

The 2021 Wicomico County Compensation and Allowance Commission met on November 30, 2021 at 2:00 p.m. in the Government Office Building, Room 301, Salisbury, Maryland 21801.

Members Present: Dr. Memo Diriker, Chairman; Victor H. Laws, III, Vice-Chairman; Michelle Chesnik, Sharon A. Morris, Mark Rudnick, John Aukward, Victoria Miele, and Michelle Wright. Sue A. Cooper, PhD, Mary Mengason, and Mr. Andrew Bauer participated via Zoom.

Staff Present: Laura Hurley, Recording Secretary

Dr. Diriker showed the latest version of the Compensation and Allowance Commission recommendations without the appendices and said the appendices are the comparison salaries, the income and population comparison, benefit information, and detail explanation of the scenario model. He said they still need to make a recommendation on what they want to do regarding the allowances. He said they will go back to the beginning of the letter so anyone can provide any comments, and then they will discuss the three additional recommendations on the last page of the document. He clarified, what is written now is just draft language, and it will be up to the Commission to decide what is written.

Dr. Diriker explained, normally this Commission convenes in the late summer or early fall, but they were convened late in the process this time, so he does not feel entirely guilty that they are a little bit behind on the timeline. He said, quite frankly, what they have accomplished in the one month they have been together with so many meetings is amazing. He said his goal is to have a final draft of the letter by the end of this week, but, if not, they will get to it when they get to it.

Dr. Diriker said there was a lot of information shared regarding the benefits elected officials receive, and there was some discussion on whether it was too much, too little, or just right, but they need to open up that discussion.

Ms. Morris said they reviewed all of the counties that have health insurance, prescription, vision, and dental. She said some have 457s, which is a voluntarily contribution benefit plan, and others have a 401a, which is the employee portion of the plan. She said the Wicomico County Councilmembers have a \$16,000 salary in addition to vision, dental, and access to the retirement plan. She said it has been mandatory for employees since 1994, and the Council is paid a retirement based on salary. She said the defined compensation plan match is 20 percent, and the maximum contribution in 2022 is \$20,000.

Ms. Wright said she looks at being a Councilmember as a part-time position. She then asked, if they were to put a value to the benefits, what would that be, as it is an added value to the salaries. She said she would have liked to have had this information prior to the vote on the salaries so she could see the whole package.

Mr. Laws said he is satisfied with the memo Mrs. Hurley emailed out that describes benefits. He said, as he understands it, the salaries are still open for discussion, to which Dr. Diriker responded, yes. Ms. Wright said they voted on the salaries, to which Dr. Diriker responded, yes, but they are looking at the whole document, so it is still open for discussion.

Ms. Chesnik asked, if a Council person makes \$16,000 per year, what is the maximum they can put into retirement, and what is the value of vision and dental per year? She said, if they are making \$16,000 per year, they cannot contribute more to a plan than what they are making. She said, for people to think these guys are getting a huge package, they are not, but they are getting some fringe benefits; for

example, someone like Joe Holloway who is retired and most likely on Medicare, and if she wants to run for Council, she gets a Medicare supplement, so she cannot just drop them and take the County's plan.

Ms. Morris clarified that Medicare would be the primary insurance.

Ms. Chesnik said she thinks Ms. Wright's perception is that they are getting so much more, to which Ms. Wright responded, that is not her perception.

Ms. Chesnik asked what the value is when adding in the maximum amount they can contribute and everything else? She said she looked at the MACO recommendations and other counties, and Wicomico County is grossly below other counties. She said, to say they work 15 hours per month, there may be some who do, but there are some who answer calls, answer questions, and do things for their constituents, which is what they are supposed to be doing, even though it is a part-time job. She said, if someone calls and says the road is caving in, they should be out there and contacting someone like Mr. Psota or whoever they need to contact to make sure it is taken care of. She said they really need a minimum for these folks, and they are never going to get people interested in these positions who are qualified unless they bump the salary up some. She said she does not know how else they are going to get people who are really interested to take time out of their day, and there is a whole lot of aggravation for only \$16,000 per year. She clarified, she is not saying go crazy on spending, but she is saying they need to do something, just like they need to do something with County Executive position too.

