGENDA – revised 2/26/2025
Wednesday, February 26, 2025
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

[Virtual Meeting](#)

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Roll Call**
- 3. Approval of Minutes from February 12, 2025 Meeting**
- 4. Public Comment – cap of 18 minutes total**
 - 4.1. Any interested attendee will be given 3 minutes for public comment
- 5. Presentation by Elected Officials**
 - 5.1. Councilmember Mark Stremler
 - 5.2. Steve Oliver, Treasurer
 - 5.3. Rebecca Xczar, Assessor
 - 5.4. Stacy Henthorn, Auditor
 - 5.5. Satpal Sidhu, Executive
- 6. Old Business**
 - 6.1. Discussion of request to review compensation/budget for County Charter Review Commission
- 7. New Business**
- 8. Information Review**
 - 8.1. Summary market data
 - Discussion of data reliability
 - 8.2. Commissioner Data Requests Status Updates
 - Added Commissioner Darwin’s spreadsheet to #9
 - Added clarification from Steve Oliver re: funding to #11
 - Added Benefits Information request as #12
 - 8.3. Discussion
- 9. Next Steps**
 - 9.1. Additional information requests (if any)
 - 9.2. Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 12th 4 – 6 p.m. PDT
- 10. Adjourn**

Attachments

Attachment A (8.1): Summary Market Data
Attachment B (8.2): Data Request from Commissioners
Attachment C (5.1): Written Statement from Councilmember Stremler
Attachment D (5.2): Written Statement from Steve Oliver, Treasurer
Attachment E (6.1): Email from Kellen Kooistra, Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
Attachment F: (5.4) Written Statement from Stacy Henthorn, Auditor
Attachment G: (5.3) Written Statement from Rebecca Xczar, Assessor
Attachment H: (5.4) Written Statement from Satpal Sidhu, Executive
Attachment I: (6.1) Email exchange with Chair Shaddix, Facilitator Carroll and County Council Charter Commissioner Morales

Whatcom County Executive's Office is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: 2025 WC Salary Commission

Time: Jan 29, 2025 16:00 Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Every 2 weeks on Wed, until Apr 23, 2025, 7 occurrence(s)

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Weekly:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/tZlUde6grDgjG9Z3FoYDz_63x1cKbFNWiRRA/ics?icsToken=DNTB4qxTs7THNlaUUgAALAAAAMoU6WjacQz54jQSgqGmclJzTlgleQWYgvBodBpGNG4w2iRBf3_hC5cv2V17cQLb4wLaOfci2sEuVLeLRDAwMDAwMQ&meetingMasterEventId=BwaWVz-fSwK9Ue7908Qneg](https://us06web.zoom.us/join/https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/tZlUde6grDgjG9Z3FoYDz_63x1cKbFNWiRRA/ics?icsToken=DNTB4qxTs7THNlaUUgAALAAAAMoU6WjacQz54jQSgqGmclJzTlgleQWYgvBodBpGNG4w2iRBf3_hC5cv2V17cQLb4wLaOfci2sEuVLeLRDAwMDAwMQ&meetingMasterEventId=BwaWVz-fSwK9Ue7908Qneg)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86327823912>

Meeting ID: 863 2782 3912

One tap mobile

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Dial by your location

- +1 253 205 0468 US
- +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)
- +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
- +1 669 444 9171 US
- +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)
- +1 719 359 4580 US
- +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)
- +1 305 224 1968 US
- +1 309 205 3325 US
- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
- +1 360 209 5623 US
- +1 386 347 5053 US
- +1 507 473 4847 US
- +1 564 217 2000 US
- +1 646 931 3860 US
- +1 689 278 1000 US
- +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)
- 833 548 0276 US Toll-free

- 833 548 0282 US Toll-free
- 877 853 5247 US Toll-free
- 888 788 0099 US Toll-free

Meeting ID: 863 2782 3912

Find your local number: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/kccjWgrQli>

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- 86327823912@zoomcrc.com

Join by H.323

- 144.195.19.161 (US West)
- 206.247.11.121 (US East)
- 115.114.131.7 (India Mumbai)
- 115.114.115.7 (India Hyderabad)
- 159.124.15.191 (Amsterdam Netherlands)
- 159.124.47.249 (Germany)
- 159.124.104.213 (Australia Sydney)
- 159.124.74.212 (Australia Melbourne)
- 170.114.180.219 (Singapore)
- 64.211.144.160 (Brazil)
- 159.124.132.243 (Mexico)
- 159.124.168.213 (Canada Toronto)
- 159.124.196.25 (Canada Vancouver)
- 170.114.194.163 (Japan Tokyo)
- 147.124.100.25 (Japan Osaka)

Meeting ID: 863 2782 3912

[Attachment B \(8.2\): Data Request from Commissioners](#)

Commissioner Data Request

Updated 2/21/2025

1. AWC data for "Summary of Data" on document.

Updated Data Pending with 2/5/25 target delivery date.

[Summary of Data](#)

[Whatcom County Electeds and Seconds 2023](#)

[Whatcom County Electeds and Seconds 2025](#)

[COLA by Group](#)

2. The updated salary grid for non-represented employees at the County.

[Unrepresented Position Titles and Salary Matrix.](#)

3. A copy of the 2025 budget.

Full budget is online at the link below. Final version is not published yet but I confirmed it would be the same information except some technical corrections and more

narrative. <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/89954/Executives-Recommended-2025-2026-Budget>

4. Any and all written compensation philosophies that exist for elected or employee groups at the County.

“[Classifying County Positions Policy](#)” as well as the attached [2025 Unrepresented Resolution](#). Collective Bargaining Agreements are also [online](#).

5. Information on what counties are used as "comparable counties" for any elected or employee groups at the county.

Comparable Counties for all groups are Benton, Cowlitz, Kitsap, Skagit, Thurston and Yakima and listed in their agreements. More information about how those counties were determined can be found in the PERC Interest Arbitration decision from 2001 [online](#):

6. The revenue forecast for the county broken down by major categories (i.e. property tax, b&o tax revenue, etc).

Requested information from our Finance Office but in interim, please see revenue summary in the County budget and let me know if additional information is

needed. <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/89954/Executives-Recommended-2025-2026-Budget>

7. Crime rates in the county as well as comparable counties

Information is available on our Sheriff’s Office

website: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3442/Crime-Stats>

More information about comparable counties can be found on the WASPC site. The document is very large, but searchable and contains summaries within for each of the requested counties. (For example, you can find Skagit Co Sheriff’s Office on page 396 & 397)

<https://waspc.memberclicks.net/assets/Crime%20in%20Washington%202023-compressed.pdf>

<https://www.waspc.org/cjis-statistics---reports>

8. Information about the roles and responsibilities for the positions (job descriptions, etc).

See attached County Charter Article 3. Full Charter is [online](#).

9. 10-year Salary History for the position.

[Elected Official Salary Increases.History.xls](#)

[Commissioner Darwin's Year over Year Salary Change Spreadsheet](#)

10. Population of Whatcom County for the last 10 years (2014-2024)

The most recent Comprehensive Plan is attached which shows total population in Figure 3 on page 6.

[Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan](#)

11. Funding for elected position salaries

[All elected positions are funded out of the general fund.](#)

[Clarification from Steve Oliver, Treasurer](#)

12. Benefits available to elected officials

[Information from HR](#)

[Benefit Rates](#)

The benefits offered are also outlined in Section 7 of the [Unrepresented Resolution](#).

