



**MINUTES of the Snohomish County Citizens'  
Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials  
March 31, 2010**

The March 31 meeting of the Citizens' Commission on Salaries of Elected Officials was called to order at 7:00pm in the 6<sup>th</sup> Floor Executive Conference Room of the County's West Administration Building, 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, Everett.

Commission Members Present

Steven Richard  
Harry Heathman III  
La Verne Gemar  
Michael Lange  
Bonnie Chambers  
Steve Neighbors  
Sharon DeHaan  
Don Shove  
Todd Morrow

Staff Members Present

Brian Parry, Executive Office  
Jackie Anderson, Human Resources  
Gordon Sivley, Deputy Prosecuting Attorney  
Marcia Isenberg, Council Chief of Staff  
Brian Haseleu, Finance Department

**The meeting was called to order by Chairman Shove at 7:00 PM.**

Commissioner Neighbors made a motion to adopt the minutes of March 17. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lange. **The motion was adopted unanimously.**

Chairman Shove asked Brian Parry to hand out information requested at the March 17 meeting.

Mr. Parry handed out various documents (included in Commissioner notebook) providing updated information on the county COLA history, CPI-W rate history and vehicle reimbursement history including the legislative history as provided by County Council staff.

Mr. Parry described that elected officials have three options relating to official travel by car, including reimbursement for using a personal vehicle: mileage reimbursement, use of a county vehicle or a monthly vehicle allowance established by the County Council at a rate no greater than 99% of the cost to the county of providing a county vehicle. He described recent changes to lower the vehicle allowance in response to the economy and budget and described a table showing the allowance amount taken by each elected official.



Commissioner Chambers asked why the County had not done a furlough for elected officials and if that was related to the duties of the Commission. Mr. Parry explained that the County Council does not have the authority to change salaries for elected officials. He also noted that any decrease in salaries approved by the Commission would not take effect until after the next election for that office due to provisions of the Washington State Constitution.

Chairman Shove asked Brian Haseleu to give a county budget overview.

Mr. Haseleu proceeded to give a high level description of the county budget and financial projections. He described the most recent quarterly financial report and the impact of the recession on County revenues. He showed the total expenditure budgets by department in the adopted 2008, 2009 and 2010 budgets; the 2009 mid-year budget reduction and the proposed 2010 mid-year budget reduction; and how furloughs contributed to the 2009 mid-year budget reduction.

Discussion followed about the timing of County revenue collection, current revenue projections and the County's fund balance position. Mr. Haseleu described the proposal being considered by the County Council to reduce expenditures across the board by 2.55% below the adopted 2010 budget.

Chairman Shove moved to the next item on the agenda: elected official comments. He asked Mr. Parry to distribute a letter to the Commission from County Executive Reardon. Mr. Parry distributed the letter. He noted that in addition to the elected officials present at the meeting, the County Auditor would be speaking to the Commission at the April 14 meeting.

Chairman Shove asked if there were any questions, then asked if any elected official would like to speak to the Commission.

Sonya Kraski, County Clerk, addressed the Commission. Ms. Kraski stated that she had not come to the meeting to make comments about salary or the task before the Commission and that instead she would like to take the opportunity to provide an overview of the Clerk's Office for those who may not be familiar. Ms. Kraski described the duties and role of the County Clerk's Office. A handout was provided that is included in the Commission notebook. She noted that the Office was allocated just over 80 employees but that the Office was operating at a lower level due to the County's hiring freeze. She stated that the Office had operated within its budget and would continue to do so including the 2.55% budget reduction being considered by the County Council for 2010. She stated that she had complete confidence in the Commission and would support any decision made by the Commission. She stated that while this was her third year as Clerk, tomorrow will be her 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the Clerk's Office.



Ms. Kraski described the impact of budget cuts on staffing in the Clerk's Office and what the Clerk's Office has done to reduce its expenditures. To reduce expenditures, Ms. Kraski noted that she had not taken a car allowance in 2010 and did not intend to, that the Office has several vacancies that they were not filling and that they were renegotiating the Office's copier contract.

Discussion followed about the number and type of staffing in the Clerk's Office and the role of the different staff types. Commissioner Lange asked to what extent Ms. Kraski could control the level of salaries for employees in her office or implement a furlough. Ms. Kraski described that salary levels are set through the County's Human Resources Department and in union contracts negotiated by the Executive Office. She stated that the staff in the Clerk's Office elected to take a furlough in 2009 to reduce total salary expenditures, but that no furlough had been agreed to for 2010.

Discussion continued. Chairman Shove thanked Ms. Kraski for her remarks.