Mr. Aukward asked if the amount showing for the health insurance premium is a monthly amount or annual, as a married couple is \$1,600, to Ms. Mengason responded, it is monthly. Mr. Aukward said, if a Councilmember is married, they are looking at \$15,000 employer costs for health care alone, and then they get a 20 percent match on whatever they contribute to the retirement plan, which is 3.5 times higher than the private sector. He said he knows they have talked about fringe benefits and it is a part-time job, but the salary is never what gets people to do these things. He said they serve as members of the Compensation and Allowance Commission as a commitment to the community. He clarified, he understands the salary is a little low, but when looking at some of the fringe benefits and the total cost, if someone is a Council person for two or three terms, they are locked in for life. He said the County is paying them a pension, covering their medical, and after a while it gets expensive. He said people wonder why cities are going to bankruptcy, and it is because of what they pay out. He said, looking at the package, he does not think the salaries are out of line where it stands for the Council people.

Dr. Diriker said they had this discussion the last time of whether the salary was too high or too low, or if the benefits were too high or too low, and the direction of the conversation was the compensation is low but the benefits make up for it. Ms. Mengason said the benefits are really good, which makes up for the salary they make.

Ms. Morris said, regarding the eligibility for retirement, which is age 55 or 25 years of service, this is not exactly correctly stated. She explained, it is when the employee reaches the age 55 and has 5 years in the plan, or has 25 years of service but in the plan, not just because the employee has 25 years of service. She clarified, they must be in the plan. Mrs. Hurley confirmed that she checked with Human Resources and that is correct, they must be in the plan.

Dr. Diriker said this is a generous benefit offering from the County to the Elected Officials, and in some ways, it compensates for the low compensation they receive; however, as a taxpayer and voter, his

personal opinion is they are getting into Charter territory in that the base compensation is in the County's Charter, and since the Charter Review Committee is meeting, maybe that should be a recommendation, which is one of the reasons he provided draft language. He said they are adjusting what is in front of them, and it is hard to justify the doubling of it, the exception being the County Executive because they have a lot of documentation showing Wicomico County is the lowest compensated in the state, and for 17 years nothing has been done, so it is a difficult decision. He said, for this particular piece of the recommendation, he will ask Mrs. Hurley to give an approximation of the monetary value of the benefits. He clarified, he understands it is a difficult thing to calculate because it is fungible, as there are so many different pieces to it. Mrs. Hurley explained that there are different health insurance plans, so it depends on which plan the Council representative selects. She said there are PPOs, EPOs, family plans, individual plans, etc. Dr. Diriker suggested that perhaps the chart could show an approximation at the high end, as it does not need to be precise, and they will look at that to see if it will change their discussion today.

Ms. Chesnik asked if the Councilmembers have other employment, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, yes. Ms. Chesnik then asked, if they have other employment, do they take health insurance first from their primary job, or can they drop that insurance and get the County's insurance, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, she would have to check with Human Resources. Ms. Chesnik said, if they have a full-time job, they should be using the health insurance offered through the full-time job as a primary insurance. Dr. Diriker said the last time they looked at that, the answer was they did not have to take what the County offers. Ms. Mengason said the fact that the County is paying 84 percent of the health insurance cost is a lot higher than some employers. She said she deals with employers everyday who do not pay that much toward the health insurance costs. Ms. Morris asked if that percentage is for full and part-time employees, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, yes.

Dr. Cooper asked, once they get the dollar amount on the value of benefits and have a total value including compensation and benefits, are they looking at a specific number to get to, as she thinks they should have a goal. She clarified, they should have an idea of what they want the compensation and benefits to add up to in the end so they can make up of the difference between where they are at and where they want to be. Dr. Diriker responded, that makes it a little difficult to compare to other counties because nobody really reports it like that. He said, when looking at the blended parity way of calculating things, for example, looking at population, median income, and complexity of the County, the parity of the compensation for the President needs to be about \$30,000, the Vice President \$25,000 and the council members \$20,000, if they were to choose that way to do the calculation. He said the Commission can look at that goal and then look at the value of the benefits, but the difficulty is that the blended parity looks at compensation only with the other counties, so it would be apples to oranges.

Ms. Chesnik said she looked at another County, but she does not recall which County, and the average Councilperson makes \$36,000, and they get all of the benefits.

