



# Pierce County Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials Process & Procedures

---

## THE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A COMMISSIONER

- Attend and be prepared for all meetings;
- Become familiar with and follow statutes, operating rules, and policies;
- Carefully listen to the presentations of experts, members of the public, and the elected officials;
- Read and examine the materials and information presented before making decisions;
- Actively participate in meetings and hearings;
- Be willing and able to reach thoughtful, non-political decisions;
- Work collaboratively with the group in making decisions, recognizing that compromise may be necessary to reach group consensus; and
- Prepare a biennial salary recommendation for the Auditor, Assessor-Treasurer, Executive, and Sheriff, and deliver the recommendation to the Clerk of the Council no later than August 7.

It is important to recognize that as a Commissioner, you do not represent a specific constituency such as a particular Council District or the field from which you were selected, for example, the business community. Rather, you represent all the citizens of the County.

## THE ROLE OF STAFF

The support staff are responsible for providing the support and resources needed to effectively carry out your duties as a Commissioner. Staff will:

- Research, develop, and provide technical information, data, and materials for consideration in your salary setting deliberations and decisions.
- Implement and carry out the rules, policies, programs, and decisions that are made.
- Make arrangements for meetings, and prepare meeting materials.
- Support staff do not influence, communicate recommendations, or play a role in any decisions or deliberations made by the Commission.

Please contact the staff regarding any questions you may have or assistance you may need.

## SETTING THE ELECTED OFFICIALS' SALARIES

It is appropriate to base salaries on realistic standards and to set salaries that are commensurate with the duties of the job. Historically, Pierce County has utilized compensation methods in determining appropriate salaries for the County's elected officials.

The positions for which the Commission has salary setting authority are:

- Assessor-Treasurer
- Auditor
- Executive
- Sheriff

**Note:** The Commission does not set the salaries of elected officials in the judicial or legislative branches of Pierce County government.

## THE COMMISSION'S SALARY SETTING AUTHORITY AND LIMITATIONS

In recommending the elected officials' salaries, the Commission may:

- Grant a general cost of living adjustment (COLA) to all positions.
- Increase the salary of a particular position or positions.
- Not grant any increases — keep all salaries at their current level.

The Commission does not have the authority to reduce salaries.

## THE SALARY SETTING TIMELINES

The Commission is required to recommend the elected officials' salaries on a biennial basis. Any revisions to the original recommendation the second year of the biennium should be submitted to the Clerk of the Council no later than August 7. The table on the following page outlines the process.



General Timeframe	Action Required
March/April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation, election of officers, and adoption of meeting schedule.</li> <li>• Review process/procedures for any improvements and/or efficiencies.</li> <li>• Identify factors and determine what information staff needs to provide for the Commission.</li> </ul>
April/May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and identify factors/methodology to consider in order to facilitate the decision-making process.</li> <li>• Review of the information provided by the staff.</li> </ul>
May/June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hear testimony from the elected officials.</li> <li>• Further discussion regarding a proposed salary recommendation.</li> <li>• After hearing testimony from the public, the Commission may adopt a salary recommendation.</li> </ul>
June/July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Year 1:</b> If a decision regarding the proposed salary recommendation has not been reached, hold further discussion and make decision regarding the proposed salary recommendation. After hearing public testimony, a salary recommendation should be adopted. Adopting a salary recommendation could be deferred to the August meeting.</li> <li>• <b>Year 2 [if needed]:</b> Review and discuss the original salary recommendation for the second year of the County budget cycle. The Commission will hear public testimony. After hearing public testimony, the original recommendation should be confirmed or revised. Adopting a salary recommendation could be deferred to the August meeting.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optional meeting if necessary.</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Year 1:</b> The Commission must file the adopted salary recommendation with the Clerk of the Council no later than August 7.</li> <li>• <b>Year 2 [if needed]:</b> The Commission must file any revisions to the original recommendation with the Clerk of the Council no later than August 7.</li> </ul>

**NOTE:** The Pierce County Council reviews the adopted salary recommendation during the budget-setting process in October/November. The Council may revise the recommendation prior to voting.

The specific meeting dates and locations will be set at the March/April meeting. All of the Commission's meetings, actions, hearings, and business conducted are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act.

## HOW THE SALARY SETTING PROCESS WORKS

It is Pierce County's desire to attract citizens of the highest quality to public service by:

- Establishing proper salaries for elected officials;
- Basing those salaries on realistic standards; and
- Paying the elected officials according to the duties of their office.