Mark Roe, Prosecuting Attorney, addressed the commission. Mr. Roe stated that he had been with the County for 23 years. He stated he wasn't asking the Commission for anything and that he certainly was not asking for a pay increase. He stated that he was speaking to the Commission because of a letter to the editor he had recently read that reflects a general public sentiment he has seen that "everything is the government's fault." He stated that his office had lost ten people in the past couple of years and that there was an increasing backlog in cases and less that the office can do for crime victims. He stated that in the 23 years he worked for the County he would not have been able to say what his salary was and that he didn't think there was anyone working for Snohomish County who was in it for the money. He stated that furlough is just a fancy word for pay cut and that whatever furlough the employees in his office take he writes a check for so that he takes the same cut as his employees. He stated that the Prosecuting Attorney had not taken a vehicle allowance for a number of years and that he would not be taking a vehicle allowance in 2010. He stated that he does not take the vehicle allowance because all of the people across county government are the same people who go to the businesses, who coach your little league team, who shop at the stores, whose kids sit next to your kids in school and that he wished there was some way to make the public see that. He said he did not want his employees to see the top guy who's worked with them for 20-some-odd years was not willing to take the same hit that they were going to take. He stated that there is a lot of management being done throughout County departments to reduce costs including holding positions vacant, doing things less, cutting back on paperwork wherever possible etc. He described a decision he made to reduce use of the state crime lab in drug cases to save costs. He detailed various reports and paperwork no longer used by the Office. He said he did not care what the Commission did with his salary. He stated what he cared about was what we could do about the crisis we are in where there is this us-versus-them mentality because there is no "them," only "us." He discussed a meeting wherein elected officials had come together to discuss how to find a way out of the budget problems. He said there was a need to work hand-in-hand with the County's labor unions to find long-term solutions for the County budget. He said that the



county would either need more resources, which he said he did not see on the horizon, or there would be fewer employees or they would have to be paid less and that everyone should be there when those decisions were made. He said that this was the worst he had seen things at the County with the number of people losing their jobs. He stated that the people being laid off were all normal people, not “the government.” He stated that he was happy to continue to not take the vehicle allowance because that money could go back into the Office’s budget to prevent other cuts. He stated that it was not a lot of money, but that the hole was so big it would not be filled with one rock but would need to be filled with a lot of little rocks. He stated that he has 17 employees who are at level one-six or two-six attorney positions who are eligible and due promotions if they are performing well enough and that he had not promoted anyone due to budget constraints. He stated that granting those promotions would lead to other staff members being laid off. He told the Commission to do whatever they were going to do as far as his salary goes and stated that he could not tell the Commission what his current salary was.

Commissioner Lange asked what percentage of the employees of the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office are union employees. Mr. Roe stated that a very high percentage of the employees in the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office are union. He stated that is why he thought for the brainstorming part of resolving budget concerns the union should be involved. He stated any decisions would impact all of those people – their kids, their families and the businesses they patronize. He stated that he controlled salary expenses by not giving promotions that were deserved, not hiring people laterally when someone could be hired cheaper by bringing someone in at the entry level. He noted that he must deal with the morale issues that result. Commissioner Morrow asked whether the contracts with employees included automatic COLA’s or pay increases. Mr. Roe stated that those contracts are currently up for negotiation. He stated that it is important to involve the union leadership in budget decisions, not to negotiate, but because budget decisions effect everyone and they are smart people with good ideas.

Chairman Shove thanked Mr. Roe for his remarks.

Commissioner Morrow asked Mr. Parry what Executive Reardon meant in his letter when Executive Reardon stated that salary changes should be commensurate with front line employees and what Executive Reardon meant by “front line employees.” Mr. Parry answered that front line employees likely referred to employees below the management level. Discussion continued about the COLA history for union employees, non-represented employees and elected officials.

Chairman Shove stated that the previous salary commission had attempted to align any salary changes or COLA with what was negotiated with the union and that the COLA history showed that COLA’s have been generally the same across the board.

Commissioner Lange spoke about the current state of the economy and questioned whether salary increases had grown faster than the cost of housing or goods. He stated that salaries and union benefits make-up a significant percentage of government budgets



and that a cut in the salaries of elected officials may put the elected officials in a better position to negotiate salary reductions with other employees and unions.

Discussion followed about the economy and government revenues.

Commissioner DeHaan noted that any salary decrease approved by the Commission would not take effect until the next election, which for most of the elected positions was two years away. She stated that this would result in staggered salaries and suggested the Commission may want to look at a zero adjustment to salaries.

Chairman Shove stated that the portion of the budget the Commission has authority over is very small as it relates only to the salaries of a handful of employees. Commissioner Morrow stated that he agreed with the statements made by Commissioner DeHaan and Chairman Shove. Commissioner Neighbors agreed that any decrease would not have an immediate effect on the budget and would impact people who are not yet in office and would lead to varied salary levels.

Commissioner Lange stated that the budget problems facing governments would take many different changes, including some give-back from union employees.

Chairman Shove stated that budget challenges are being faced by governments with union and non-union employees alike, and that the solution to those challenges will come from policy discussions that go beyond the role of the Commission.

Discussion followed about government budgets and the salaries paid to government employees.

Commissioner Gemar asked whether the Commission should look at different salary changes for each elected office based on function and size or whether changes should be considered only across the board. Commissioners agreed that the Commission has discretion to review individual salaries. Discussion followed.

Commissioner Heathman stated that many people in the general public are being asked to take pay cuts and furloughs. Discussion continued about the economy, government budgets and the role of the Commission.

Commissioner DeHaan stated that reducing salaries may impact the field of candidates who run for public office and the importance of having qualified people in public office. Commissioner Richard disagreed that there was a correlation between the salary for elected offices and the qualifications of those who run for office. Discussion followed about whether reducing salaries would or would not impact the qualifications of the people who pursue public office.

Chairman Shove asked whether any Commissioners had any additional comments. Commissioner Gemar stated that she was impressed by the elected officials who had



spoken to the Commission or offered written comments, and that they brought a great deal of knowledge to their positions.

Chairman Neighbors suggested that the Commission continue its discussion to the next meeting.

Discussion followed about the upcoming agenda and public hearing.

Commissioner Neighbors made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner DeHaan seconded the motion. **The motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 9:01 PM.**