Additional information:

[City and County Execs with Exec Branch 2024](#)

[Department Head 2025 Salary](#)

Attachments can be accessed via this [google drive](#).

[Attachment C \(5.1\): Written Statement from Councilmember Stremler](#)

Hello Stacey and WCSC. My name is Mark Stremler. I was elected to represent district 4 on the Whatcom County Council. My term began January 8, 2024. It is a 4 year term.

You have asked for input regarding duties of my position.

This past year has been extremely interesting. A few things I have observed that may be helpful to you.

There are an immense amount of opportunities for council members to engage in. We have our required 22 regular council meetings. The Whatcom County Council is tasked with With these are the committee meetings which take place during the day. It is typically a 12 hour day. We are also have Health Board, Flood Control Zone and Water Works sessions that we facilitate.

In addition to those mandated committees, we also serve in various “outside” advisory roles. Personal development for a role like this is also, to me, part of this position.

Here is the nuts and bolts of our responsibilities. We represent the citizens of Whatcom County. That is a huge responsibility and requires much time to do it properly and effectively. I personally take that very seriously.

I would refer you to Whatcom County Charter, Article 2, Legislative Branch to give you a description of our duties.

Within all of that, there is opportunity to do more, or less. I will not speak for other council members. Many of our duties are left to our discretion as far as time management, hence there is likely a wide range of effectiveness being there are 7 members.

Sometime, I would like to see a much more robust job description and time requirements. Look forward to meeting with you on the 27th.

Mark Stremler
Councilmember District 4

Whatcom County Council
311 Grand Ave. Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Office: 360-778-5022
Cell: 360-935-1266
Email: MStremler@co.whatcom.wa.us

Notice: All email and attachments sent to and from Whatcom County are public records and may be subject to disclosure pursuant to the Public Records Act (RCW 42.56)

And that government of the people, by the people and for the people, shall not perish from this earth.
Abraham Lincoln



M E M O R A N D U M

To: Whatcom County Salary Commission members

From: Steve Oliver, Whatcom County Treasurer 

Date: February 18, 2025

RE: Requested Position Information and Salary Commentary

***PREFACE:** In addition to new information, some of the background information contained in this document will be repetitive for returning Commission members, but I wanted to provide this information for the new member's information and consideration.*

Let me start by thanking all the Commission members for volunteering to be part of this process. I've said this before and I'll say it again - publicly discussing elected officials' salaries is just plain awkward. Salary Commission offers a level of objectivity and thoughtfulness that has been sought by elected officials for many years. Whatcom County is blessed with highly qualified and dedicated elected officials that sincerely appreciate the opportunity to serve our community in our various capacities. I am personally committed to this process and conversation and I look forward to working with the Commission. Thank you for your continued consideration.

Salary Proposal

Utilizing the 2021 and 2023 Commission decisions as a path, I recommend the Commission to continue to seek parity in setting the County Treasurer salary for 2026 and 2027 equal to the County Finance Manager. I would recommend setting the County Treasurer salary at \$183,660 + a CPI-W adjustment in 2026 and an additional CPI-W adjustment in 2027. Approval of this recommendation would address internal equity and salary compression issues in 2026 and 2027.

I would further encourage the Commission to NOT state the County Treasurer's salary in terms of the County Executive's salary. There's a risk of unintended consequences if the County Executive's salary changes substantially in the future. There is an active Charter Review Commission proposal to do just that.

What does the County Treasurer do?

The County Treasurer holds a key position of public trust and transparency in the financial affairs of local government. This is exactly why the framers of the State Constitution created an independent, separately elected County Treasurer. Acting as the bank for the County, school

districts, fire districts, water districts and other units of local government, the County Treasurer's office receives, accounts for, disburses, and invests the funds of each of these entities. On a local market share basis, the County Treasurer's office would be one of the largest banks in the county. In addition, the County Treasurer is charged with the collection of various taxes, assessments and fees that benefit a wide range of governmental units. A large majority of the workload of the County Treasurer is directed toward providing services to the other taxing districts other than the County itself.

The major responsibilities of the County Treasurer can be summarized in the following areas:

- Independently elected and transparent treasurer – provides direct, independent treasury and financial services to 100+ local government entities.
- Receiving, accounting and disbursing of revenues – total annual cash flow of approximately \$2 billion.
- Collection of taxes, assessments and fees – in 2025, over \$450 million will be billed and collected.
- Cash and investment management – manages an approximately \$600 million local government investment pool for the benefit of local government entities.
- Debt management – manages an approximately \$600 million local government debt portfolio.
- Agent for the State of Washington – represents the State of Washington's interest in over 10,000 real estate transactions per year.
- In 2024, the County Treasurer's Office had 14 FTEs, one of which is a temporary project manager. The Chief Deputy is also included in the FTE count, and serves at my discretion and has the authority to act in my absence. In the 2025-2026 biennium, we are hoping to add another permanent position to create a more sustainable department when current leadership retires. In my years in this office, we have reduced our FTE count by nearly 30% which I don't think has ever happened in another County department. The 2024 departmental expenditure budget was \$2.47 million.

About Myself

I graduated with a bachelor of arts in Finance and moved to Whatcom County over 35 years ago. I have served nearly 27 years in the County Treasurer's office, including nine years as the Chief Deputy before being elected to office. Before coming to the County, I served two terms on the Ferndale City Council, and worked in the fields of banking, community development and commercial development. I am a successful small business owner and served for over a decade on the board of directors for one of the county's largest employers. I am an enrolled member of the Lummi Nation.

Comments Regarding Compensation

As the only elected official that experienced elected official salary setting prior to the establishment of the Salary Commission and participated in every Salary Commission since creation, I feel the Salary Commission process is a significant improvement over prior County practices and every iteration of the Commission process seems to be an improvement over the last.

In 2021, the Commission reached the following conclusion: “After deliberation, the Commission set 2022 compensation to align with the top step of Range 440 of the 2021 Unrepresented Employees, Group B-Management Salary Matrix and applied a 2.4% COLA increase for 2023.” In 2023, the Commission continued to follow this recommendation.

Over the past three Salary Commission cycles, I have strongly urged the Commission to address the internal organizational equity and salary compression issues. The Commission has made excellent advancement on both issues over the last three cycles. In fact, the decisions of the last Salary Commission completely closed the gap. However, it’s a dynamic target and there is work remaining on both issues. 2025 presents some unique circumstances that I believe will allow the Commission build off last cycle’s decisions and to further close the loop on these issues.

In 2024, the salary gap between the County Treasurer and County Finance Manager was finally closed by the Salary Commission. For 2025, The County Finance Manager, along with the other county administrative department heads, was given a two-range increase on the County salary matrix. This increased the County Finance Manager’s salary from \$158,688 to \$183,660 in 2025. While I have not seen the justification for this increase, I am assuming that it is substantial and thoughtful as they raised all of administrative county managers by the same amount. Whatever the justification, I would assume the same logic could easily be applied to the County Treasurer.

