



SALARY REVIEW COMMITTEE

CITY OF KENT ■ 320 S. DEPEYSTER STREET ■ KENT, OHIO 44240 ■ 330-678-8007

MEETING MINUTES

July 27, 2021

This meeting of the Salary Review Committee of Kent City Council was called to order at 4:30 p.m. on **Tuesday July 27, 2021** by Chair, Dr. Tom Pascarella.

PRESENT: DR. TOM PASCARELLA, MR. JEFF ROEGER (ALTERNATE) MR. WARNER MENDENHALL (ALTERNATE), MS. KATHIE SLATER, MR. BENJAMIN TIPTON

ALSO PRESENT: MR. JERRY FIALA, MAYOR & PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL; MS. HOPE JONES, LAW DIRECTOR; MS. RHONDA HALL, BUDGET AND FINANCE DIRECTOR; MS. AMY WILKENS, CLERK OF COUNCIL

MOTION TO APPROVE MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 13, 2021 made by Mr. Tipton, SECONDED by Dr. Pascarella and CARRIED by a voice vote of 3-0-0.

Discussion:

Dr. Pascarella opened the meeting by introducing the two councilmembers, Mr. Roger Sidoti and Mr. Jack Amrhein who were in attendance to answer questions previously submitted by the committee.

Mr. Sidoti thanked the Committee Members for their work and results that will be provided to City Administration and City Council.

Mr. Amrhein thanked the committee and began with a brief statement. He explained there are two meetings per month, the Committee Meetings and the Regular Council Meeting. He spends about two hours preparing for the Committee Meetings, as there is a lot of information presented prior to the meeting and the meeting could last up to 2.5 hours. Council Meeting preparation is approximately an hour with the meeting usually lasting one to two hours. He also serves on the Board of Health which meets every month and spends approximately an hour preparing for a two-hour meeting. Phone calls, complaints and discussions with residents occupy some of his time; he received six phone calls from residents in the month of July for various reasons that require investigation, phone calls to administration and follow up. He has had 71 emails so far

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this month to read with 20 needing responded to. There are a lot of extras that aren't planned in any given month, such as the Capital Plan review and Budget Review.

Mayor Fiala added Mr. Amrhein is also the Pro-Temp and fills in for Mayor Fiala in his absence.

Mr. Sidoti said his role as an At-Large Council Member is to support the whole town and each council member. Most of his time is spent talking to residents and reading emails, forwarded information and other items. He spends approximately ten or so hours per week on top of meetings. He handles issues the residents bring to him and is on the phone a lot with constituents, Mayor Fiala and city administration. He keeps current with the Board of Zoning Appeals and the Planning Commission. He said he doesn't speak for all council members but feels that his position on council is to serve the community. They also represent Kent City Council on various committees and organizations throughout the city.

Dr. Tom Pascarella asked if every member of council has a board they represent.

Mr. Amrhein said Ms. Gwen Rosenberg serves on the Parks and Recreation Board, Ms. Wallach serves on the Portage County Solid Waste Committee, and Mr. DeLeon is on the Standing Rock Cemetery Board.

Mayor Fiala added these positions are appointed every two years. He asked a list of council committees be sent to the Salary Review Committees. He also said there are many Main Street Kent and Chamber of Commerce activities throughout the year that council members attend.

Mr. Sidoti said issues arise that require time to research and discuss from time to time, for instance when the issue of the roof on the West Side Fire Station arose, they spent time touring the station and talking with firefighters.

Mayor Fiala added City Council also does yearly evaluations of the City Manager and Clerk of Council.

Mr. Tipton asked if Council is generally supportive of an increase, or status quo. Also, the OPERS issue has arisen and asked about the level of importance for future members of City Council.

Mayor Fiala said the OPERS issue is what brought this committee into action and added there may be those who need the salary, those who put the salary back into the community, but the main issue is not earning a full OPERS credit (based on salary). He added, in the whole time he has served on Council, they have never asked for a raise. The issue of OPERS causes concern.

Mr. Amrhein said he is not on City Council for the money but also believes if you want quality people there has to be some sort of financial incentive. He is a council member to give back to the community he loves. The City Council does what is best for the community and is bipartisan.