The Commission's responsibility is to evaluate the position and recommend a salary that is commensurate with the duties. It is the voters' responsibility to evaluate the performance of the person doing the job.

The Commission is directed to set a biennial salary recommendation.

1. The first step is to adopt or review a proposed biennial salary recommendation. The proposal is then "on the table" for public comment and input. Consideration of a proposed salary recommendation will be listed on the Commission's agenda, which is published on the Pierce County [website](#).
2. The public is encouraged to participate in the decision-making process by attending one of the public meetings or by sending comments to the Commission via phone, fax, mail, or email at [pchumanresources@piercecountywa.gov](mailto:pchumanresources@piercecountywa.gov). All input from the public is shared with the Commissioners.
3. A final biennial salary recommendation must be adopted no later than August 7.
4. The final salary recommendation must be filed with the Clerk of the Council no later than August 7. The effective date of the final salary recommendation would be effective on January 1 of the following year.

## PUBLIC TESTIMONY AT MEETINGS

The meetings of the Commission are informal. Anyone can testify; however, time is limited, so please be brief and direct. Written testimony can be distributed in lieu of oral testimony. If presenting written testimony, please provide 11 copies.

In presenting testimony, begin your remarks by addressing the Chairperson and the Commissioners. Introduce yourself and whether you are representing yourself or an organization. Your testimony must be limited to three (3) minutes.

After your testimony, be prepared for questions and comments from the Commissioners.

The Commission asks that you consider the following in preparing your testimony:

- The Commission is charged with evaluating the duties of the elected officials' positions, not their performance. Voters are responsible for evaluating their performance.
- Issues that are appropriate for testimony and the Commission's consideration are those that deal with factors such as complexity of duties, the knowledge and skills required by the *position*, and the current or proposed salary.
- Issues that are not appropriate for the Commission to consider include the pros and cons of legislation, tax rates, policies of County government, personalities of elected officials, and other topics not related to the duties or salaries of the elected officials under the purview of this Commission.

### **Your input is needed!**

Public comment and testimony at meetings is welcomed and encouraged. If you cannot attend a meeting, the Commission would still like to hear from you. You can address any communication to:

Pierce County Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials  
c/o Pierce County Human Resources Department  
950 Fawcett Avenue, Suite 200  
Tacoma, WA 98402-5603

## PUBLIC MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

All meetings, actions, hearings, and business the Commission conducts must comply with the [Open Public Meetings Act](#) (OPMA) and the [Public Records Act](#). This means that all business the Commission conducts must be open and accessible to the public. The only exception is if the Commission calls an Executive Session. The law is very specific about the topics and/or business that may be considered in Executive Session and how and when such a session may be called. Generally, if an Executive Session is called, legal counsel will be present.

### Attendance at Meetings

---

Your regular attendance at meetings is important. Your position as a Commissioner may be forfeited because of poor attendance. The Pierce County Code states:

*The Executive may remove any appointed member of the Commission for inefficiency, neglect of duty, malfeasance, or three unexcused absences in one year, subject to confirmation by a majority of the Council. ([PCC 2.100.050](#))*

Requesting to be excused from a meeting is easy. You may be excused by either calling or sending an email request to the Commission's support staff stating the reason and requesting to be excused. They will then give your request to the Chair of the Commission.

At the meeting, the Chair may grant you an excused absence or ask for a vote of the membership to excuse your absence.

### Quorum

---

A **majority** of the appointed members constitutes a quorum for the purpose of conducting a meeting. If a member is not able to be physically present at the meeting site, they may participate by teleconferencing for all or part of a meeting if: prior approval for good cause is given by the Chair of the Commission, prior arrangements are made with Human Resource staff; and all persons participating in the meeting are able to hear each other at the same time.

### Action/Adopt a Salary Recommendation

---

Taking action at a meeting requires an affirmative vote of **a majority of members present**. Final action to set or recommend a salary increase requires an affirmative vote of not less than six members. Such final action shall be in writing and certified by the signatures of the members voting.

### Officers

---

The Chair and Vice-Chair serve at the discretion of the Commission and may be replaced by majority vote at any time. In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair assumes the duties of Chair.

