



City of Tacoma
Citizen Commission on Elected Salaries

Dalvin Yarbrough, Chair
Danette Knowles
Keoni Ho
David Koenig
Amanda Robison
Thomas Brewster
Judy Loveless-Morris

MINUTES
CITIZEN COMMISSION ON ELECTED SALARIES
Monday May 1, 2023
6:00 PM

I. CALL TO ORDER: 6:02 PM

II. ROLL CALL: Chair Dalvin Yarbrough
Commission Chair Dalvin Yarbrough took roll call of the Commissioners in attendance.

Present: Chair Dalvin Yarbrough

Commissioners: Keoni Ho, Danette Knowles, Judy Loveless-Morris,
Amanda Robison

Absent: Thomas (Jed) Brewster, David Koenig,

Staff Present: City Mayor Victoria Woodards, Deputy City Mayor
Kristina Walker, HR Manager Jen Peters, HR
Liaison Monica Rutledge

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM February 27, 2023 MEETING

There was a motion to approve the February 27, 2023 meeting minutes as presented.

First: Commissioner Danette Knowles
Second: Commissioner Judy Loveless-Morris
Ayes: 5
Nays: 0

The motion passed.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments submitted.

V. CITY OF TACOMA MAYOR VICTORIA WOODARDS

After brief introductions, Chair Yarbrough asked the Mayor and Deputy Mayor their preference for the questioning format, and they agreed to address questions together.

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Mayor Woodards thanked the Commission for the opportunity to come speak and thanked them all for volunteering and for the pay raise that was issued in 2023. Chair Yarbrough asked each of them to describe their jobs. Mayor Woodards replied that she wears several hats, number one being leading the Council. She explained that she has no more power than the Council, having just one vote. Her job is not to get them to all vote the same, but to ensure everyone's viewpoints are heard and incorporated into decisions. Her second main role is working directly with the City Manager. In her Mayoral role she is also the 'face of the City' and often the first contact for calls and complaints from the public. She and all the Council Members advocate for and represent the City.

Deputy Mayor (DM) Kristina Walker conveyed that the Mayor does a great job managing the Council. She describes her main job duties as two buckets, the policy making process and working as a communicator within the community, including representing the City while serving on Committees.

Mayor Woodards added that another aspect of her role is holding relationships and collaboration with other entities and elected officials.

Commissioner Loveless-Morris asked the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to share some accomplishments that they are proud of and describe any unique challenges the City faces.

Mayor Woodards replied that she was recently elected as President of the National League of Cities (NLC) which allows a national platform for sharing information and potential resources for the City as well as Washington State. Under her leadership they are focused on workforce and affordable housing. She has leveraged an agreement between the Dept. of Labor and the NLC for 12 Cities to become a workforce cohort, receiving technical assistance from the Dept. of Labor. They will also be hosting a leadership summit this summer. In addition, Tacoma partners with Pallet Shelters, which will be providing the City with some of their newest product, at no cost to the City. Mayor Woodards has also been able to elevate the leadership of the Council by providing an avenue for involvement with national Boards. Finally, Mayor Woodards has also used her position this year to focus on issues such as youth violence and public safety. Due to her work in the NLC, she has arranged to bring in a partner to perform a needs assessment called asset mapping, at no cost to the City, which identifies gaps and opportunities in City programs and facilitates funding opportunities to fill in the gaps. She is grateful to have the support of the Deputy Mayor and Council which allows her the time to participate at the National level, and to bring resources back to Tacoma.

DM Walker spoke to the challenges and complexities of the job. She states that there is a lot of work and often varying opinions which goes into reviewing any issue or policy prior to any vote. Housing and community safety are among the current priority issues

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around the country. Unique to Tacoma is the world-class Port, and the international trade and traffic that it supports. Mayor Woodards added that they all need to learn about and understand the issue complexities as well as communicate them to the community.

Chair Yarbrough asked the guests how they would describe a typical month. DM Walker replied that in addition to attending meetings, there is preparation and extensive reading required in advance of those meetings. She also spends a lot of time connecting with the Boards and Committees she is involved with, in addition to communicating with constituents and attending Community events. Mayor Woodards agreed, adding she probably spends a little more time in meetings. She estimates spending about 50% of her time in meetings, 30% preparing for those meetings, and the additional 20% traveling for her national role.