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He loves everyone on Council and said it is a good place to be. He understands the need for the raise in salary to meet the minimum requirement of receiving OPERS credit.

Mayor Fiala brought up the fact that four people are running for office for the City of Kent in the Fall and there is no one running against them. He asked the group why this was. Many opinions were it was not due to the salary but the amount of time that is required.

Mr. Sidoti added the main question is if we want City Council members to earn a full credit towards OPERS retirement. If we want them to, we have to raise the base salary to at least get to that. This is not about council members making more money, it's about council members being able to earn a full credit towards retirement. He added that Council has a huge responsibility to approve or deny actions of the city and spend quite a few hours doing so.

Mr. Mendenhall said the main reason they needed to hear how council members spend their time so they feel justified, based on reasonable evidence, that they are making the right recommendation for the City of Kent. He asked if there are any efforts of council members to reach out to their ward members.

Mr. Amrhein said he used to have ward meetings and attendance slowly dwindled to the point they were no longer productive. He said other members encountered the same thing. Council members do have special ward meetings when specific issues arise, such as coyotes in the area. He talks to many people when running for reelection. Mr. Sidoti meets with community members through his membership in Rotary and rotates around discussing issues. He has attended local breakfasts as well as visiting local businesses. He does it a little differently because he does not have a ward.

Mr. Mendenhall asked if any members have relationships with state representatives. Mr. Amrhein said he does.

Mr. Roeger said OPERS is a big issue and is in full agreement that Council should be at the minimum level. He asked if when they are out in the community if they see future leaders. Mr. Amrhein said he is worried about his and feels as if people do not want to get involved. They have busy lives, working full time with families and believes young people have different priorities. Mr. Roeger asked if an increased salary would be an attraction for future members. Mr. Amrhein said he worries if you pay members high salaries if people would apply just for the money and not for the job. A discussion continued regarding involvement from younger residents in local government.

Dr. Pascarella asked if the Board of Education is paid similarly. Mr. Roeger said he believes they are paid by the meeting. Mr. Sidoti said he is under the impression they are paid similar to City Council.

Ms. Slater said when she was younger with a family and working, it was difficult to do things in

the evening after work. She says the pay as something to help those younger people who do want to get involved help with maybe paying for child care. It could be a gateway and an enabler to level the playing field for some people.

Dr. Pascarella said they viewed three different sets of communities; cities with City Managers in NE Ohio (Hudson, Cleveland Heights, Bedford), communities surrounding Kent, and University towns in similar cities (Athens, Bowling Green and Oxford). Reviewing other cities in Ohio, the median and average salaries were around \$10,500. Dr. Pascarella thanked Mr. Sidoti and Mr. Amrhein for coming to tonight's meeting as their input has been very valuable.

Dr. Pascarella asked the committee about the decision to be made by August 10, 2021. He is considering raising salaries at least to the OPERS minimum with a built-in escalator. He is also considering recommending the average of Ohio communities to \$10,500. He asked what other committee members were considering.

Ms. Slater asked if they voted on the second option of raising to \$10,500, how many years that would cover the minimum OPERS salary requirement. Ms. Hall responded it would take them to the year 2029 at least.

Dr. Pascarella added a decision should be made on Council salaries and then give an increment above that for the Mayor, due to his extra duties.

Mr. Tipton thanked the members for the information provided to the committee and the clerk for the salary data provided. He also thanked Ms. Shaffer Bish for her submitted comments (Attachment #1). He added the baseline salary should be definitely be considered but that he likes \$10,500 as a starting point and is appropriate for everything they have been hearing. He feels he has enough information to decide by the next meeting.

Mr. Mendenhall said he agrees with the second assumption of an increase to \$10, 500.

Ms. Slater agrees the OPERS minimum would have to be met and is leaning toward the second option of \$10, 500.

Mr. Roeger leans to the increase to \$10, 500 with caution. He worries about the perception from the community and wants to make sure this is not a shock to the community.

Ms. Hall added the Council At Large and the Mayor's salary would take effect immediately, as they are running this year. The other council members raise won't go into effect until 2024.

Mr. Tipton suggested this will be making up for lost time, so a big step is probably appropriate. He added \$10,500 would be equal to Aurora, below Tallmadge, way below Stow and way below Cuyahoga Falls. He added Kent is doing a great job for the amount of pay they receive.