Dr. Cooper asked what the purpose is of finding the value of the benefits if they do not have anything to compare it to? She further asked, as they cannot use it in the deliberations, is there really a value of gathering the extra data, to which Dr. Diriker responded, if a member of the Commission wants that information, then that is the value, but in terms of comparing the information, it is difficult to put it in terms of a good scenario model.

Ms. Morris said the life insurance is only if they die in Office, and the same for retirement. She said they have to be in the plan for 25 years, unless they change the age limits, so they probably will never see it, so it is an accessible benefit, but they will likely not get it. She said there are a lot of details like that.

Dr. Diriker said there is a qualitative benefit to knowing this information. He said, for the math part of it, they should stick just to the compensation, and the benefits information can guide their decision making. He said it is hard to put everything into one comparative number and say this is apples and apples, but, if they use the blended parity, the numbers would be 25/30/20.

Ms. Chesnik said she is self-employed so she knows what the benefits are, but the benefits are not as much as they perceive. She said, if they die in Office and are in the plan long enough, that is great, but she would like to see people run for Office who are really interested in this County and work very hard to make it a better County. She clarified, not that the people they have do not, but, if they do not hold some type of carrot out for the salary, people are not going to take the time for the amount of aggravation involved and number of hours, as it is not a 15-hour a month job if it is being done correctly.

Dr. Cooper said Ms. Chesnik has made this comment twice, so she is wondering if there is push back from the people serving on the Committee about it, to which Ms. Chesnik responded, no. She said she looks at the benefits in paying her own health insurance, Medicare supplement, and drug plans, and she puts away for her own retirement. She said it sounds great to her, but she does not think people perceive it as being great.

Ms. Mengason said, unless they are coming from a self-employed situation or a small business owner, people do not realize the value of the benefits, and she agrees that the carrot is really the salary. She said they can say the value of the benefits is easily about \$8,000 a year, but she does not see people putting a value on it unless they are coming from a self-employed area.

Dr. Diriker said, in the 16 years of doing this, no one has asked him about the benefits, as it was always about the compensation. Dr. Cooper said benefits have gotten a lot more expensive in recent years, so that could be a big part of it. Ms. Mengason said benefits have been expensive for a long time. She said, when people have it paid for them, unfortunately, they do not see it as a value unless they are paying for the benefits themselves as a business owner, or if they are self-employed.

Ms. Morris said the Council has not always received benefits. Mrs. Hurley said she is not sure when Councilmembers started receiving benefits. Dr. Diriker said, even when they did not, they were not asking for benefits, as the focus has always been on the base compensation, which has not increased for the last two go-a-rounds. Dr. Cooper asked if the Council gave a reason why it has not been increased, and is it because there was some problem with the recommendation, to which Ms. Chesnik responded, it falls into the election cycle, so they are afraid if they get a raise right before the election year, it is going to look like they gave themselves a raise, so they are afraid to take any money.

Dr. Diriker said this is why he added the additional recommendations at the end of the letter. He said the timing of this being at the end of a four-year cycle is unfortunate. He said, if this Commission were to be convened earlier in that four year cycle, it would make more sense both mathematically as well as politically, which is a recommendation they made the last time. He said it was received positively, although they did not make a decision about it. He said the other issue is that some members were reluctant to spend any money, to put it mildly, and they just did not want to hear that. He clarified, the

County Executive issue was completely different. He said the issue about what the job should be worth is really not an adjustment issue, it is a base, and that is why he mentioned in the other recommendation that the base needs adjusting as part of the Charter.

Ms. Chesnik said she thinks the salaries for the Councilmembers need to go into the Charter, and the Charter Review Committee is still reviewing the Charter, so they may be able to recommend a change to the Charter.

Ms. Morris said she would consider just looking at the salary because the benefits were not always there. She said the salary itself has not changed since 1997 when they added the \$1,000 difference for the Vice President to make \$17,000 and the Councilmembers \$16,000. She said, since that year, they have not received an increase in compensation, but they now receive some benefits. She said the counties they reviewed all receive those same benefits, and even Somerset County is receiving the same benefits and a \$25,000 a year salary, and they are the poorest county in the State of Maryland. She said it is, however, up to the Council, but it is challenging because the process is in the election cycle.