Regarding the structure of Tacoma's City government, Chair Yarbrough asked the guests to explain their roles in relation to the other City Leaders. Mayor Woodards replied that most Cities do not have a full time Mayor, a part time Council and a full time City Manager. Because she is full time, she is often the primary contact and spends a lot of time coordinating for projects between all the City entities.

Chair Yarbrough asked DM Walker how much time she spends in her role each week. She replied that during her first few years on Council, there was a lack of community events due to Covid, and she was able to keep her hours under 40 per week. Now that the events have increased, she spends from 35-50 hours per week on her duties. Mayor Woodards added that was likely an understatement. DM Walker concurred that the Deputy Mayor position does require extra hours.

Chair Yarbrough asked Mayor Woodards to describe her role with the Council in relation to setting the agenda for deliberations. She replied that it is always in collaboration, but she approves the agenda items. She may, however, question an item prior to adding it to an agenda. She also serves in a coaching role, in regard to certain issues. Chair Yarbrough asked DM Walker to share her view of that experience. DM concurred, adding that there is also a dynamic of the senior Council members coaching the newer members. She stated the Council works together amazingly well, thanks to the Mayor and her management of agenda items. DM Walker also stated that their shared staff for policy and scheduling support play an important role in the process. Mayor Woodards is very proud of her relationship with the current Council, which she contributes to mutual respect.

Chair Yarbrough asked if they felt there have been potential Council candidates who possibly declined to run based on the current salary. Mayor Woodards replied she hasn't seen it in the past but is seeing it now. In the past Council Members may have been older and held an outside job with more flexibility. Now due to the complexities of the issues,

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the time commitment is much greater, and it becomes more difficult to find candidates with the availability required. She feels insufficient salaries could become an issue in the future. DM Walker stated she felt that this may already be an issue, although there are other reasons that keep candidates from running, in addition to the salary. DM Walker decided to leave her previous job to focus on her Council Duties but does part-time consulting to make ends meet. She added that if the community is asking to see more productivity, the Council, as well as their support staff needs to evolve together. Mayor Woodards addressed the issue of having a full-time Council and concurred that sufficient support staff is crucial to get the work done.

Commissioner Knowles asked the Mayor in comparison, why the Tacoma Mayor salary appears to be behind those of similar cities. Mayor Woodards replied that it may be due to the difference in City management structure. A question was brought up about comparable Council member salaries, and Jen Peters replied an updated chart was on the agenda to review.

There was additional discussion on the Council becoming full time. The Mayor responded that for her position, the decision goes through public process. She would keep the Commission posted and be sure that any change to the Council status would also go through a public process prior to a vote.

Commissioner Loveless-Morris asked the guests which Mayor's and Deputy Mayor's they see as peers, in and outside of Washington State. Mayor Woodards replied Spokane, Vancouver, Everett, Kent, Auburn, and named several Cities of similar size outside of the state. DM Walker echoed the Mayor's response. In addition, she stated that serving on regional boards, they are all their peers regardless of City size or salary. Mayor Woodards added that most elected officials want to serve and meet the expectations of their communities.

Commissioner Loveless-Morris asked the guests to describe the performance metrics they use to measure goals and progress. DM Walker replied that Tacoma 2025 and their Affordable Housing Action Strategy are more tangible examples. She added that building collaborative relationships are a less tangible metric example. Mayor Woodards concurred that both internal and external relationships are crucial and require a lot of work to maintain. She also referred to email flow as a tangible metric to measure progress.

Chair Yarbrough asked if there has been any discussion around adding additional support staff. Mayor Woodards replied that one additional staff person was added to last year's budget to assist with constituent services. DM Walker added that they also keep the focus on the needs of the community and be conservative with using resources on themselves.

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Chair Yarbrough asked the guests for any final thoughts. Mayor Woodards described several of her additional key regional responsibilities, including serving as a board member for multiple organizations.

Commissioner Ho shared with the guests that he is currently a dissenting vote for issuing our elected officials a raise and asked them each to respond with their feedback. DM Walker replied that she does this job because she loves the work and the City. More dollars that more closely reflect the amount of work that they do and its complexity would be greatly appreciated. Mayor Woodards replied that although she is not good at asking for a raise for herself, she feels the Council deserves a raise due to the amount of work they do and their strong commitment to the City. The Mayor asked Commissioner Ho to share his reasoning for a dissenting vote. He explained that he has looked at comparative data from around the state and feels the current Council salary is adequate. The Mayor asked Commissioner Ho to consider including the diversity of each Council in his research.