Let’s look at the data

Unrepresented COLA Position	ACTUAL				
	2% 2021	3% 2022	6% ¹ 2023	4% 2024	3% 2025
County Treasurer	\$126,264	\$133,332	\$136,536	\$158,976 ²	\$173,654 ²
County Finance Manager Range 440 (old matrix) Range 14 (new matrix) Range 16 (new matrix amended)	\$136,008	\$140,088	\$152,592	\$158,688	\$183,660 ³
Difference	\$(9,744)	\$(6,756)	\$(16,056)	\$288	\$(10,006)

Note 1: In 2022, the County completed a salary survey of selected unrepresented positions. As a result, a new salary matrix for unrepresented employees was implemented effective 1/8/23. In addition to this matrix a general, across the board 4% salary increase was also added. The County’s implementation goal was for each employee to receive, at a minimum, a 6% increase in 2023. Some received increases as high as 9% depending upon individual circumstances. Range 440 in the old salary matrix is now Range 14 in the new salary matrix.

Note 2: Based upon the previous decision of the Salary Commission, the County Treasurer’s salary has three definitive salary levels across 2024 and 2025. From 1/1/2024 to 6/30/2024, the approved salary was \$136,536. From 7/1/2024 to 6/30/2025, the approved salary is \$166,932. From 7/1/2025 to

12/31/2025, the approved salary is \$173,654. For simplification purposes in the table above, I have listed the County Treasurer's salary in the 2024 column as what it was on 1/1/2024 and the salary in the 2025 column as what it will be at 12/31/2025.

Note 3: Effective January 2025, the range of the County Finance Manager was moved from a Range 14 to a Range 16 on the amended 2025 County salary matrix. The result of this change was about a \$20,000 salary increase.

Salary compression

My proposal also addresses the salary compression issue between the elected official and their second in command. With the implementation of the new unrepresented employee salary matrix, many previous ranges were combined into a single new range. The number of ranges went from 37 to just 20. This has the effect of consolidating many department head salaries and second in command salaries. The wage separation of the County finance manager and his second in command is currently about 25%. My second in command is compensated at the same level of the second in command to the County finance manager, so implementing my proposal would also solve the long-standing salary compression issue in an equitable manner. I do expect a salary adjustment to the County finance department's second in command, as the incumbent is retiring in March. This should also increase my second in command's salary by a range or two as well.

For many years, most County departments have maintained a 20% or greater gap between the salaries of County department head and their second in command. Many of the prior salary commissions had to face the issue where elected official second in commands made nearly the same salary of the elected official. In some cases, the second in command made more than the elected official. Although significant progress has been made through the efforts of the Commission, elected officials have generally not been able to achieve the same salary gap as other County departments until 2024.

Other Pertinent Information

The County Treasurer is an independent elected official AND a department head

Many of the duties and responsibilities rest solely with the County Treasurer alone. As a constitutionally created officer many of these duties and responsibilities are mandated by state law. The County Council or Executive have very limited control of the County Treasurer's operation outside of the fact that the County is required by state law to pay for its operation. The final decision-making authority largely rests with the County Treasurer. This isn't a flaw in the system but it was thoughtfully created and structured this way on purpose. The idea is to insulate the public trust and transparency from politics and to keep the County from wielding unreasonable power over the public treasury that could negatively impact the other 100+ public entities that the County Treasurer represents.

So, let's examine the County Treasurer and the County finance director. Both offices are of similar size, although I'd offer that my office is more efficient. Both offices are financial operations. The County Treasurer is responsible for the revenue side of the picture and the finance director is responsible for the budget side of the picture. The scope and nature of both

offices are similar and impactful. So why are they compensated differently within the same organization?

From my perspective, it is due to the fact that the County finance director only serves the County in its organizational capacity while the County Treasurer serves 100+ other public entities in addition to the County organization. Over 70% of the County Treasurer's operations are in service to other public entities. The County is just one of 100+ customers and they get the same great service as everyone else. From a purely organizational perspective, the County finance director is more important to County operations. However, from a larger perspective of local government operations, the County Treasurer is more important. This perspective has caused this compensation gap between the two positions to continue for decades within county government.

About the Comparable Counties Model

The Salary Commission should reject this concept in its entirety. This model comes from a 2001 PERC arbitration. I don't think you could get more irrelevant to this discussion. This mechanism was developed decades ago, and oddly clung onto, as a County bargaining tool for negotiating with the numerous bargaining units that represent County employees. The elected officials have never been in a position to bargain for their compensation before and are not bargaining with the Salary Commission. In fact, the elected officials requested the creation of the Salary Commission in search of fairness and equity.

You could look at other counties, but it can be a mixed bag of results. Some of the larger counties seem to value their elected officials with a more political lens and that drives them to more political salary decisions over objective and reasoned decisions. I think this has resulted in keeping elected official salaries artificially low in those counties. Some counties have term limits. A former Snohomish County Treasurer served two terms as treasurer, termed out, served two terms on the county council, termed out, then served two more terms as treasurer. I think their rotating door has also kept their salaries artificially low.

We tend to think of 'comparable' counties in terms of population, parcel count and tax roll size, but that doesn't always tell the entire story. Our county has an inordinate number of outside entities that I serve as their treasurer or provide some kind of service. I would be hard pressed to think of another county with more, except for King and Pierce counties. This creates a lot more roles and responsibilities in our county for the County Treasurer.

So Where Should We Look Then?

The obvious answer is to look in your own backyard for starters. We are in a unique situation in that we have a highly aligned internal County Finance Manager position to look toward. Across the street, we have the City of Bellingham's Finance Manager making about \$205,000. A couple blocks down the road, the Bellingham School District's top finance person makes about \$208,000. Down at the harbor, the Port of Bellingham CFO makes about \$200,000. These are my peers and local comparable positions. These are the types of comparisons that the County has literally refused to consider for decades for any and all County employees.

This Process Should Include an Aspiration Element and Be “Directionally Close”

Two years ago, a Salary Commissioner used the term “Directionally Close” and it has kind of stuck with me since. I firmly believe that the County needs a more aspirational view of future county government operations to effectively solve the wage, salary and human resources issues it faces throughout its operations. I think the concept of “directionally close” fits into that perspective. To a certain extent, I think the Salary Commission already exercises this perspective.

The Commission could collect a warehouse of data, draw a bunch of graphs, apply mathematical algorithms and regression models to the data that considers dozens of variables, and pinpoint an exact salary for each elected official. Is that what the County or the taxpayers expect? I don’t think so. I do think that many expect the Commission to consider relevant data, apply qualitative values and observations (the “directionally close” and “aspiration” elements) and then articulate a result that demonstrates how the Commission arrived at its final decision. From an elected official’s perspective, that clear explanation of how the Commission came to its final decision is important as it will help build continuity from Salary Commission to Salary Commission.

As I enter my 27th year at Whatcom County, my focus has turned to making sure the Treasurer’s Office is left in a better place and ready to respond to future demands. Your ideal candidate for this office is going to be a successful leader from government/private finance or accounting, banking, or investment management. What we choose to pay the County Treasurer will impact the pool of highly qualified individuals, especially and uniquely for someone coming from the finance industries.

I’m Not A Politician

The County Treasurer is not an elected official to make it political. In fact, it’s the exact opposite. The County Treasurer is elected to make it independent from political forces as much as possible. I have worked hard to maintain the office’s independence. I’m good at this position and I’m very qualified to do it. I’m happy to compare my skillsets and experiences with anyone, but I’ve also been elected by the voters, which no county department head can claim.



Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Question from Salary Commission

4 messages

Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Mon, Feb 3, 2025 at 4:44 PM

To: kkooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us, George Roche <GRoche@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Cc: Eric Richey <erichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Kellen and/or George - At the last meeting of the Whatcom County Salary Commission for Elected Officials a member of the public attended and asked the salary commission to consider some form of compensation and/or budget for the 2025 Whatcom County Charter Review Commission. The member of the public who serves on this commission stated that it was a big commitment of hours and that the commission had no budget to purchase any needed items (i.e. copies, offices supplies, etc).

Members of the salary commission voted to discuss this at their next meeting, but it's unclear to me if this commission has any authority to amend or recommend changes to the [Ordinance](#) that establishes the Salary Commission for Elected Officials. Prior to any discussion at the Commission I thought it would be helpful to get your opinion on the matter. Any information or guidance you can provide that I can share with the commissioners would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks -

Stacey Carroll

Facilitator for the Whatcom County Salary Commission for Elected Officials

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Stacey Carroll

President/Principal Consultant

HR Experts On-call

(360) 643-0503

Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Tue, Feb 4, 2025 at 9:40 AM

To: Stacey Carroll <Stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>, George Roche <GRoche@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Stacey,

The Charter Review Commission doesn't have any authority to change ordinances, just the charter. Currently the charter itself indicates that Charter Review Commission members serve without salary. The Commission could send a proposed amendment to the voters removing that prohibition, or replacing it with some other provision providing for compensation for members. Should the prohibition on salary be removed, my understanding is that it would be up to the council to amend the ordinance to include Charter Review Commissioners among the officers covered by the Salary Commission. Hope that makes some sense, let me know if you have other questions. Thanks

Kellen

[Quoted text hidden]

Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Wed, Feb 5, 2025 at 9:49 PM

To: Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Cc: George Roche <GRoche@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Kellen - Thank you so much for this response. As a point of clarification - when you say "The Commission could send a proposed amendment to the voters . . . ". Do you mean the a) Charter Review Commission or b) the Whatcom County Salary Commission for Elected Positions or c) Either?

The "Salary Commission" made a decision to discuss this at the next meeting, but I want to make sure I provide the right guidance on what the Salary Commission is allowed to do either collectively as a group or alternatively as a group of individuals who happen to all serve on the Salary Commission.

THanks -
Stacey

[Quoted text hidden]

Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Thu, Feb 6, 2025 at 8:52 AM

To: Stacey Carroll <Stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Cc: George Roche <GRoche@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Sorry for the ambiguity, I meant the Charter Review Commission could send an amendment to the voters. I don't believe anyone can give the Charter Review Commissioners a salary unless and until the charter is amended to remove the provision saying they will serve without salary. Thanks

[Quoted text hidden]

**Whatcom County
Auditor's Office**

Whatcom County Courthouse
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 103
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038



Stacy Henthorn
County Auditor

February 21, 2025

Members of the Whatcom County Salary Commission,

Thank you for serving as a member of the Salary Commission. I recognize the time commitment you are making to this important process and I appreciate the opportunity to provide answers to your questions regarding the County Auditor's salary placement.

1. Essential Functions of the County Auditor

The duties and responsibilities of the County Auditor are diverse and wide-ranging. The County Auditor has the responsibility for maintaining the voter registration database and administering all federal, state, and local elections; recording and maintaining permanent property records; issuing state marriage licenses and process server registrations; and acting as Washington State Department of Licensing's (DOL) agent for vehicle and vessel transactions with oversight of six privately owned licensing subagent offices throughout Whatcom County including inventory control, auditing, and training.

2. Scope of Responsibilities

As County Auditor, I am responsible for providing elections, recording, and licensing services county-wide. These duties are mandated by federal, state, and county statutes and require an in-depth understanding of each diverse division each having very specific timelines. My staff includes 16 full-time, 3 temps, and during peak election times hiring up to 55 additional workers. I manage a budget with expenditures of 3.4 million annually not including grant funds. I am responsible for very complex operations from cyber security to physical security. I oversee numerous tasks including managing 30 plus contracts (software, equipment, and operation), 21 permanent ballot drop box locations, publishing a local voters' pamphlet, community outreach, and so much more.

3. Process and Outcome of the Last Salary Commission to Determine Salaries

I was elected in 2024 so I was not part of the last salary commission process. However, I am aware of the outcome. I appreciated the salary commission's conclusion to adopt a salary that aligns with administrative department heads to make the Auditor, Assessor, and Treasurer's salary equitable to a department head salary for the IT Manager, HR Manager, and Finance Manager. Once again, currently, there is a disparity in compensation with the department heads earning \$10,006 more annually.

The chart below shows the Auditor, Treasurer and Assessor salary placement compared to three county department heads. It shows the inequity both in terms of salary and in the salary compression between the head of the office and the second-in-command position:

Auditor/Assessor/Treasurer	\$173,654
Chief Deputy	\$137,244
% salary differential	20.97%
IT Manager/HR Manager/Finance Manger	\$183,660
Assistant Manager	\$137,244
% Salary Differential	25.27%

In addition, the salary differential between the top position and the second in command is smaller for the elected officials than the administrative departments. At the same time, the elected officials' responsibilities outweigh those of the internal administrative offices. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask for the Auditor, Assessor, Treasurer to receive the same or surpass the current department heads salary to be compensated fairly.

4. Determining Position Salaries

Department head salaries can be considered comparable however these administrative department heads fall under the elected County Executive who is responsible for these departments. As an elected official, I am ultimately responsible for my office. Likewise, this is true for the Assessor and Treasurer. We are each an independently elected County official and a department head.

5. Position Responsible in Your Absence

My Chief Deputy steps in to perform most of my duties in my absence, however I am ultimately responsible for the office.

6. My Educational Background/Work Experience

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration with a minor in small business management. I have 20 years of leadership experience in the Auditor's Office. I am state certified as an Elections Administrator and a Licensing Operator. I've served on numerous state committees representing county auditors from legislation to state standardization work groups. I am an active member of the National Association of Election Officials and Property Records Industry Association (PRIA). I've worked on several committees to provide technical advice on new legislation and to strengthen the Washington State County Auditor's Association (WSACA). This work included all divisions: licensing, recording, and elections.

I've also worked in retail management for seven years as an Operations Manager and Store Manager for Circuit City.

7. Education and Experience Necessary for the Position

A successful candidate for County Auditor has experience directing, planning and overseeing daily activities and operations of the Auditor's office including administering elections, recording, and vehicle and vessel licensing. They should have the ability to evaluate operating procedures, systems, and equipment to recommend changes or implement new procedures, systems, and laws. In addition, they require the skills to communicate through multiple platforms, manage multiple deadlines and projects with an ability to prioritize tasks, manage people, and budgets.

Thank you for your time. Please contact me for additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy Henthorn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stacy Henthorn
Whatcom County Auditor

**Whatcom County
Assessor's Office**
County Courthouse
311 Grand Ave, Suite 106
Bellingham, WA 98225
assessor@co.whatcom.wa.us



Rebecca Xczar
County Assessor

Falon Hoven
Chief Deputy

Memorandum

To: Whatcom County Salary Commission
From: Rebecca Xczar, Whatcom County Assessor
Date: February 21, 2025
RE: Requested Information and Salary Commentary

Salary Commission members,

Thank you for your service on this commission. The Salary Commission plays a vital role in the County and your willingness to participate and contribute is appreciated.

Questions from the Salary Commission:

1) Please briefly describe the essential functions of your position.