Ms. Jones said Cuyahoga Falls put in step increases for the Mayor, Council and the Directors, using a formula and haven't voted for Council raises since the late 1980's. She added she has always been shocked at what Kent City Council receives as their salary in comparison to the salary of city employees.

Dr. Pascarella asked for members to consider the two alternatives he suggested and offer any other options they want to consider. He also asked members to consider the Mayor's salary and what should the percentage increase should be. A recommendation will be voted on and presented to Council by the September deadline.

MOTION TO ADJOURN MADE by Mr. Tipton SECONDED by Ms. Slater and CARRIED by a voice vote of 3-0.

Amy Wilkens
Clerk of Council

DRAFT

7/25/2021

Dear Salary Review Commission:

Thank you all for your time and effort in serving our community. I'm sorry but I'm in the middle of submitting two large grants at my day job. I cannot take time during the day to visit with you this week....any other week I could. So I'll try to address your questions in writing but am willing to talk with you at the end of the week or next week by phone or in person.

Every few years, we review the salary not of ourselves, but of these vital positions serving the Kent community. Thank you for your help in this. In Kent, we have a City Manager form of government. All power lies with the City Council as we are both the Legislative Branch and the Executive Branch. We manage the Executive Branch through our employee, the City Manager. Our Mayor is elected but does not vote except for situations of a tie. Therefore, all of the responsibility for the present and future health, safety, and services that bring us such a good quality of life is on the 9 persons elected to represent the citizens of the City of Kent.

When I think about this, I am humbled and a little overwhelmed to hold this weighty leadership position. At any time, we might have to drop everything and attend to a crisis. We must learn so much to oversee the day-to-day operations of the city making sure the residents come first, to plan wisely for the future, and to also be able to lead in the case of crisis like we did when we mandated masks prior to the Governor's orders. We have to take the heat from people who disagree and/or are afraid of change. This particular council has done much to make up for the cowardice of past councils in cases where rates needed to be raised and penalties imposed to turn around rental housing abuses, rescue water/sewer utility funds that were slated to go broke, and many, many more policies that improved the property values, increased economic vitality, and generated an increased quality of life in our city. Several years ago five of us faced recall for having the courage to try to avoid having to cut services by following the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations. Finally, we worked hard to get the downtown development under way - during the Great Recession! We will have to work hard to get the economy back in shape post-pandemic, while first ensuring the health of our citizens to the best degree we can while also maintaining freedoms.

The positions we hold are paid quite poorly in comparison to other cities of this size and level of challenges. We have a high poverty rate, lots of aging infrastructure and housing, and a range of other concerns but at the same time we are one of the safest cities and one of the best in which to live in our region. We are environmentally aware and are ahead of the curve in many other ways. We have faced down a budget deficit and have built a new police station. We are on the way to building a seminal city hall in which we can all be proud. Downtown has been a success...but we know we cannot rest. We need to keep improving the city and ensuring that our decisions have the greatest impact at the lowest cost.

Most of the day-to-day operations are handled by the City Manager and his staff. We are proud of the excellence of our staff and know that it is no accident. We ensure that the City Manager has all of the tools to continue to make Kent great and that the staff stay focused on a positive vision for our city and treat our citizens with respect. We supervise the City Manager and the Clerk of Council.

In this light and after this long introduction, let me briefly address your questions:

1) What motivates you to be on Council?

Big question. I would have to say vision and possibility. I ran because our ward – our city – was not well represented in my opinion and the opinion of several persons in my ward. I drew the short straw. But as I campaigned I grew very committed to the people I met and spoke with, not just in my ward but across the city. I represent not just the voters but the residents, the businesses, the people who work here and who enjoy coming to Kent. I also realize that the position entails us to be committed to the future people living, working and visiting the city. The City has a chance to model to the region and even the country and world what a place with good government can be and become. In a time of cynicism and even active denigration of government, it is our task to serve and serve so well that the results of our service show how much better we can be and become working together. Working together means as a council, as a city staff, and with the many constituents we serve. We listen, we debate, we decide, we act. At times we have to correct for errors as well. I appreciate serving with my colleagues who all have the city's best interests in their hearts. We are very civil and effective and we have cultivated this demeanor consciously and over time.

