



WASCO COUNTY
COMPENSATION COMMITTEE

APRIL 13, 2022

Held at Casa El Mirador, The Dalles, OR

Also available through Google Meet

PRESENT: John Hutchison (Chair)

Jorge Barragan

Mike Woodside

STAFF: Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer

Mike Middleton, Finance Director

Nichole Biechler, Human Resources Manager

Kathy Clark, Executive Assistant

ELECTED OFFICIALS: Jill Amery, Assessor/Tax Collector

Lisa Gамbee, County Clerk

Kathy Schwartz, County Commissioner

Steve Kramer, County Commissioner

Matthew Ellis, District Attorney

Chair Hutchison convened the meeting at noon and reviewed the agenda. He called for nominations for Chair and Vice-Chair.

{{{Mr. Woodside nominated John Hutchison to serve as Chair of the Wasco County Compensation Committee for 2022. Mr. Barragan seconded the nomination. The vote was unanimously in favor of Mr. Hutchison serving as Chair.}}}

{{{Mr. Barragan moved to approve the Wasco County Compensation Committee minutes of March 10, 2021. Mr. Woodside seconded the motion which passed unanimously.}}}

Ms. Biechler reviewed the memo (attached) provided to the Committee. She reminded the Board that elected officials have been placed in the same salary process as all other County employees. This is a year in which employees receive an adjustment to wages based on the market survey and review conducted by HR Answers. In January, HR Answers recommended a 6.5% increase; however, since that time, data has revealed a significant increase in the CPI which is one factor considered in the review. HR Answers is now recommending an 8% increase. She added that the County implemented a 5% increase last July in response to economic circumstances as well as to retain and recruit staff.

Ms. Biechler noted that two of the elected officials have submitted requests for consideration beyond what is being recommended. She would like to give each the opportunity to address the Committee

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

DA Matt Ellis reviewed the memo (attached) submitted for the Committee's consideration. He explained that it is a common practice for Counties to supplement the District Attorney's wages paid by the State. We are the largest County in the State of Oregon not doing that. After canvassing the counties around the state, he is asking for a supplemental stipend of \$16,000 annually. The stipend is an incentive to recruit and retain qualified attorneys to public service. The State formula for District Attorneys salaries is not based on the market but is a calculation based on the county's population.

Discussion ensued regarding the merits of the request. Mr. Stone reminded the Committee that our system for setting wages is in large part based on comparators; that is what the Committee should be looking at. Ms. Biechler added that most counties supplement because the statute governing DA salaries does not recognize that the DA is managing staff.

Mr. Barragan asked if the stipend would be affected by the 8% increase. Ms. Biechler replied that it would not; it is a flat amount.

Mr. Barragan asked what the difference is between the 2.5% being added to two elected officials and the 8% being added to all county staff. Ms. Biechler responded that the 2.5% is for the two elected officials performance steps; they are the only two who have not reached the top rung of their performance matrix. The 8% is a market adjustment.

Mr. Hutchison asked how many counties do not offer the DA stipend. Mr. Ellis replied that there are 11 including Wasco County and Hood River County; the Hood River District Attorney is also requesting a stipend.

Ms. Amery asked if the Clerk went through the process with HR Answers as we have a process for reviewing compensation for any position. She noted that the DA is not in our compensation program so this is a different discussion.

Mr. Hutchison suggested that the DA's request be vetted through HR Answers. Ms. Biechler pointed out that Mr. Ellis has already done that work for the Committee.

Commissioner Schwartz commented that if we want quality people in this position, we need to have a salary that will attract them. Mr. Ellis has done the work and brought it forward for the Committee's consideration.

Commissioner Kramer said that it is hard to vote for a pay raise for himself and he is challenged by these conversations. That is why we have the Compensation Committee. He said that the Clerk should have been vetted through the Management Team but we have to figure out how to recruit and retain staff.

Mr. Stone pointed out that the Clerk's position went through the market analysis with all the other positions. He added that if we sent the DA's position to HR answers, they would look at the average and apply our compensation philosophy to it – it would likely be \$12,000-\$13,000.

Ms. Biechler said that stipends are complex but it is up to the organization; Mr. Ellis has done a good job in researching.

Mr. Barragan said that he appreciates the homework and he recognizes the fact that the current salary is too low.

Mr. Hutchison said that he supports the notion of a stipend.

Ms. Biechler pointed out that the Management Team does not determine wages.

Mr. Hutchison said that he would like to approve the stipend but it should go through HR Answers rather than the Committee setting an arbitrary number.

Mr. Woodside said that he thinks the work has already been done and the request is reasonable.

Ms. Biechler pointed out that there is a cost associated with going through HR Answers when we already have the data available to us.

Mr. Stone asked if there are any equity issues around this decision. Ms. Biechler replied that there is not as he is not a County employee.

Commissioner Kramer said that he is comfortable with the request but we need to lobby Salem to pay the District Attorneys appropriately.

Commissioner Schwartz commented that the issue today is if the stipend is within the budget, is it a reasonable request and is there adequate information on which to base a decision.

Mr. Barragan asked why the recommendation from HR Answers went from 6.5% to 8%. Ms. Biechler said that the CPI drives the cost of labor on which we base our compensation. The work calculation was originally done in January but is already outdated. A dramatic increase in the CPI is what caused the increase.

Mr. Woodside said that the County has done an incredible job of putting their fiscal house in order. The only criticism he has is that the County has not done a good job of information the community of the good work they have done. He expressed his confidence in the team.

{{{Mr. Barragan moved that the 2022 Compensation Board pass a recommendation that the Assessor's and the Sheriff's salaries receive a 2.5% increase for performance and that the current stipend payment for the Sheriff (\$10,000) continue as well as the inception of a \$16,000/year stipend for the District Attorney. He further moved to recommend the 8.0% market increase for all elected positions. Mr. Woodside seconded the motion which passed unanimously.}}}

Ms. Gambee reviewed the memo (attached) submitted to the Committee. She explained that she did the work for her position as well as her staff positions to compare wages around the state. She reviewed the numbers in the table. She said we seem to be lagging the rest of the state for Clerk's Office salaries.

Mr. Hutchison asked how frequently salaries are reviewed. Ms. Biechler replied that they are reviewed every 3 years. She said that the market review numbers for elected are in the Committee's packet – we try to hit 92% or higher to market comparators.

Ms. Gambee noted that those numbers could change with a larger pool of comparators.

Ms. Biechler explained that they look at a minimum 70% job match for a comparator to be included in the review. She said it is important to maintain the integrity of the process. Mr. Stone stated that we compare job description to job description and duties to duties. Ms. Biechler added that if the comparators are not doing their pay equity work that impacts the data.

Ms. Gambee said that even with the 8% increase, the pay seems to be lagging other Clerk's Offices around the state.

Ms. Amery pointed out that Ms. Gambee can work through the process of requesting an increase.

Ms. Biechler said that the larger conversation is ongoing and they are looking at expanding the comparator pool.

The meeting was adjourned at 1;15 p.m.

WASCO COUNTY
COMPENSATION COMMITTEE



John Hutchison, Committee Chair



Jorge Barragan, Committee Member



Mike Woodside, Committee Member