



## **Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials**

### **MEETING MINUTES (Approved)**

**June 28, 2023**

**5:45 p.m.**

Pierce County Annex Building  
2401 S 35<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Tacoma, WA 98409  
Pantages Conference Room  
OR

Teams (Virtual)

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 278 738 406 673

Passcode: G4FYSa

Or call in (audio only)

+1 206-800-4708 Phone Conference ID: 313 954 466#

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#### **Board Members Present:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Orval Warren   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Candie Lorenzo |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Doreen Wymore  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kirsten Willis |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mark Lindstrom | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deidre Puffer  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laura Biddle   | <input type="checkbox"/> Trevor Williams           |

#### **Pierce County Staff Present:**

- Kim Schwannecke – Administrative Assistant, Board Clerk
- Carrie Frohlich – Classification and Compensation Manager
- Kelly Lewis – Assistant Director of HR – Talent Management
- Lauren Caldera – Compensation and Classification Analyst
- Katie Blinn – County Attorney

#### **Welcome and Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Candie Lorenzo at 5:46 p.m.

**Acknowledgement of Quorum:** Candie Lorenzo confirmed a quorum.

## **Approval of May 31, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

[**Moved:** Orval Warren | **Seconded:** Mark Lindstrom | **All in Favor:** Aye]

**Announcement:** Board Clerk, Kim Schwannecke, announced that Marlo Oesch has been appointed to the Legal Representative position of the Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials. Oesch will have her orientation before the next meeting and will be an active board member at the July 26, 2023, meeting. Oesch introduced herself. Oesch is a resident of Pierce County. She is a member of the Washington State Bar Association and has professional experience as a Washington State Attorney. Oesch also has experience with the Pierce County Department of Assigned Counsel as an Attorney and Rule 9 Intern. Oesch has volunteered as a member on the Pierce County Ethics Commission and was the Chair from 2016-2018. Additionally, Oesch was a member of the TPCBA Judicial Qualifications Committee. Welcome!

### **Presentation to Commission by Elected Officials:**

- 6:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Assessor-Treasurer – Mike Lonergan:

Mike Lonergan introduced himself as the Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer. Lonergan stated that Assessor-Treasurer is a unique position in the State of Washington, as other counties have an Assessor and a Treasurer. Lonergan stated that he has been the Assessor-Treasurer for 10.5 years, with 1.5 years to go in the twelve-year term for this position. Lonergan stated that his main duties include discovering, listing, and assessing the value of all taxable properties in Pierce County. Lonergan stated that Pierce County has 330,000 parcels to place value on each year. Currently, Pierce County is valued at \$185 billion. Additionally, Lonergan stated that the Office is responsible for complying with legal requirements for processing appeals to the assessments, exemptions from taxes, and deferrals from taxes, as outlined in the Code of Washington. Another duty of the Assessor-Treasurer is to maintain the accurate physical inspection, mapping, and records of Pierce County properties. The Office physically inspects every property once every 6 years; this past year, they completed the City of Tacoma. On the commercial side, each of Pierce County's nine commercial appraisers had a specific assignment in the County. The Office also has five employees on the cartography team; they map each parcel, which are always changing. Furthermore, the Assessor-Treasurer's office completes the levy process for over sixty different taxing districts. The Assessor-Treasurer not only works for Pierce County, but also the Park Districts, Flood District, all Cities and Towns, Fire District, Sound Transit, and more. The Assessor-Treasurer creates the bills and tax statements.

Lonergan stated that he like that the property value and taxation are in one Office. Lonergan stated that his Office gets customer calls for both the Assessor and Treasurer. This year, the value in residential properties went down, so there have been many customer calls about that. Lonergan stated that the Assessor-Treasurer Office is responsible for closure of properties that do not pay their taxes, which comes out to 20-30 properties a year. However, the Assessor-Treasurer's Office does not have control over mobile homes, business equipment, etc., which have taxes due every year. This section is held in the Finance department when it should be handled by the Assessor-Treasurer. This is the one thing he would change.

Lonergan stated that the most challenging part of his job and the most enjoyable part of his job are the relationships he gets to build. Lonergan stated that he manages seventy-eight people who do a variety of complex jobs. During the last ten years, about half of the employees have retired or left and have been replaced. Lonergan stated that he also builds relationships with the taxing districts and with other departments within Pierce County. Furthermore, Lonergan stated that he builds relationships with vendors. For example, there's a major upgrade to the twenty-two-year-old software systems that Pierce County is in the process of replacing with a newer, better system. All these relationships take time to ensure the job is getting done correctly and they have the resources needed.