The duties of an elected Assessor are set in statute. The Assessor values all property in the county for property tax purposes, updates and maintains records of ownership, maintains maps of all property in the county, administers several property tax exemptions, and calculates levies for taxing districts. Property tax accounts for approx. 30% of the total state and local taxes. It is the primary revenue source for public schools, fire protection, libraries, and parks. State law requires assessors to appraise property at 100% of market value, revalue every property annually, physically inspect 1/6th of the county per year, add all new construction annually, calculate personal property listings, etc. Accuracy, uniformity, and correct reporting are vital to the public and all taxing districts, which includes the County. The Assessor is an elected position to maintain a separation of power. The Assessor answers to the people, the taxing districts, and the Department of Revenue. The Assessor must learn and maintain working knowledge of an extensive number of RCW's, WAC's, Dept of Revenue advisories and guidelines, and keep track of pending legislation annually that may impact property value, property tax, taxing districts, or administration of any of those.

The Assessor is also a Department Head. I manage an office of 32 people. I must comply with HR and employee union expectations, follow county Finance policies and procedures, as well as work with other departments and follow their policies and procedures. I have all the same requirements as other department heads, with the exception that the sole responsibility rests with me. I answer to the public.

2) Please describe your scope of responsibilities. Such as:

number of direct reports: 4; Chief Deputy, 2 managers, Admin Specialist

total staff size: 32

budget managed: 2025 budget= \$4,828,751

level of decisions made with impact on the county:

Following all RCW's, WAC's, and Dept of Revenue guidance to uniformly and accurately value all property in the county for property tax purposes directly impacts all citizens in the county. Property value impacts property tax which impacts property owners, typically renters, and business owners. Fairness, equity, and compliance with the law are vital. Calculating property tax levies ensures taxing districts can collect their legally allowed property tax budgets, including new construction value which requires annual work adding new construction values to the rolls. These tasks must be completed accurately and timely, as a core county service.

What (if any) changes have there been in recent years to your position and/or scope of responsibilities:

In 2023, Dept of Revenue had an increased focus on Counties out of compliance with state law, regarding assessed values at market value, which included Whatcom County. Assessed values were increased county wide to get compliant with state law, which caused a significant number of appeals to the Board of Equalization. Management of that appeal load was beyond the capacity of our staff level. Hard decisions were made based on legal requirements, staffing capacity, my extensive personal hours worked for over many months, balancing past practice and customer service level expectations, and research and implementation of new online tools. We do intend to maintain an assessed value to sale price ratio moving forward that meets Dept of Revenue guidelines regarding compliance with state law, which will continue a higher level of appeals than historically typical, in years to come.

Additionally, in 2023, the State Legislature increased the qualifying income levels for the exemption program for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, effective 2024. For Whatcom County, qualifying levels went from \$42,000 to \$52,000. The office saw an increased number of applicants for the senior program due to this new threshold, which is a complex application process for each requiring tax returns, income documentation, and often medical receipts. An additional staff person was added in 2024 due to these two increased demands, as well as new technology tools such as an online exemption application portal launching soon. Technology tools have been a vital addition, and each require a significant amount of time and resources to research, work within county policies and with other departments, secure contracts, train staff, and implement.

Within the past 2.5 years, total staff has increased from 30 to 32. The job requires significant people managing. There have been multiple retirements including key management staff, some additional staff that have moved on, in addition to the two new positions; 52% of the staff have been in the office for 5 years or less, with 26% being new to the office within the past year, which has been an added workload of interviewing, hiring, training, and managing staff. Many county departments and other agencies have

experienced similar levels of turnover in the past several years, which is not specific to my office, but is an added workload for all impacted.

3) Please describe your thoughts on the process and the outcome the last salary commission used to determine salaries. Such as:

- **the structure of basing salaries on a state position and then internal alignment with other elected positions in the County.**

Internal alignment with other County Department Heads was my primary recommendation to the salary commission in 2023. The structure of basing salaries on a state position was a reasonable measure, as it was reasonably aligned with the County Administrative Managers.

I would not recommend tying salaries to other elected positions in the county moving forward, especially since the Charter Review Commission is discussing other structures.

- **Basing the decision in part on ensuring the salaries proposed exceeded the highest direct report (i.e. "second in command")**

I agree salaries should exceed the highest direct report, with a similar difference to other county departments. My Chief Deputy is at range 11, which is the same range as the IT, HR, Finance, and Facilities' Associate Managers/ second in command positions.

- **Was there anything missing, over or under emphasized from the last process? What additional factors would you like us to take under consideration?**

Parity with other Department Heads is the fairest way to set my elected salary.

4) What other position salaries should be considered when determining your position's salary?

Whatcom County Department Heads should be considered when determining the elected salaries. The Assessor is an elected official and a department head. In 2021, the Salary Commission aligned the 2022 Assessor pay with the top step of Range 440 for 2021. This was an attempt to align the elected offices of the Assessor, Treasurer, and Auditor, with the lowest-paid department heads/ administrative managers. However, the Range 440 staff then received a 2% COLA for 2021, after the salary commission set elected officials' salaries. Since then, the other Dept Heads received COLAs every year, and a reorganization, and then a reclassification. Due to the reorganization, Range 440 became Range 14. Then in 2024, the Administrative Managers were reclassified to Directors, from Range 14 to Range 16.

My office is near the median for FTE responsibilities, yet my salary is at the bottom of the range, and below the county departments of non-elected officials.

Title	Range	Current Top Step	Future Top Step	FTE's
Finance Director	16	\$183,660	\$189,170	19
HR Director	16	\$183,660	\$189,170	9
IT Director	16	\$183,660	\$189,170	27
Facilities Director	16	\$183,660	\$189,170	32
Parks Director	17	\$194,676	\$200,516	32
Health Director	17	\$194,676	\$200,516	154
PDS Director	17	\$194,676	\$200,516	53
Superior Court Director	17	\$194,676	\$200,516	68
Public Defender	17	\$194,676	\$200,516	50
Public Works Director	18	\$206,352	\$212,543	192
Assessor		\$166,932	\$173,654	32
Auditor		\$166,932	\$173,654	17
Treasurer		\$166,932	\$173,654	15
Prosecuting Attorney		\$228,261	\$237,460	60
Sheriff		\$221,208	\$237,246	225
*Future for Directors is expected 3% COLA Jan 2026				
**Future for EO's is as of 7/1/2025				

***FTE totals taken from 2025 budget documents.

5) Is your Deputy the position that would have responsibility for your duties in your absence? If not, what position would or what combination of positions would have responsibility?

Yes, my Chief Deputy is responsible for my duties in my absence.

6) What is your educational background, and what is your previous relevant work experience?

I have been in office just over 5 years, as County Assessor. This is my second term in office, and I did not work for the County previously. I am a Certified Residential Real Estate Appraiser, with 22 years' experience appraising property in Whatcom County. I previously served on the Ferndale City Council in addition to running my own appraisal business, with prior years served on the Ferndale Planning Commission and other city boards and commissions. I have a BA in Business from Western Washington University. I am a small business co-owner, and current chairperson of two volunteer groups. I was the president of the Washington State Association of County Assessors in 2023.

7) In your experience in the position, what is the education and experience necessary for the position (i.e. is there anything you believe is necessary for the position)?

Being the Assessor requires a unique blend of experience. The position requires technical knowledge about property values and appraisal, public service and strong customer service skills, staff management, and ability to interpret and follow extensive state laws and government agency guidance.