Commissioner Robison asked Mayor Woodards how she would plan to implement transitioning the Council to full-time. She replied that the City is preparing to go through a Charter review process, where that question may be posed. She also suggested possibly bringing the decision to the community on a ballot.

Mayor Woodards thanked the Commission for their work and thoroughness regarding the salary decision. DM Walker also thanked the Commission for their work and for inviting them all to speak and share their thoughts.

VI. CITY OF TACOMA DEPUTY MAYOR KRISTINA WALKER

Deputy Mayor Kristina Walker joined the conversation along with Mayor Woodards, as detailed above in agenda item V.

VII. CITY OF TACOMA COUNCIL MEMBERS BLOCKER & USHKA

Council Members Blocker & Ushka were not in attendance at the meeting.

VIII. PRELIMINARY COMPENSATION AND DATA REVIEW: JEN PETERS, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

Jen Peters shared the Council Member and Mayor scheduling information that was requested by the Commission. A presentation of the collected calendars was shared along with a memo explaining in more detail what the calendars might reflect. A copy of the information will be emailed to the Commissioners for further review. Chair Yarbrough asked for further clarification on the content of the calendars; Jen Peters will follow-up with additional detail.

Jen Peters shared a spreadsheet of preliminary compensation data from comparable entities to the Commission. Jen briefly described the collected information and the difference in City government structure. Chair Yarbrough asked about median salary data for the comparable cities. Jen stated she would look for that information and provide it to the Commission if available. Commissioner Loveless-Morris asked about the employment status of the Council in comparable Cities. Jen replied that Seattle has a full-time Council, and the majority of the others are part-time and not based on set working hours.

IX. QUALITATIVE REVIEW: COMMISSIONER KEONI HO

Commissioner Keoni Ho presented information he collected about other Citizen Salary Commissions, demographics, and details affecting their decisions. There was further discussion and clarification on the data. Commissioner Ho shared additional documentation on his sources of information.

There was discussion on including data on other Council workflow and meeting frequency. There was additional discussion regarding prior salary decisions, including no increase and even rollbacks in other Cities, depending on current conditions at the time. Chair Yarbrough added that some of the comparable Cities are smaller with less public expectation and workload. Commissioner Ho shared additional data on current living wages, as well as a letter addressed to the Commission from three Tacoma Council Members, advocating for a salary increase. He reviewed the table referenced in the letter and shared his research on Council members' personal scenarios in comparison. There was further discussion on the current Tacoma median salary, current Council salary placement, and actual hours worked, though they are still considered part-time. Commissioner Loveless-Morris asked for input and clarification on what criteria they should consider in their decision. Chair Yarbrough responded by stating the importance of attracting good candidates and offering a fair salary, and that the opportunity should be available to as many people in the City as possible. There was additional discussion on which factors should be considered in the decision process.

X. OTHER COMMUNICATOINS

The letter referenced above from three City Council Members was reintroduced and reviewed in further detail. The Commission requested clarification on the dollar amount of the suggested increase cited in the letter. There was additional discussion on the current economy and budget restrictions of the City. The Commissioners shared thoughts and opinions regarding the potential direction of their votes, most agreeing that they would like to see additional information before a determination is made.

XI. OTHER TALKING POINTS: OPMA TRAINING

The status of the required OPMA training was discussed. Chair Yarbrough stated he would complete the training prior to the August meeting. Commissioner Knowles has

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not completed the training. Commissioners Loveless-Morris and Ho have completed the training. Commissioner Robison has completed the training within the last 4 years. Commissioners will intend to have the training complete prior to the August meeting.

XII. TOPICS FOR AUGUST 7, 2023 AGENDA

There was discussion on possible agenda topics. Commissioner Loveless-Morris suggested adding a special meeting prior to the August decision meeting. An invitation will be extended to CM's Blocker and Ushka to attend a special meeting in July, date TBD.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

First: Commissioner Judy Loveless-Morris

Second: Commissioner Danette Knowles

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Meeting adjourned 8:49PM