Dr. Diriker said the jump is going to look huge, but, in reality, it is not, to which Ms. Morris responded, it has been \$16,000 since 1997.

Ms. Wright said she is glad she brought this up because it is bringing up some good discussion and she is listening to everybody's opinions, which she respects. She said, looking at Somerset County, it says the President's salary is \$17,000 and for Councilmembers it is \$15,000, and they get some benefits. She said Cecil County is \$25,000 for all members and no benefits. She said she is trying to compare Wicomico County to other surrounding counties that are somewhat similar, and it appears that, with or without benefits, Wicomico is in line with them.

Dr. Diriker said, mathematically, Wicomico County is not that much different, but that is the blended parity, which looks at the size of the county, size of the budget, and number of employees. He said, with all those different factors, it would be \$30,000/\$25,000/\$20,000, and they are currently at \$18,000/\$17,000/\$16,000. He said essentially what the Commission chose in its early discussion was not to do the blended parity but to do the 2 percent. He explained, the President under 2 percent will be \$20,000, but under blended parity would be \$30,000. He said the Councilmember positions under the blended parity would be \$20,000, but under 2 percent would be \$18,000. He said they have a little bit more information about the benefits, so now they have to decide to do the blended parity for the higher number, or stick with the 2 percent as it was discussed the last time.

Mr. Bauer said he does think anybody is going to run for Office at the County level thinking they are going to be able to support anything. He said his company pays roughly 85 percent of the benefits for employees, and they have 110 employees, but only 32 take the benefits. He said he does not think they can factor benefits into it. He said some people's spouses probably have benefits, or they have another job somewhere, or they are retired, so personally, he does not think benefits should be factored in.

Dr. Diriker said, mathematically, it is very difficult, and, historically, they looked only at the compensation, but they did gather information just to inform their thinking, but not necessarily comparison wise. He said that brings the discussion to the blended parity-\$30,000 or 2 percent-\$20,000. He then asked if anybody wanted to make a motion.

On motion by Ms. Chesnik and seconded by Dr. Cooper, using the blended parity at \$30,000 passed with a vote of six in favor and four opposed.

Ms. Chesnik said she thinks this needs to go back to Charter Review to see if they can put minimums in the Charter, which will hit the next cycle.

Dr. Diriker then asked if they should vote for the Vice President and Councilmembers using the same calculation. Mr. Laws said he does not understand how they have structured this so they cannot talk about a number between \$20,000 and \$30,000, to which Dr. Diriker responded, he can make a motion to that effect.

Mr. Laws then made a motion for \$25,000 for the President, which was second by Ms. Morris.

Dr. Diriker then asked Ms. Chesnik if she would accept Mr. Laws' motion as a friendly amendment, to which she responded, yes. Dr. Diriker then clarified, the friendly amendment will take it down from \$30,000 to \$25,000.

Dr. Cooper asked if there is justification for why \$25,000 is a good number, to which Mr. Laws responded, he thinks it is true that there has not been an adjustment in these numbers in a long, long time. He said his father was a Councilmember serving four terms on the County Council through the 1990s, and he thinks Ms. Morris is correct that it has been \$16,000, \$17,000, or 18,000 since that time period. He said, all that time, inflation alone would suggest that they need an increase in the \$5,000 to \$7,000 range. He said \$30,000 seems somewhat aggressive, especially given the fact that some of these benefits are relatively new, as they were not always part of the picture. He said another factor is that Council's role has changed during this era, as it used to be both Executive and Legislative function, but now it is just a Legislative function. He clarified, that does not mean they do not put a lot of time in and play a valuable role, not only in legislating, but in checks and balances on the Executive, so it is not a negligible amount of time, but they also do not run the whole County like they did before they had a County Executive. He said it should be something in the middle between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

Ms. Chesnik asked if Mr. Laws is talking about \$25,000 for everybody, to which Mr. Laws responded, no, he would step it down by \$1,000 for the other two positions. He clarified, his motion would be President-\$25,000, Vice President-\$24,000 and Council Members-\$23,000.