Conclusion

I believe my position should be paid equal to other department heads within the county. While the Assessor is an elected position, it is required to function as a department head as well. It is important to attract and retain qualified elected officials to fill this vital role.

My salary for 2026 should be set at the top step of Range 16, with an anticipated 3% COLA.

My recommendation:

2026	2027
Range 16, top step, w/3% COLA	3% COLA
\$189,170	\$194,845

Thank you for your time and consideration as a member of the Salary Commission, and for allowing me to provide information and input. I look forward to being involved in this process, and am happy to provide any additional information needed.



Satpal Singh Sidhu
BSc, BSEE, MBA, Fulbright Scholar
Whatcom County Executive



Date: February 25, 2025

TO: Whatcom County salary Commission

RE: Questions from Salary Commission:

1. Please briefly describe the essential functions of your position.

I am the head of the Executive Branch of the Whatcom County Government.

The Role of County Executive is defined the County Charter for overall responsibilities and administrative powers.

I report to the legislative Branch, the seven Member County Council for my Administrative responsibilities and execution of the all ordinances and policy directives enacted by the Council. In addition to that it is my responsibility to ensure that all State and Federal laws are obeyed by the County Government. My essential functions are, but not limited to:

- **Vision and Strategy Development:**

Visioning the policy direction to secure the future economic and social health of the county residents. Develop strategies to administer the Council policy directions to achieve the goals set by the Council.

Propose new ordinances / resolutions to the Council for approval or provide input to the ordinances / resolution being proposed by Council before and during the policy development phase.

I do have the authority to veto for reasonable cause any ordinance / resolution passed by the Council.



Satpal Singh Sidhu
BSc, BSEE, MBA, Fulbright Scholar
Whatcom County Executive



- Treasurer

Direct reports:

Executive Office has Two Dy Executives, Two other Senior Managers and support Staff.

Department Head direct reports are: 10

Administrative Services: Four Countywide Services department:

- Finance
- Information Tech
- Facilities and
- Human Resources

Total employees: over 1050

Annual Budget (Operating and Capital and Grants): \$400 million (approx.)

Executive Office makes overarching decisions about County's Admin, Budget allocations, Performance of Dept Heads and the Implementing the Policy Goals of Council

County population has grown 200K to 245K in the past decade. County Executive has now TWO Dy Executive since 2024.

3. Please describe your thoughts on the process and the outcome the last salary commission used to determine salaries. Such as:

- the structure of basing salaries on a state position and then internal alignment with other elected positions in the County.
- Basing the decision in part on ensuring the salaries proposed exceeded the highest direct report (i.e. "second in command")
- Was there anything missing, over or under emphasized from the last process? What additional factors would you like us to take under consideration?

I believe the salaries for County Executive and Elected Officials are commensurate with their jobs, when compared to other similar counties. However, the variations are different for different positions.

It is reasonable to policy that elected official salary shall exceed the salary of direct reports. However, the process of hiring skilled and subject matter expert employees in your department is competitive with “private sector” salaries. So many times, in recent years, it has been an obstacle for County to entice well qualifies employees because governments salaries lag behind private sector (e.g. engineers and attorneys) and this gap is eve widening in past decade. The salary gap for elected official with similar responsibilities is much bigger compared to private sector.

County Executive is NOT the highest paid employee of the County, it is the Medical Examiner.

Currently, all combined salaries of Elected Officials including Council members’ is approx. \$2 million (includes benefits), which is 0.5% (one half percent) of the budget. Elected Judges (wages set by WA Supreme Court), account for roughly over \$1.5 million wages (0.375% of Budget). Total salaries of all county employees are closer \$100 million.

3. What other position salaries should be considered when determining your position's salary?

Usually the comparison is made for other similar Counties, which in reverse do the same for their own comparison. This is not objective comparison methodology. I am not sure, how to get away from this tradition. In the beginning, some 250 years ago the elected government positions were designated as “public service” and salary was not much of a consideration. However, the world has changed a lot in past 250 years.

4. Is your Deputy the position that would have responsibility for your duties in your absence? If not, what position would or what combination of positions would have responsibility?

Yes.

5. What is your educational background, and what is your previous relevant work experience?

BSc in Math and Physics

BSc in Electrical Engineering

Master’s in Business Administration

Licensed Professional Engineer

Fulbright Scholar (US State Dept scholarship for International Study)

I have worked as Senior Executive internationally in US, Asia and Europe.



Satpal Singh Sidhu
BSc, BSEE, MBA, Fulbright Scholar
Whatcom County Executive



6. In your experience in the position, what is the education and experience necessary for the position (i.e. is there anything you believe is necessary for the position)?

Any citizen in good standing is eligible to stand for election as County Executive. It is six months to one year long public interview process by some 175,000 local voters to choose the County Executive among many contenders. So “candidate qualifications” in the traditional sense of skills needed for the job is not always in sync with the process used for “hiring” or “Electing” a County Executive. Matching the qualifications to the Job requirements is a huge question for the democratic process of governance, which is engrained in our constitution some 250 years ago. However, the workings of the government have so many checks and balances that the system does work most of the time.

This does lead to Bureaucratic Governance Syndrome meaning the “bureaucrats end up virtual governing entity, because of their expertise, Institutional memory, longer tenure (longevity) and past practices and procedures. On the contrary, elected officials lack some of these attributes, which they seek (or learn) from bureaucrats.”

Our current political system is so broken and riddled with disrepute that it discourages numerous qualified and well-meaning citizens to go through this public “interview process” to serve as Subject Matter Expert elected official. However, it may not be possible to change that.

Thank you in advance for your participation and cooperation. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any clarifying questions.

Sincerely,
Satpal Singh Sidhu

Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive



Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Your request of the Salary Commission

6 messages

Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Wed, Feb 19, 2025 at 1:46 PM

To: MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us

Cc: Eric Richey <erichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Kellen Kooistra <kkooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Maya - First of all, I want to thank you for attending the "Salary Commission" meeting the last few weeks as a citizen. You brought forward an issue that you hoped the Salary Commission would address regarding their ability to set compensation and/or budget for the WC Charter Review Committee. We got an opinion from Kellen Kooistra regarding the Commissions' ability to make changes. The short answer is no. I understand you may disagree with this opinion and provided a lengthy explanation to the commissioners to support your point of view. I've confirmed that remedying this disagreement is outside of the experience and time allowed for the Salary Commission. Therefore, at the next meeting I will let the Commission know they should focus on the task assigned to them in the currently approved resolution.

It's also been brought to my attention there may be changes to the charter that would create a different method for setting salaries. I'm certain that in the future if there is a change to the process that will be addressed during the implementation planning.

Thanks again for your active involvement in County government processes!

Sincerely,
Stacey

--

Stacey Carroll

President/Principal Consultant

HR Experts On-call

(360) 643-0503

Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Wed, Feb 19, 2025 at 2:32 PM

To: Stacey Carroll <Stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Dear Stacy, et al;

I'd like to clarify that I have attended two Salary Commission meetings (it's second and third meetings) as a currently elected Charter Review Commissioner, explicitly wearing my commissioner hat, and having submitted a formal memo of request to the Salary Commission, with specific asks that pertain to my office.

I did not attend as a private citizen, and it seems you are a bit confused about that, so I'd like to clarify for you.

As an elected County Official, it is within the powers and in fact the duty of my office to ask for information of other officials, and bodies.