Lonergan stated that he had a Deputy Assessor-Treasurer on the Organization Chart, but there hasn't been anyone employed in that position since he's been in Office. This is because he had to make a choice between hiring a Deputy and keeping the employees he had. Lonergan stated that he chose to keep the employees. He currently has six assistants under him, including an Administrator who oversees everything except the appraisal of properties and has been in the Assessor-Treasurer Office for about five years. Lonergan stated that the Administrator is well compensated. Lonergan stated that the Office is always succession planning, and training employees to replace other employees as they leave.

Lonergan stated that one major upcoming change is that there will be someone else elected as the Assessor-Treasurer two years from now. He also stated that Pierce County is finalizing budgets for the next biennium, which can lead to some changes. Additionally, Lonergan stated that the qualifications for Senior and Disabled exemptions will be changing on a County-by-County basis, based on a percentage of the median income. Lonergan stated that he believes this change will add a large number of additional people who can qualify for the exemption. Because of this, he is asking for two additional employees in the biennium budget.

Lonergan stated that he believes the compensation for the Assessor-Treasurer is fair. He stated that he would not like to receive a larger increase than the staff receives. Lonergan stated that the last raise was 4% for the Elected and most County employees, which he believes is fair. Lonergan shared the strategy of Whatcom County, which states that the County Executive Salary shall be 103% of the Superior Court Judge, which is set on a state-wide basis starting January 1 of each year. The three Elected positions shall be 71% of the County Executive's Salary; in Whatcom County, the Assessor and Treasurer are two separate positions. Lonergan stated he thought this process was interesting. Lonergan also stated that Whatcom County is smaller than Pierce County but has a bigger salary than Pierce County.

Orval Warren asked what the percentage is for successful appeals. Lonergan stated the Office typically has 1,000-1,500 appeals (about 0.33%). Lonergan stated that the Office reviews the appeal for any errors and prepare a stipulation to the Board of Equalization for any errors; this ends up being about a third of all the cases. For the remaining appeals, Lonergan stated that the Office prepares a position using comparable properties and typically wins more than half the cases because they've already addressed the ones needing correction. If there's a correction, it's retroactive. Lonergan stated that the Assessor-Treasurer Office doesn't care if they win or lose, they care about getting the correct value.

Candie Lorenzo thanked Lonergan and stated that it is very admirable that he would like the same pay raise percentage as his employees.

Carrie Frohlich stated that the Classification and Compensation team can get similar data and percentages as Whatcom County if desired. Lorenzo stated that the information would be helpful. Frohlich stated she will provide it in the meeting minutes.

**Recess:** Candie Lorenzo made a motion to recess until 6:30 p.m.

[**Moved:** Kirsten Willis | **Seconded:** Diedre Puffer | **All in Favor:** Aye]

**Back into Session:** Candie Lorenzo declared the Commission back into session at 6:32 p.m.

### **Continued Presentation to Commission by Elected Officials:**

- 6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Executive Bruce Dammeier

Bruce Dammeier introduced himself as the Executive and thanked the Commission for having him. Dammeier stated he appreciates the work of the Commission members and thanked the Commission members for serving the citizens of Pierce County in this way. Dammeier stated that he is 6.5 years into his two terms, which will total eight years.

Carrie Frohlich asked: What are the five key responsibilities of your Elected Position and how are you meeting them? Have they changed?

Dammeier stated that the first responsibility of the Pierce County Executive is County Leadership, which includes leading the Executive departments of Pierce County and leading the Elected Officials of Pierce County who represent the other departments. Dammeier stated that he thinks they've done well with leading the County, especially through COVID, and have received national and international recognition. Dammeier mentioned that PCTV just one an Emmy. Dammeier stated that the second responsibility is regional leadership, which includes Pierce County as a whole and representing the County in larger, regional events. Dammeier stated that he is proud that the County has brought together fifteen governments in Pierce County to address the need for housing affordability by forming the South Sound Housing Authority Partnership. Dammeier also stated that they've come together around a Blue Zones initiative that promotes wellbeing in the Parkland area. Furthermore, Dammeier stated that the County is in the process of building the Pierce County Village – a microhome village that addresses those experiencing homelessness. This model has been very successful in Texas, and Pierce County will be the first to establish this model in Washington. The Pierce County Village helps those experiencing homelessness to get healthy and restore dignity of life, giving people dignity and purpose. Dammeier stated that the third responsibility of the Executive is establishing County culture. The County has a list of five values that the Executive talks about at every new employee orientation: Integrity, Accountability, Innovation, Respect, and Partnership. Dammeier stated the fourth responsibility of the Executive is fiscal responsibility, as it's important that the County manages their finances well. Dammeier stated that our community needs the services the County provides, so the County needs a stable workforce that can deliver the services to our community. Dammeier stated that the County was told by a rating agency that Pierce County is at a Triple A rating, the highest bond rating there is. Lastly, Dammeier stated that the fifth responsibility of the Executive would be transparency. Dammeier stated that the County works hard to be transparent to build trust with the residents of the County. The Open Pierce County website shows the public County budget, spending, dashboards, and more.