Dr. Cooper said, from the justification Mr. Laws explained that it seems aggressive, she would counter that with the idea that she teaches accounting students at Salisbury University, and the students graduate when they are about 23 years old. She said they get offers at local CPA firms for upwards of \$55,000 a year for full-time work plus benefits. She said, to clarify, the Commission is suggesting that the President of the County Council is part-time and is less qualified than a 23 year old student fresh out of school, and she cannot buy that. She said Mr. Laws' justification that this seems aggressive is, frankly, unsupported, it is emotional, and not logical.

Ms. Morris clarified, the County Council positions are not considered full-time employee, they are elected to serve the people who elected them. She said they are not appointed to positions as they did not apply for them, except through the electoral process. She said she thinks over time the County Council people have become like employees, and that is why the Commission is looking at it this way. She said the County is not a business, as it does not make money; it makes enough money from taxes to pay the cost of government. She said, if they are vying for an increase in salary, that money has to be

raised and that money comes from the taxpayers. She clarified, she is not saying they will have to raise taxes, but there is a probability that it could happen.

Ms. Morris said another point is that people run for Office because they want to serve their County and want to be able to come to a meeting, but that is why only certain people can run for Office, as every employee cannot get up from their desk and go to a two-hour meeting. She said, if the Commission is suggesting they need to take away the ability for that person to be able to do that, then the County has to pay them a real salary because they cannot afford to work anywhere else. She said it is two hours for a meeting twice a month and whatever else they put in it for \$16,000 a year to pay for the cost of doing business with the community.

Mr. Rudnick said he was going to do something slightly different. Dr. Diriker said, if they were to keep the current ratio it would be \$25,000/\$22,500/\$20,000, to which Mr. Rudnick responded, that is originally where he was going.

Mr. Bauer asked why they need to step it down between the President, Vice President and regular Councilmembers. He further asked if there is that much of a delta in the responsibilities that it would justify this? He said he is the president of his HOA and wonders if it is more like the president-treasurer type thing, to which Dr. Diriker responded, there is a difference in the roles and responsibilities, and that is why those differentials were put in, and nothing has changed since then. He said he would be reluctant to make everybody the same, but it is the Commission's decision.

Mr. Aukward said he was just doing some quick math and, assuming a Councilmember is married, the total cost of benefits, excluding the pension, is about \$41,330 at a \$25,000 salary. He said, for a single individual it is \$32,620 for part-time work. He said, going back to what Dr. Cooper said about the \$25,000, if they are married, a salary of \$82,000 for a full-time job is what it would equate to. He said, at 20 hours a week at \$25,000 they are being paid \$24 an hour. He said they also do not have a five-year plus master's degree to get a CPA to go out and make \$50,000 - \$55,000. He said he works in the private sector in this area, and the pay is not that great unless they are in sales, but he stays where he is at because he likes where he works.

Mr. Aukward asked if they have seen an additional amount of people run for Office now that they have benefits and are making \$18,000 and getting health benefits, as he does not think that is what causes people to run. He said this is the same reason they have people in Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, and involved with their church. He said they have a sense of community, and \$16,000 or \$25,000 does not give that sense of community, it has to come from the heart. He said he thinks, personally, the County is overpaying. He said, when he looks at what some of the other counties are paying, Wicomico County is right where it should be when looking at the cost of the benefits package. He said he is looking at the whole thing, but, again, nobody is looking at running for Office and saying they need \$25,000 or this is not going to work for them. He clarified, the County Executive position is a different story, but for County Council, he does not see it.

Dr. Diriker said, with that in mind, he would like to get Mr. Laws to repeat his numbers since they have a motion and a second in place, and he would like to take a vote on those numbers. He said, if that fails, they will come with other numbers.

Mr. Bauer said he is active in his church, he volunteers for the American Red Cross, and he is part of his HOA. He said his fear is that, if they do not compensate people for serving, they are going to wind up with is a privileged class or a retired class of people who will constantly go in and run for Office. He said there are time constraints or other things that some people are not able to do, and he does not think anybody should go into politics to get rich, but, if there is not some sort of compensation, setting benefits aside, they will have groups of people. He explained, for example, when he goes to Rotary, it is a lot of business executives, and a lot of people who do not need money, and they have the time and the flexibility with their positions so they can go out and volunteer. He said, while that is great, he does not know that he would want that for government.