I have send my substantive response to your earlier email to the Chair of the Salary Review Commission, whom is the appropriate person for me to be corresponding with about Charter Review matters.

Thank you ,

Maya Morales

Whatcom County Charter Review Commissioner, District 2

From: Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2025 1:46 PM
To: Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>; Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Subject: Your request of the Salary Commission

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To: Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Wed, Feb 19, 2025 at 5:05 PM

Thanks for clarifying your position. I'll respect that you have directed your memo to Chair Shaddix and have chosen not to include me. I will take her and the commissions direction on how to proceed.

For what it's worth, I'll share this with you. This is a group of individuals who come together for a very specific, narrow focus and their appointment is for about 3 months (30 hours total). Most are not deeply entrenched in the inner workings of county government processes. They are citizens who want to contribute and make a difference. That may prove to be an obstacle to your desired outcome.

I'll wait for their direction.

Thanks-
Stacey

Stacey Carroll
President/Principal Consultant
HR Experts On-call
(360) 643-0503

On Wed, Feb 19, 2025 at 2:32 PM Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us> wrote:

Dear Stacy, et al;

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I did not attend as a private citizen, and it seems you are a bit confused about that, so I'd like to clarify for you.

As an elected County Official, it is within the powers and in fact the duty of my office to ask for information of other officials, and bodies.

I have send my substantive response to your earlier email to the Chair of the Salary Review Commission, whom is the appropriate person for me to be corresponding with about Charter Review matters.

Thank you ,

Maya Morales
Whatcom County Charter Review Commissioner, District 2

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Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>; Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>
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Sincerely,
Stacey

--

Stacey Carroll
President/Principal Consultant
HR Experts On-call
(360) 643-0503

Rebecca Sadwick Shaddix <rebecca.sadwick@gmail.com>
To: Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Mon, Feb 24, 2025 at 3:36 PM

Hi Maya,

Thank you for the time and thoughtfulness you put into researching and presenting your perspective on this matter. We appreciate it.

Regarding your concern about Stacey Carroll's outreach: she is tasked with handling necessary correspondence, meeting organization, and communication on behalf of the Commission.

I wanted to reiterate her point that we reviewed and sought input regarding the question you raised about the Commission's ability to set compensation or budget for the WC Charter Review Committee. After discussing the facts

currently at hand, we concluded that the Salary Commission does not have the authority to make the requested changes at this time.

I understand you may see this differently, and I appreciate the time you took to provide a detailed explanation of your perspective. However, after reviewing the Commission's scope, I've confirmed that this issue falls outside its role and the time allotted for its work.

Given that, I am going to keep the Commission focused on the task outlined in the approved resolution, which is setting salaries for the elected officials previously identified.

If and when there are changes to the charter that could affect how salaries are determined, I'm sure those updates will be addressed during the implementation process. For this session of the Salary Commission, we won't be discussing this matter further.

Again, thank you for your involvement and for bringing your thoughtful perspective. Your commitment to constituents in Whatcom County is admirable, and I appreciate the time and energy you've put into these discussions. I'll keep an eye out for the great work you're doing on behalf of Whatcom County, and hope that our paths will cross again in the future.

Warm regards,
Rebecca

On Wed, Feb 19, 2025 at 2:22 PM Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us> wrote:

Dear Chair Sadwick;

I am a bit confused as to why I have heard from an outside apparently hired consultant, rather than our Salary Commission Chair. I'd love to have clarity on that!

I have not asked for this commission to *apply* a salary to the Charter Review Commission – I am fully aware that is not possible under the current authority vested in the salary commission by our Charter.

What I have asked of the Salary commission is to consider the following requests:

III. Three requests for the good members of this Commission to consider:

1. Should it please the commission, I ask for your discussion on the question of whether the clause in Section 8.13 declaring that our elected Charter Review Commission shall serve without salary should be severed from our Charter; and
2. *If* our Charter Review Commissioners *were* legally provisioned by our Charter to salaries for FY 2024-2025 in a manner consistent with its review of our other elected and deliberative legislative body (our Council), what would this commission consider to be a reasonable salary for this elected role? and
3. Should the commission discuss and conclude that it is in agreement with the need to remove the clause in Section 8.13 which codified that our elected Charter Review Commission should serve without salary, I humbly request that this body;
 - Prepare a brief memo for our County Executive, County Council and Charter Review Commission in support of my request for a remedy, and draft a brief resolution regarding the need to sever what is actually the enactment of pay inequality from our Charter; and
 - If supportive of a this effort to bring pay equity across our elected County offices, to consider attending an upcoming Charter Review Commission Meeting in person or remotely for some Q&A, with the inclusion of this body's memorandum and resolution in our Charter Review Commission Meeting agenda packet.

I have asked for this review because it seems important that we modernize and update our charter. While there is another charter amendment proposed that would alter the way salaries for elected officials are set, if adopted, that amendment actually conflicts with mine, as it has been drafted and noticed to our commission, that amendment does not include the Charter Review commission in its list of salaried electeds, *and* it is has not even been deliberated, let alone adopted. I am also concerned that adding that the Charter into that other amendment would in effect position the Charter Review Commission as setting its own pay/salary.

Thus, I would like to ask that my requests of the salary commission be honored with the same weight and consideration as the other amendment that was I now understand was brought to you for review, (I had not known of or been informed about this amendment until after it was sent out in our agenda packet, and until after I had notified commissioners that mine would be in our packet) offered by Commissioner Reding. My hope is that we may be able to find a way to harmonize these amendments, however; I would strongly prefer to do thorough research, and have objective parties looking into what an elected vs appointed Charter Review Commissioner should be reasonably be salaried prior to discussing that with the full charter review commission.

Paying elected officials is not my area of expertise, but it is the purview of your appointed body, and it *does* seem to be an area of expertise for the Salary Review Commission. So, as a current elected considering this question of salary for the Charter Review Commission, I am sincerely asking for your commission's advisement.

I appreciate your further input, and thank you for considering my follow-up.

Very truly yours,

~Maya

Maya Morales
Whatcom County Charter Review Commissioner, District 2

From: Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2025 1:46 PM
To: Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>; Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>
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It's also been brought to my attention there may be changes to the charter that would create a different method for setting salaries. I'm certain that in the future if there is a change to the process that will be addressed during the implementation planning.

Thanks again for your active involvement in County government processes!

Sincerely,
Stacey

--

Stacey Carroll
President/Principal Consultant
HR Experts On-call
(360) 643-0503

Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Wed, Feb 26, 2025 at 12:02 AM

To: Rebecca Sadwick Shaddix <rebecca.sadwick@gmail.com>

Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Stacey Carroll <Stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Dear Chair Shaddix and Stacy;

Thank you for your thoughtful responses. I appreciate your review of my memo and formal requests of your body as a Charter Review Commissioner.

I'd like to once again reiterate that *I have not requested that the Salary Commission newly enact current pay or budget for currently elected Charter Review Commissioners*, which seems to be a continuing misunderstanding here. But, I did include a preponderance of information, food for thought, and detail, which in retrospect, I suppose wasn't necessary! I understand how that may have been confusing for folks.

My hope was to have your commissions' input to enable a more informed discussion by our Charter Review Commission on these matters, as we consider amendments that would ask voters to continue, or to abolish, your salary commission going forward, and whether to update our charter and provide salary to the elected Charter Review officials (via two different amendments, mine and Commissioner Reding's).