Frohlich asked: If you could re-write your job description what would you add and/or delete?

Dammeier stated he would give the County Executive the ability to veto a line item in a proposed Ordinance. Currently, he is only able to veto all of the proposed Ordinance or none of the proposed Ordinance according to the County Charter. Dammeier stated that this would be particularly helpful as the County enters into a challenging budget season.

Frohlich asked: What is the most critical/complex piece of your job? What part of your job do you enjoy the most?

Dammeier stated that the most complex piece of the Executive's job is working with other governments and other elected officials. It's core to what he must do, but it's challenging. Dammeier stated he can't tell them what to do, he can only try to persuade and convince. Dammeier stated that the biggest upcoming challenge will be the budget and helping everyone transition to a more sustainable level of spending. Dammeier stated at the best part of his job is getting to know Pierce County employees.

Frohlich asked: Do you have a "second-in-command" (assistant/deputy/etc.)? If so, what is his/her role in your organization? Do you feel the compensation for your second-in-command is fair?

Dammeier stated that he has a Deputy Executive (Dan Grimm) who directly supervises all the Department Directors. Grimm works with the Department Directors daily and is responsible for the operations of Pierce County Departments. Dammeier stated that he believed Grimm is compensated, but he acknowledged that the Pierce County Classification and Compensation team is the one who makes sure Pierce County employees are paid professionally and competitively.

Frohlich asked: What changes have you made within your role over the last year? What do we have to look forward from your office in the future?

Dammeier stated that Pierce County now has a Chief of Staff, Brian Hardtke. The Executive Team works under the Chief of Staff, which has enabled us to be more effective in advancing our initiatives. Dammeier stated that Hardtke is super sharp and effective. Dammeier stated that the public will continue to see the County advocating strongly on behalf of our community, investing widely, promoting transparency, and acting in the best interest of the County. Dammeier stated that Pierce County is very diverse – we are urban and rural, we are far right and far left, we go from commencement bay to Mount Rainier, and we have an array of cultures and communities. Dammeier stated that representing and serving all of those in Pierce County is challenging but really fulfilling.

Frohlich asked: In your opinion, do you think the compensation for this position is fair?

Dammeier stated Yes, he thinks the compensation is fair. He also stated that he believes the County will attract new candidates, and he doesn't believe compensation drives people in the Executive position. Dammeier stated that he believes the County Executive

should never accept a pay raise higher than its employees are getting. Dammeier stated that the County should take care of its employees first.

**Public Testimony:** None

**Good of the Order:**

Board Clerk, Kim Schwannecke, announced that the next two meetings will be in the Grand Conference Room across the hall for those attending in person. There will still be an option to attend virtually. Schwannecke then asked if there is any additional information the Commission needs from the Classification and Compensation team before the next meeting. Lorenzo stated No.

Orval Warren asked for more information regarding the letter from Auditor Linda Farmer. Classification and Compensation Manager, Carrie Frohlich, stated that the previous Auditor declined the recommendation made by the Salary Commission in the past. Farmer's letter is addressing that the Assessor-Treasurer is compensated higher than the Auditor currently is due to the previous Auditor declining the recommendation. Lorenzo asked if those two positions would normally be placed in a similar pay grade. Frohlich stated that she can provide the Commission with the pay for each position over the last few years. Pierce County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, Katie Blinn, also mentioned that the General Wage Increase will not be known until late 2023, but we will share any knowledge with the Commission as soon as we have it. Lorenzo asked if the Commission would have the June CPI rates for the July meeting. Lauren Caldera with the Pierce County Classification and Compensation team said yes.

**Adjournment:** Candie Lorenzo called for meeting adjournment at 6:59pm

[**Moved:** Orval Warren | **Seconded:** Doreen Wymore | **All in Favor:** Aye]