Dr. Cooper said, in a worst case scenario it also encourages corruption.

Dr. Diriker said he is going to ask Mr. Laws to repeat the numbers, but before he does that he wants to say that, as a Chair, he only votes to break a tie, but his personal feeling is the parity, which is \$30,000/\$27,500/\$25,000; however, he is very comfortable with the numbers Mr. Laws offered as well.

Mr. Laws said anything the Commission does is a recommendation, as the Charter says the Council can cut it, but it cannot increase it. He said his motion is Council President-\$25,000, Vice President-\$24,000 and Council Members-\$23,000.

Ms. Wright asked if the \$30,000 figure is still on the table, to which Dr. Diriker responded, no, just the numbers Mr. Laws put forth.

Ms. Mengason then asked for clarification on if this is another option different from the \$30,000, to which Dr. Diriker responded, yes. He explained, if this fails, then they will come up with new numbers. Ms. Mengason then asked if they want Council to take this recommendation and, if the Council has not taken recommendations in the past, is there less of a chance they will take a recommendation of \$30,000, to which Dr. Diriker responded, they will discuss that in a few minutes.

The motion put forward by Mr. Laws was seconded by Ms. Morris, but failed with a vote of three in favor and seven opposed.

Ms. Morris said the County Council has not accepted any recommendation for an increase since 1997. She said, if they say that the Council is going to go into an election year with \$16,000 to a \$30,000 increase, the public will not have had the benefit of any of these discussions. She clarified, all they will see is the \$16,000 to \$30,000.

Dr. Diriker said he is going to be brutally honest - they cannot worry too much about what the Council is going to do. He said Ms. Morris is probably right, as that is probably what is going to happen, but he would like to give them a sufficiently palatable increase that Council can then cut back from, because they cannot add to any number they give them, as they can only cut back or completely refuse, which they have done in the past. He said, whatever the next set of numbers is going to be, they are not the numbers they are going to take as they are likely going to cut back from that, but will give Council a starting point for their discussions.

Mr. Rudnick made a motion for \$25,000/\$23,000/\$21,000, which was seconded by Mr. Aukward.

Dr. Cooper asked what happened to the vote on parity, to which Dr. Diriker responded, there was never a vote on the parity. He clarified, the Commission took a vote on the 2 percent, and now it is about to supersede that with the current vote.

The motion by Mr. Rudnick and seconded by Mr. Aukward for \$25,000/\$23,000/\$21,000 passed with a vote of 8 in favor and 2 opposed.

Dr. Diriker said they have now decided on the County Council President, Vice President, and Councilmembers. He said the County Sheriff position he had mistakenly put in at \$105,000, but currently it is \$95,000, so the recommendation would be \$107,000.

Mr. Laws said he thinks that is excessive as that is a 12.6 percent increase, to which Dr. Diriker responded, that is a cumulative two percent, including the next two years, which is the methodology they used. Mr. Laws said his other problem is that it is not in the Charter that they recommend anything about the Sheriff by law. He said the County Council sets the salary, which they can do as part of the ordinary budget process without recommendations. He said he knows this Commission has made that recommendation in past meetings, but it is not in the letter he received appointing him to this Commission, which was confined to the Charter, the roles of recommending compensation for County Councilmembers and the County Executive. He said he is not sure why they are making a recommendation, but, if they are going to make a recommendation, he thinks it is a little high.

Dr. Diriker said Mr. Laws is correct in that it is not in the Charter, but members of the County Council have asked them to look at the Sheriff's salary, and it is the Commission's prerogative whether they are going to answer a question or not. Mr. Laws clarified, he did not know there was a formal request for it.

Dr. Diriker said the other request they have not even discussed yet is the salary for members of the Board of Education, but given the time crunch with what they have to do, they are going to delay looking at the Board of Education's salary for now.

Dr. Diriker said the current number for the Sheriff comes from the 2 percent, which is \$107,000 and is still below the parity number.

Ms. Morris asked, if they are making a recommendation in lieu of it being part of the budget process, what happens if the County decides they are going to give 4 percent this year, to which Dr. Diriker responded, it is in lieu of. He explained, because it is an elected position, the Council wanted the Commission's deliberations on it. He then asked if there is a motion to reduce the amount.