However, I must respect your commission's time and choice not to engage any of my requests. I'll note that I attempted to elicit this info in my address to the public, so that at least voters know I did my best to get our salary commission's expert input and guidance as to how a salary for a future Charter Review Commission might reasonably be assessed. I do anticipate that could be one of the first questions fellow commissioners may ask as we deliberate.

I remain concerned that a combination of my amendment with the other amendment, and stipulating a Charter Review Commissioner salary based on a multiple of a state wage, as Commissioner Reding's framework calls for with the other elected roles, may be perceived as a body setting its own pay, given that we have Charter Review Commissioners that have served multiple times, and whom were actually involved in setting and then retaining their *lack* of pay, which I personally do view as somewhat of a conflict of interest. Commissioner Reding seems unbothered by that, though, and feels that setting it to a state wage presents no conflict. If anyone has thoughts on that, feel free to reach out to me.

Wishing you, your fellow commissioners, and Stacy, the very best in your salary review process. I appreciate your time and efforts, and appreciate your review of my memo and this email. I will look forward to seeing you all around in community as well! Although I may not recognize folks from a single zoom, so please do forgive me in advance!

Very Truly Yours,

~Maya

From: Rebecca Sadwick Shaddix <rebecca.sadwick@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 3:36 PM

To: Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>; Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>; Stacey Carroll <Stacey@HRExpertsOncall.com>

Subject: Re: Your request of the Salary Commission

Hi Maya,

Thank you for the time and thoughtfulness you put into researching and presenting your perspective on this matter. We appreciate it.

Regarding your concern about Stacey Carroll's outreach: she is tasked with handling necessary correspondence, meeting organization, and communication on behalf of the Commission.

I wanted to reiterate her point that we reviewed and sought input regarding the question you raised about the Commission's ability to set compensation or budget for the WC Charter Review Committee. After discussing the facts currently at hand, we concluded that the Salary Commission does not have the authority to make the requested changes at this time.

I understand you may see this differently, and I appreciate the time you took to provide a detailed explanation of your perspective. However, after reviewing the Commission's scope, I've confirmed that this issue falls outside its role and the time allotted for its work.

Given that, I am going to keep the Commission focused on the task outlined in the approved resolution, which is setting salaries for the elected officials previously identified.

If and when there are changes to the charter that could affect how salaries are determined, I'm sure those updates will be addressed during the implementation process. For this session of the Salary Commission, we won't be discussing this matter further.

Again, thank you for your involvement and for bringing your thoughtful perspective. Your commitment to constituents in Whatcom County is admirable, and I appreciate the time and energy you've put into these discussions. I'll keep an eye out for the great work you're doing on behalf of Whatcom County, and hope that our paths will cross again in the future.

Warm regards,
Rebecca

On Wed, Feb 19, 2025 at 2:22 PM Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us> wrote:

Dear Chair Sadwick;

I am a bit confused as to why I have heard from an outside apparently hired consultant, rather than our Salary Commission Chair. I'd love to have clarity on that!

I have not asked for this commission to *apply* a salary to the Charter Review Commission – I am fully aware that is not possible under the current authority vested in the salary commission by our Charter.

What I have asked of the Salary commission is to consider the following requests:

III. Three requests for the good members of this Commission to consider:

1. Should it please the commission, I ask for your discussion on the question of whether the clause in Section 8.13 declaring that our elected Charter Review Commission shall serve without salary should be severed from our Charter; and

2. *If* our Charter Review Commissioners *were* legally provisioned by our Charter to salaries for FY 2024-2025 in a manner consistent with its review of our other elected and deliberative legislative body (our Council), what would this commission consider to be a reasonable salary for this elected role? and

3. Should the commission discuss and conclude that it is in agreement with the need to remove the clause in Section 8.13 which codified that our elected Charter Review Commission should serve without salary, I humbly request that this body;

- Prepare a brief memo for our County Executive, County Council and Charter Review Commission in support of my request for a remedy, and draft a brief resolution regarding the need to sever what is actually the enactment of pay inequality from our Charter; and
- If supportive of a this effort to bring pay equity across our elected County offices, to consider attending an upcoming Charter Review Commission Meeting in person or remotely for some Q&A, with the inclusion of this body's memorandum and resolution in our Charter Review Commission Meeting agenda packet.

I have asked for this review because it seems important that we modernize and update our charter. While there is another charter amendment proposed that would alter the way salaries for elected officials are set, if adopted, that amendment actually conflicts with mine, as it has been drafted and noticed to our commission, that amendment does not include the Charter Review commission in its list of salaried electeds, *and* it is has not even been deliberated, let alone adopted. I am also concerned that adding that the Charter into that other amendment would in effect position the Charter Review Commission as setting its own pay/salary.

Thus, I would like to ask that my requests of the salary commission be honored with the same weight and consideration as the other amendment that was I now understand was brought to you for review, (I had not known of or been informed about this amendment until after it was sent out in our agenda packet, and until after I had notified commissioners that mine would be in our packet) offered by Commissioner Reding. My hope is that we may be able to find a way to harmonize these amendments, however; I would strongly prefer to do thorough research, and have objective parties looking into what an elected vs appointed Charter Review Commissioner should be reasonably be salaried prior to discussing that with the full charter review commission.

Paying elected officials is not my area of expertise, but it is the purview of your appointed body, and it *does* seem to be an area of expertise for the Salary Review Commission. So, as a current elected considering this question of salary for the Charter Review Commission, I am sincerely asking for your commission's advisement.

I appreciate your further input, and thank you for considering my follow-up.

Very truly yours,

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Maya Morales
Whatcom County Charter Review Commissioner, District 2

From: Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2025 1:46 PM
To: Maya Morales <MMorales@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Cc: Eric Richey <ERichey@co.whatcom.wa.us>; Kellen Kooistra <KKooistr@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Subject: Your request of the Salary Commission

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compensation and/or budget for the WC Charter Review Committee. We got an opinion from Kellen Kooistra regarding the Commissions' ability to make changes. The short answer is no. I understand you may disagree with this opinion and provided a lengthy explanation to the commissioners to support your point of view. I've confirmed that remedying this disagreement is outside of the experience and time allowed for the Salary Commission. Therefore, at the next meeting I will let the Commission know they should focus on the task assigned to them in the currently approved resolution.

It's also been brought to my attention there may be changes to the charter that would create a different method for setting salaries. I'm certain that in the future if there is a change to the process that will be addressed during the implementation planning.

Thanks again for your active involvement in County government processes!

Sincerely,
Stacey

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Stacey Carroll
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(360) 643-0503

Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Wed, Feb 26, 2025 at 12:43 PM

To: Ralph Foldenauer <ralphf@dewaardandbode.com>, Rebecca Sadwick Shaddix <rebeccasadwick@gmail.com>, Vanessa Bronsema <vanessab@ridewta.com>, Brennen Brown <brennen_james@yahoo.com>, Tracie Gulit <tracieg@windermere.com>, "Karen@BuriFunston.com" <Karen@burifunston.com>, Gary Wrightson <garywrightson1@gmail.com>, Sonya Luhm <SonyaL.Bellingham@gmail.com>, Guy Occhiogrosso <guy@bellingham.com>, Daniel Darwin <president@atu843.org>

Commissioners - I'll get this email string added to the formal record, but wanted to send this along so you had it prior to the meeting. It will be added to a revised agenda as an attachment along with Executive Sidhu's written statement.

Thanks-
Stacey

----- Forwarded message -----

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