Report and Recommendations of the Lynnwood Salary Commission

The Lynnwood Salary Commission is an entirely new citizen commission formed in early 2020 for the express purpose of reviewing and setting the salaries of the Mayor and City Council of Lynnwood. Salary Commissioners are appointed by the mayor and subject to approval by the city council after a public interview process.  The Salary Commission is an independent commission, not subject to Council review and the final recommendations of the Salary Commission are enacted after a legal review.

The commissioners for 2020 are: Chair Michele McGraw, Vice-Chair Alyssa Pulliam, Connie Ballard, David Parshall and Steven Sterner.

The Salary Commission performed its duties under LMC Chapter 2.98 and files this report on the salary determination for the Mayor and City Council.

We are appreciative to Evan Chinn, City of Lynnwood Human Resource Director, for his assistance in acting as a city liaison, hosting our Zoom meetings (in compliance with state issued Covid-19 guidelines), and for the documents and written resources he shared with the Commissioners upon our request.

Our meetings were all noticed publicly, both inviting the public in person when the timeline allowed, and electronically once WA State guidelines were in effect per LMC 2.98.050. The Commission requested and was granted approval from City Council to complete our work once it extended beyond the deadline due to the unforeseen global pandemic. Two Public Hearings were held in accordance with requirements, also as outlined in LMC 2.98.050.

To begin the process of determining fair salaries for the Mayor and Council, the commission started by comparing Lynnwood with other cities in our region with the same strong Mayor/Council form of municipal government. The initial number of comparable cities in Washington State was twenty (20). The commission compared these cities by budget, economy, transit status and population, then reduced the list down to the five (5) cities that were most similar to Lynnwood.  The final list compares Lynnwood (population of 38.5K) with:

* Redmond 67.7K
* Edmonds 42.7K
* Bremerton 41.2K
* Issaquah 39.3K
* Mount Vernon 35.7K

In-depth research was done to determine the pay-scale and benefits that each city provided to their Mayor and Council Members. Due to Covid-19, much of the research of the commission was done remotely consisting of online searches, phone calls and emails with human resources and salary commissions in the other cities.

The commission found it necessary to go beyond simple salary comparisons with each city. This research included salary, benefits, and dependent benefits for mayors, councils and city council presidents. The Lynnwood Salary Commission is restricted solely to salaries and was not empowered to change the benefits for the mayor or council. However, we felt that a broader look at comparable compensation was necessary to set salaries at the fairest level possible.  In addition, the commission branched out beyond municipal comparisons and considered the salaries of individuals in the private and non-profit sector.

After considerable comparison and discussion, the commission determined that the salary of the Mayor is below that of comparable cities and Chief Executive Officers.

As such, the commission recommends matching the average Mayoral salary of the comparable cities by instituting a 10.54% salary increase to $124,107.

In order to be fair, the commission used the same system to evaluate City Council salaries that was used to evaluate Mayoral salary. The current salary of the City Council is $900 per month in base salary and an additional amount up to $750 per month in meeting pay, making a combined total salary of $19,800 per year.

This commission recommends that meeting pay (tied to meeting attendance) be eliminated and City Council Members receive one monthly base salary, providing simplicity to the budget process and transparency to the public. That combined figure is comparatively higher than the average of other cities used in the Salary Commission’s research. The commission therefore further recommends a reduction in City Council annual salary to $15,726 per year. This number reflects the average salary of the five other cities that we compared to Lynnwood. Salary decreases shall become effective to incumbent City Council Members at their subsequent terms of office.

The Commission also recommends that the Council President pay remain at $2,400 per year, to be paid in addition to the base Council salary.

The commission is highly cognizant of the impact of Covid-19 on budgets and revenue. As a new commission, we are also one of the first to go about setting salaries with the full knowledge of how Covid-19 is causing fiscal uncertainty in the short and long term.

Our recommendations are net negative and in order to insulate Lynnwood from unknowns, the commission recommends any future increases for mayoral and council salaries be tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area. If CPI goes up, salaries can be increased by the same percentage with a cap at 2.5%. If the CPI goes down, salary will remain unchanged.

Included is the PowerPoint presentation which summarizes the Salary Commission’s work.