Mr. Laws made a motion for the Sheriff's salary to be \$100,000, which was seconded Mr. Aukward.

Ms. Morris clarified, the current salary is \$95,000, to which Dr. Diriker responded, yes.

Mr. Aukward said, in 2013, the Commission recommended \$99,000, and, in 2017, they recommended \$104,000.

Mr. Rudnick said, when looking at all the numbers for Sheriffs in other counties, the \$100,000 seems like a pretty fair number. He said there are nine counties under \$100,000, so it looks pretty good.

Ms. Chesnik said, in some counties all the sheriff does is deliver warrants, so they do not do what Wicomico County's Sheriff does, and their sheriff does a heck of a lot more than just deliver warrants.

Mr. Laws said, in many counties they do not have an urban center like Salisbury with its own police department either, to which Ms. Chesnik responded, they also do not have a big County like Wicomico where they run from end to end either.

The motion made by Mr. Laws and seconded by Mr. Aukward to increase the Sheriff's salary to \$100,000 passed with 6 in favor and 4 opposed.

Dr. Diriker said they do not need to revisit the salary for the County Executive as they did that and it was long and detailed.

Ms. Chesnik made a motion to leave the benefits unchanged, which was seconded by Mr. Laws and unanimously approved.

Mr. Laws said Dr. Diriker mentioned that they did not need to review the salary for the County Executive again, but that was the meeting he missed. He then asked if the Commission recognizes that the \$124,000 is actually a little bit less than the 2017 recommendation, to which Ms. Chesnik responded, it is less, but when comparing Wicomico County to Cecil County or Frederick County being somewhere around \$98,000 to \$120,000, it is well within range.

Dr. Diriker said there are three additional recommendations, which he is going to review from the bottom up. He said, in looking at number three, the last Commission also discussed that the timing of this Commission's meeting is creating optics issues. He said the last time they made a recommendation, which was favorably received verbally, but then they tabled the discussion and he does not know what happened, as it never got voted on. He said he thinks moving this process into the middle of the four year cycle takes away some of the heat.

Mrs. Hurley clarified, State law dictates the timing. She said the Charter Review Committee took a look at it, and the County Attorney said it would have to be changed by the State. Dr. Diriker suggested they include language recommending that the Council look into talking with the State. He said every obstacle that is part of a law or statute was put there by human beings and can be also amended by human beings, it is just that the process is a little bit longer.

Ms. Chesnik made a motion to include a recommendation to change the timing for the review by the Compensation and Allowance Commission to be discussed with State representatives, to which Ms. Morris seconded, and was unanimously approved.

Ms. Chesnik asked if there is a reason why the Charter cannot contain a Section that sets a minimum amount for the County Councilmembers, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, she does not remember that being discussed by the Charter Review Committee. Ms. Chesnik said she recalls the Charter Review Committee set a minimum for the County Executive, and she thinks there should be a minimum for the Councilmembers, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, the Council salaries are in the County Code, which is different than the Charter, and can be amended by Legislation.

Ms. Chesnik then made a motion to include a minimum salary for the Council President, Vice President, and regular Councilmembers in the County Code.

Mr. Laws asked if she meant the Charter rather than the County Code, to which Ms. Chesnik responded no, it is in the Code. She then asked if it could be added to the Charter, to which Mrs. Hurley responded,

it is a different process, as the changes to the Charter are approved by the voters and the County Code changes are approved by Council through Legislation.

Ms. Wright asked if Ms. Chesnik can explain why she thinks that is necessary, and why they need a minimum, as she cannot see anybody lowering their salaries, to which Ms. Chesnik responded, they go through this round and round, and if they cannot do something with the State to change when these recommendations are made, she strongly suggests they put them in the County Code as a minimum.

Ms. Morris said this Commission should have been appointed a month ago, so the timing is not a problem, it is when it is done. She said the law is already written for when this Commission should be established, to which Ms. Chesnik responded, it should have been done in the summer.

Dr. Diriker said, historically, the Commission has always been appointed four or five months before the November deadline to present, but the issue is that they have to vote on it when it is too close to the next election. He clarified, that is the issue, so that is what they are trying to fix.

