



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

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.

SALARY REVIEW COMMITTEE

July 27, 2021

Page 2 of 5

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 said the baseline should be definitely be considered. 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

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