

Salary Setting Meeting

January 6, 2021

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Via Microsoft Teams

Call to Order – Gary Ratterree, Vice Chair

Gary called the meeting to order at 6:07. AJ Malidore, Chair, was excused due to still being at out at sea.

Roll Call of Commissioners – Teri Wright, Executive Director

At the request from Gary, Teri did the roll call of Commissioners.

Commission Members Present:

Kirsten Barron
Jon Bridge
Tray Cave
Dr. Diana Gale
Libby Hart
Sandi LaPalm
Karen McGaughy
Anastasia Potapova
Gary Ratterree, Vice Chair
Gerry Sherman
Steven Starkovich
Karen White

Commission Members Excused:

AJ Malidore, Chair
Wendy Sowers

Commission Members Unexcused:

Alahna Kirtley
Greg Millican

Staff Present:

Teri Wright, Executive Director
Lois Williams, Executive Assistant

Meeting Opening Statement – Gary

Gary said that he was pleased to have everyone at today's meeting. He reminded them that they are charged to set salaries of elected officials and read the list of elected officials. He said that this is the fourth meeting in the series and the final meeting on February 3, 2021. He asked members of the public who are here to testify to log into www.salaries.wa.gov and wait to be called.

Housekeeping – Teri

Teri reminded the group that they could take breaks as needed. She also reminded the Commissioners that this is not a political platform or social group, she requested that the conversation stays on topic.

Commission Work Session

Approval of the December 10, 2020, Meeting Minutes

Gary called for approval of the minutes. Steve said that in the second line of his comments it says he spent 30 years in the private sector and that it should be private higher education sector. Sandi asked for a change to second line down of her comments. She asked to change where it said that she wanted to increase salaries but was unable to. She wants it to say that Sandi wants to be sure there is documentation that shows there was some support for salary increases, but the timing is such that we could not approve them at this time.

Gary asked for any other changes and there were none. Teri said that those changes would be made. Gary asked for a motion. Steve moved to accept as corrected and Diana seconded the motion. Gary called for a voice vote. All were in favor.

Commission Meeting Reminders

Teri said that there are a few issues that have been brought to her attention. She said that these remote meetings have confirmed to her that when the Commission is able, they need to be in-person. In-person meetings are important to get to know each other and to develop trust and to communicate with each other. She sees where there has been a real disconnect without the ability for the Commission to meet in person. She wants the Commissioners to know that she really appreciates them going through this process and that they are showing up and working on the issues under less than ideal circumstances. She also wants them to know it is law that says a Commissioner can only have two unexcused absences and that they must be removed from the Commission. She must abide by the law. She encouraged the Commissioners to review the rules in the Commissioner's Reference Manual to make sure they understand the rules and laws that the Commission is bound to.

Teri mentioned there is a change in the agenda because AJ is still out at sea and unable to attend as Chair. Sandi thanked AJ and Gary. She also said that she is retired from working for state government and she has also worked in the private sector. She said that in the public sector, you are paid by the people. She reminded them that Teri must stay within the constitutional boundaries, and she is audited to make sure that she complies. She said that things that are okay in the private sector are not in state government because of the strict rules. Teri is responsible to make sure that all the rules are complied with. She supports and thanks Teri for her work.

Gary reminded the Commission that the public is listening in and we must stay on task.

Update on the State Budget and Forecast

Teri said the Governor's budget has been received and is being printed to be mailed to them with other meeting materials. The Governor's budget was about forty-nine pages, so she is sending a few pages that are of interest to the group. If they then want to see more, the entire budget is published on the Governor's website. She will send the forecast in its entirety.

At the February meeting, there will be updates from the same people who presented in October on the budget and the forecast. She asked if there was there was any additional information that the Commissioners would like to see before the last meeting. Gary asked if there were any questions. Steve said that at the last meeting he raised the option of them considering the second year separately from the first. He said that we have to decide on the biennium, but we can treat the two years differently. He thinks that during the time that he and Karen have been on the Commission and both salary setting sessions the two years were treated differently. He wants to look for signs of improvement in the budget and he asked Teri to ask the speakers to concentrate on the second half of the biennium. He wants to know what the budget is for state salaries for the next year. He wants to know, even if it's not in the written notes, what are the discussions around compensation for state employees for the second year, anything that would suggest an improvement. He says the newspapers say salary freezes, but he wants to know if there are possibilities for increases. We might even want to consider the Social Security cost of living increases. He said that Anastasia has opened our eyes to the necessity of raises, so he wants to know about anything that might suggest that the second half of the biennium will be more prosperous.

Karen said she listened to Anastasia's heartfelt words about how we shouldn't not give them a raise in the second year. And it dawned on her that we need to discuss a second-year raise, no raise this year, but consider next year. Anastasia thanked them for considering her opinion. Jon says the second year really needs to be looked at carefully. He said we should ask those coming to testify to be prepared to talk about what their thoughts are on the second year.

Sandi says she agrees with what has been said, but that she doesn't think they can forecast to the second year. She feels it is important for the Commissioners to see what the proposed budget says about state government salaries and for it to be talked about in the February meeting.

Diana says she still has a hard time understanding why if the world changes, that we can't change it in the second year. Teri said that the Commission has put together a proposed schedule and it is on the table for discussion. On February 3rd, a final schedule has to be finalized to take effect on July 1, 2021, and July 1, 2022, and it cannot not be changed after February 3rd. The process is that 1) Teri takes the salary schedule to the Code Revisor's Office to be written into law format; 2) it goes to the Secretary of State's Office and they file it; 3) 90 days later it becomes law.

Steve said that there are now two conversations on record in the minutes about a raise for the second year, so it would not be an unexpected decision. He also wanted to let them know that a COLA should apply to all positions. They can give it to all and then make justifiable reasons for additional increases on top of the COLA for some positions. Steve said that there were all types of options available to the Commission in February. Sandi said she has mixed feelings, that in the first long meeting, she heard that the state government was in dire straits. If this Commission says that there will be a salary increase for elected officials, it happens, even if members of their staff are eliminated to fund it. A lot of money needs to go to helping businesses and people to get through this pandemic. Sandi wanted to know if we needed to schedule another meeting in

February, should the economy show any signs of changing. Teri said the law requires February 3rd be our final salary setting meeting.

Gary said the state budget and forecast is fluid and dynamic, which is why we need the updates at the February meeting. Maybe new information will justify changes to the salary schedule. Steve asked what the last possible date for a decision to be made to give state employees an across the board increase or COLA. Sandi said that traditionally, the collective bargaining agreements are in the next budget cycle so will be in the spring. Diana said the session could be short because of the pandemic. Lois said she had heard that state employees have been told to be prepared for furlough days over the next two years. Teri said that it has been decided and it is in the Governor's budget for state employees to be furloughed one day a month for the next two years. Gary said that he is posting the link for the Governor's budget for those who want to get a head start on reading the budget. Gary asked for additional comments. Jon said we need to look at how furloughs really impact the total salaries, because if you are furloughing one day a month, you are reducing salaries. Even if there is a cost of living increase, the salaries still go down. Gary asked about additional budget information. Teri said that the Legislature is not bound by the Governor's budget and can make their own decisions. You must set salaries prior to knowing what the Legislature decides and then signed by the Governor.

Other Business as Needed

There was no other business.

Public Testimony

Procedure for Public Testimony

Gary read the procedure in its entirety. Due to Covid-19, the Commission is meeting remotely for this salary setting session.

Adjourn

Gary asked for a motion to adjourn. Jon made the motion and Diana seconded. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.



Gary Ratterree, Vice Chair

February 3, 2021
Date