## MEETINGS

All meetings, actions, hearings, and business the Commission conducts must comply with the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). This means that all business conducted must be open and accessible to the public. The only exception is if the Commission calls an Executive Session. Information about Executive Sessions is found below.

### Regular Meetings

---

Regular meetings are defined as recurring meetings held in accordance with a periodic schedule. The meetings held during the salary setting process meet the definition of *Regular Meetings*. These meetings are open to the public. Time to hear public testimony will be a part of the regular agenda.

### Public Hearings

---

The Commission may hold public hearings to take public testimony on the *proposed* salary recommendation. All regular meetings are open to the public, and time to hear public testimony is a part of the agenda of each regular meeting.

### Work Sessions

---

The Commission may hold Commissioner Work Sessions in conjunction with public hearings. Their purpose is to review and discuss data and materials relative to the salary setting process and to conduct other business. Items discussed in these sessions that require formal action must be included on that meeting's agenda.

### Special Meetings

---

A special meeting may be called at any time by the Chair or by a majority of Commissioners. The orientation meeting, planning meeting, and conference call meetings fall into this category.

### Executive Sessions

---

The Chair or a majority of Commissioners may call for an Executive Session at any time. However, the law is very specific about the topics and business that can be conducted in Executive Session and how and when such a session may be called. The Chair must publicly announce the purpose of the Executive Session prior to convening one. Members of the public are not allowed to attend these sessions. Legal counsel may be asked to attend any such meetings to ensure that the Commission follows the letter of the law.

## MEETING PROCEDURES

All business is conducted by motion. Any Commissioner, except the Chair, may make a motion. The Commission's meetings are informal, but it will loosely follow [Robert's Rules of Order](#) for its procedures.

### Voting

---

The Chair has a vote just like any other member. The Chair may call for a voice vote or a roll call vote for general business.

The exception is when adopting the final salary recommendation. The Chair will call for a roll call vote. Those votes are recorded into the minutes.

The Open Public Meetings Act prohibits voting by secret ballot.

### Meeting Minutes and Filming

---

The Commission's meetings are recorded by staff support. The minutes are sent to all Commissioners and are posted on the Pierce County Human Resources website after they are approved.

The Commission's meetings may be filmed by and shown on PCTV, the County's public affairs television network.

### Public Records Act

---

Members of Boards, Commissions, Committees, and Task Forces may be required to produce their personal notes taken at their meetings and/or emails that relate to the activities and deliberations of the organization in response to a request for inspection and copying of public records (a public records request). To the extent those notes contain information that is purely personal or material that is exempt under the [Public Records Act](#), portions of the documents may be redacted.

Public records are the property of the County and must be managed (preserved, stored, transferred, destroyed, etc.) according to the provisions of [RCW 40.14](#). We suggest that Commissioners copy electronic and paper records **not already in possession of the County** back to County staff periodically (in the case of ongoing Commissions) or upon completion of their charge.

It is recommended that Commissioners establish a separate, clearly named folder within their personal email account and/or on the hard drive of their personal computer in which they file all materials relating to the organization. It is also advisable for members to establish a separate email account specifically used for the purpose of participating on the Commission.



The County must provide the fullest assistance in response to public records requests. The County's Public Records Officers and a representative of the Prosecuting Attorney's Office will review any documents for any information which may be exempt from disclosure and will provide the necessary explanations of the exemptions to the requestor if access to particular records is denied. Courts may award monetary penalties should the County not respond promptly or fully.



## DEALING WITH THE PRESS

The news media is an important tool to help us inform the public about the Commission's work. The following points are intended to aid you in comfortably dealing with the media.

- The Chair will speak for the Commission as a whole and serve as the primary contact with the media.
- Commissioners are welcome and encouraged to speak with the media in their local areas or when approached at meetings. However, use discretion to avoid the appearance of speaking for the Commission unless you have been asked to do so.
- If a member of the news media contacts you, please inform staff of the following: whom you spoke with, whom they represent, the topic, and the date. That information becomes part of our historical records.

When speaking with members of the media, keep the following points in mind:

- Be familiar with statutes and authority.
- Be as open as possible, but keep your focus on the business of the Commission.
- Respond to the questions asked; do not express personal opinions or comment on what actions you think may be taken.
- Do not express dissatisfaction with actions taken or make inappropriate comments about other Commissioners or staff.
- If you do not know the answer to a question or are unsure about what you should say, refer the individual to the Chair.