2) How many hours do you work?

There is no set job description and few set hours other than attendance at meetings twice each month and occasionally more often. The position also entails being visible in the community and attending events, answering communications, and assisting residents and other constituents with issues. These fluctuate widely. We also have to study our agenda packets prior to meetings, meet with staff to discuss issues, and sometimes reach out and talk with constituents to see what they might think about an issue. If we want to place something on the agenda, we might work to learn about the topic so that we can discuss the importance to the rest of council. I initiated and chaired the Sidewalk Snow Commission – a group of residents who were fed up with trying to climb ice mountains while walking in the winter. That took many extra hours. I also regularly take pictures of problem areas in my ward as I walk or drive around and report issues (noise, trash, fights, unkempt properties, etc.) to the health department, zoning inspector and police. I recently took a half day off from work and attended court on behalf of a constituent who was pressing charges for a noise violation. In addition, I am keenly aware that I am a role model and try to keep my house and yard up and obey all ordinances. I serve as a resource person wherever I go. I help educate the public, talk to reporters on a regular basis, show up at events, and am often approached at any time in person and by other media to listen to concerns. I am ALWAYS ON DUTY. Plus, it impacts your family life.

So the answer is – it varies. It matters how much you personally want to put into the position. Also, when I first started, several of us took a 12-week course at KSU in governance. The learning curve is pretty steep. On average, we meet two times per month. The meetings range from 1-3+ hours. That is pretty much the bare minimum.

3) What are your typical tasks?

I think I addressed this question to some degree. There is no job description but there are effective ways of being in the position and poor ways. If you don't attend meetings, if you micromanage the staff, if you use this position for personal gain or you have an axe to grind, you won't be very effective and you are also disrespecting the position. Also, if you take an attitude of distrust and disrespect toward your colleagues, if you

don't prepare for the meetings, if you stay in a small bubble of people who share your views without trying to reach out to people with other opinions, then you are not doing the job well.

4) Usually the Salary Review Commission asks me whether I think we should even be paid. "Shouldn't this be a volunteer job?" So here is my response:

I think the position needs to be paid for the sheer responsibility and dignity of it, and many factors involved including losing a sense of privacy, and being "on" 24/7. Also, and this is important, because some of us, myself included, could not do it without pay. I had to leave a paid part-time job to take the job of city council representative. If it was solely up to me (this is a Charter issue), I would also pay the Planning Commission and BZA because of the sacrifices they make and their responsibility. But none of them have the level of responsibility and public exposure of the City Council members.

If we want to attract more diversity on our council who can make the best decisions, we need to pay and pay decently. Otherwise, it will be filled with comfortable, affluent – often retired – persons, usually male in gender and also white. They may be doing their "civic duty" but the perspective of this demographic might be quite limited, as we all have blind spots. Plus, volunteers do not always take their jobs seriously.

We still need to do better recruiting people to run that reflect the make-up of the city. Without a decent salary and benefits there are fewer persons available and willing to do this. It should never be the main reason someone is on Council. However, there is an element of fairness. Kent Council is underpaid (in comparison to many other cities) and also under threat of a reduction in pension – one of the few benefits. Other councils have benefits such as paid health care. We also participate in union negotiations and hiring/salary review of our employees. It is important we feel secure enough in ourselves to provide what the City can afford to attract and keep the best staff. It seems rather unfair to provide the benefits to the staff positions that our positions are denied. In addition, we cannot benefit from our positions so I have actually lost income due to my yoga studio not being able to work with the Parks and Rec Dept. Others have had to forego getting a new roof or furnace despite being qualified for city-supported replacement programs. The position is owed respect in part for what people give up to serve.

Most elected positions in the county are part-time and draw a significantly larger salary than Kent council members. County commissioners all have a full-time job in addition to their elected job but they draw more than \$70K per year with full benefits. People have asked me whether I would run for State Rep or County Office, assuming I would want to improve my personal position (prestige and income). All I want to do is serve the City of Kent well. And I think I speak for many of my colleagues. We are not in this for the "stepping stone" to something greater. To me, nothing is greater than working with 9 other inspired and competent people, the Mayor included, to make Kent great.

Thank you for listening!

Respectfully,

Heidi Shaffer Bish
Ward 5 Council Representative