Dr. Diriker said they are currently working off of a base that was set many, many years ago, and since that time, the Council's roles and responsibilities have changed. He said it is now a discussion beyond the scope of their responsibility to determine if that base is still correct or not. He clarified, they are simply looking at adjustments to what is in front of them. He said Ms. Chesnik's motion, which needs a second, would address that issue and would get them to look into the roles and responsibilities and, therefore, whether it should be a different number. He said, if there is no second, it is going to die on the table.

Ms. Chesnik clarified, her motion is to set a minimum in the Code for the Council salaries, just the way it is going to be for the County Executive in the Charter.

Dr. Diriker said the next Compensation and Allowance Commission would work off of that, so they would either stay with that recommended minimum or add to it.

Ms. Chesnik said the County Executive has never gotten any money because there is a minimum set in the Charter and nobody is going to change that ever. She said, hopefully, they will take this recommendation; plus, they will take what they have recommended for the Charter, which they do not have to accept either, and make a change for the County Executive.

The motion made by Ms. Chesnik to set a minimum in the County Code for the Council salaries was seconded by Mr. Laws and unanimously approved.

Dr. Diriker said he will change the wording in the letter.

Dr. Diriker said the last recommendation is a simple procedural thing. He explained, when a regular employee's COLA is afforded to them, this recommendation says that it should also go to these people for whom they made these decisions. He said it takes out the cost of living piece from their discussions, they simply discuss that is it fair. He said they are employees, particularly the County Executive and Sheriff, and they are subject to the same cost of living realities.

Ms. Chesnik asked if they are at 5 percent this year, to which Dr. Diriker responded, almost 6 percent, and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve said it is going to last longer than they originally thought. He

said, at least for the Sheriff and the County Executive, the last Commission believed this and he still believes this, COLAs should not be a discussion that they have to do each time.

Ms. Wright said she agrees that the County Executive and the Sheriff should fall into that category. She then made a motion that the County Executive and Sheriff's salaries should include an annual COLA, which was seconded by Ms. Chesnik. Dr. Diriker clarified, the COLA would be whatever is decided in the budget, not an automatic number.

Mr. Laws asked what the logic is of leaving the Council out but including the County Executive in the annual increases. He said the Charter constitutionally is to make recommendations for the upcoming term, and they both have a four-year term and are all political Office holders, so he does not understand the logic of including the County Executive but not the Council in cost of living type increases.

Mr. Aukward said it is a full-time versus part-time argument. He clarified, for the County Executive and Sheriff, it is their career.

Dr. Diriker clarified, the motion is to include COLA language for the Sheriff and County Executive only. Ms. Morris asked if that will require a Charter amendment, to which Dr. Diriker responded, these are just recommendations for them to consider whatever the process is.

Mr. Rudnick said it seems there is history of rounding off to the \$1,000 numbers. He then asked if that is relevant to this discussion, to which Dr. Diriker responded, this is just something for Council to consider.

The motion made by Ms. Wright to include a recommendation to provide a COLA for the Sheriff and County Executive was seconded by Ms. Chesnik and approved with 9 votes in favor and 1 opposed.

Mr. Laws made a recommendation that a paragraph be put back in the report like the one that was in the letter four years ago making the point that says the Council and County Executive salaries have not changed in a really long time and inflation alone, especially given the surge of inflation they are seeing now, would dictate considerably higher numbers. He said there was a figure of \$113,000 just based on inflation four years ago for the County Executive, and he is not sure if that number was put in. Dr. Diriker responded, that number is actually going to be in Appendix B, but he can also put it in the letter itself.

Dr. Diriker said he is going to send a copy of the letter to everyone for review and edits.

He said there will be one last Zoom meeting to vote on the final letter, and then the final letter will be ready for signature. He said the letter will be kept in the Council Office for everybody to sign it, and then at the next council meeting they will present their recommendations to the County Council. Mrs. Hurley said the Council meeting will be on December 21 at 10 a.m. Dr. Diriker said it is not required, but encouraged, that Commission members attend that meeting if they can.

Dr. Diriker asked for any comments or edits to the letter to be submitted by noon on December 6. There was no further discussion.



Dr. Memo Diriker, Chairman



Laura Hurley, Recording Secretary