



BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION

Report

Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Present: Co-Chair Claudia Dumond-Henderson, Co-Chair James Simons, Karen Carroll Bennett, Sharon Chan, Doug Cornelius, Sue Flicop, Timothy Moran, Greg Reibman, John Stewart, Kathy Sun, Donald Siegel, Andrea Steenstrup and Committee Clerk, Danielle Delaney

Absent: Carolyn Gabbay

Co-Chair Simons reviewed with Commission members the initial list of criteria and data findings from the January 3, 2019 meeting. He stated that the Commission determined that they will examine the compensation of the Newton elected officials receive for their service and to make recommendations for possible future changes to their salaries, benefits and perquisites. The review will make comparisons to jobs of similar responsibilities and scope, held in cities or towns with characteristics deemed important by the Commission. Co-Chairs will assure the recommendations are written and complete and may temper the Commissions efforts as needed for recommendations to the Council by June 1, 2019.

At the January 3 meeting a suggestion was made to contact the City Solicitor requesting what benefits are required. The City's Law Department Solicitor has confirmed to Mr. Siegel that by virtue of state statute, state-wide elected officials are required or are eligible for retirement and health insurance benefits. Mr. Siegel stated that he spoke with the City Solicitor requesting the legal source of the right of the elected officials to participate in the benefits. He then stated that her response was this is 'in your hands'. He understands that there is a statute for state law not city law that allows elected officials the right to participate for retirement by application. He then stated that if an elected official works twenty hours per week they are entitled to retirement and health benefits. The Mayor must certify per state statute that elected officials have the right to participate in these benefits. This has been allowed in approximately the past fifty years. It will be important to determine if this is allowed in all communities or Newton.

Co-Chair Simons provided a PowerPoint presentation; an updated PowerPoint presentation is attached to this report. He explained in detail the "Guiding Principles" (ground rules) which will govern the Commission. He then explained that a creation of sub-committees, subsequently named Outreach–Stakeholder Voice, Peer Group Selection, Data Availability/Metrics, and Purpose, to focus areas of research for the Mayor, City Council and School Committee compensation recommendations. Co-Chair Henderson suggested the sub-committees create a charter, including a scope statement, list of steps and dependencies and the necessary time to complete the task. The sub-committees will report to the Commission their Charter at the next meeting. The following discussion at the next BRC meeting, subcommittees will develop a time line for tasks.

Commission members volunteered for one or more subcommittees as follows:

Blue Ribbon Commission Four Sub-Committee Members

Outreach - Claudia Dumond-Henderson, Greg Reibman and Doug Cornelius

Peer Group Selection - Sue Flicop, Kathy Sun, Sharon Chan and Doug Cornelius

Data Availability/Metrics - Karen Carroll Bennett, Andrea Steenstrup and Jim Simons

Purpose - John Stewart, Don Siegel and Tim Moran

Carolyn Gabbay was not present to select a sub-committee.

Co-Chair Dumond-Henderson reviewed with Commission members sub-committee objectives in order to collect current information on elected officials. On January 3, Commission members expressed interest in understanding the current state of health insurance provided, dental, vision, additional detail regarding pensions, perquisites that may have monetary benefits and if expenses are reimbursed. The spreadsheet was provided to Commission members on January 7, hoping to address the questions Commission members expressed on January 3.

A Commission member stated that she contacted David Olson, City Clerk asking how to obtain information from the Human Resources Department on funds raised by elected officials for their campaigns. Mr. Olson offered to obtain the information and informed her that the information is complete for the Mayor and Councilors, but the School Committee has until January 22 to file their 2018 numbers. There is no sense when data will be complete.

A Commission member stated that he reviewed the 2017 expenditures, an election year. He then stated that 2017 was the most relevant year in most recent pass. Some Commission members agree that this may not be relevant.

Questions, Answers, Suggestions and Comments:

- Would it be appropriate for the sub-committees to provide material prior to the next meeting? Co-Chairs Dumond-Henderson and Simons agreed it would be appropriate.
- Is it required to take notes during sub-committee meetings? The Committee Clerk answered no, written notes are not required. The sub-committees can report their findings to this Commission.
- Is phone participation allowed during the voting process? The Committee Clerk answered no, phone participation is not allowed during the Blue Ribbon Commission voting process. The Commission consists of thirteen members. A quorum must constitute seven members all being present during the voting process.
- A suggestion was made to determine part-time elected officials versus full-time elected official position pay to determine if the salary and benefits are a deterrent or a benefit to run for elected office.
- The Commission's report to the Council shall explain how recommendations were reached regarding School Committee members and City Council's compensation.
- It was noted that the discussion of salaries is out of the Commissions scope to determine if the

City's budget can afford salary increases, if appropriate. It will be the City Council's determination. Co-Chair Simons noted that in the 2005 report, an Alderman, calculated the cost of elected officials as a percent of the total budget to provide a reasonable ratio to other communities.

- How would this Commission consider affordability? It was noted, that this Commission would only make a recommendation.
- Is there a historic rationale why certain positions are made certain salaries? It was said, that the City Council and School Committee members started receiving a salary in 1971. The rationale was that the City Council would receive 10% and the School Committee members would receive 5% of the Mayor's salary. This was determined after the Charter Commission report of 1968-1969.
- Please clarify the words stipend, salary, compensation and total compensation? It was decided that the term compensation is broad and intends to include salary, benefits or perquisites.

Commission members reviewed the "Guiding Principles" suggesting a few edits.

In #5, please clarify the word 'perquisites'.

In #6, please clarify the word 'attract'.

In #6, please add the word 'fairness'.

- It was suggested to poll the Mayor, City Council and School Committee members to collect data on the number of hours per week they work for the City and ask the elected officials anonymously on what is a fair salary, or whether their salary affects their position? It was noted that it would depend on the elected official's status. It is hopeful elected officials will be able to provide this request to the Commission.
- Is there a way to determine from the City Council Committee Reports the time an elected official works for the City? The Committee Clerk answered yes that is possible, but this would not include the number of hours spent outside meetings on any given issue.
- Commission members were reminded from the January 3 meeting that a suggestion was made to create two detailed survey/questionnaires for elected and non-elected officials to determine if the salary and benefits are a deterrent or a benefit to run for elected office.
- Should the City accept the fact that some elected officials do not have health insurance or a retirement plan? It was said that all members would have a different accrued benefit in a retirement plan. The constant will be the formula to this dependent on salary and service. There is some value associated with an elected official being offered a benefit and does not choose to take the benefit.
- Are Newton elected official's retirement benefits affected differently than other communities that do not have term limits?
- Is membership required to obtain information from the Massachusetts Municipal Association? It was answered yes; the City is a member.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for Thursday, January 31, 2019 in City Hall.

The Commission adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Claudia Dumond-Henderson, Co-Chair
James Simons, Co-Chair

Guiding Principles

1. Committee members will listen and respond to each other respectfully.
2. Committee members are expected to attend all committee at-large or sub committee meetings and in person when possible. No deliberation or voting can occur for those who call in.
3. All Committee member suggestions are welcome and if majority can agree to a member's proposal in a timely manner, the proposal can move forward.
4. Sub-committees work independently and bring any disputes or needs for clarification to the Co-Chairs to resolve.
5. The study portion (other community data) will be limited to total compensation including salary or stipend, subsidized benefits and perquisites of tangible/quantifiable value if any.
6. The study portion may influence but need not be the sole reference for Committee's final recommendations and may consider the need to balance rewards with the city's ability to attract qualified and committed candidates.
7. Committee's report to the Council will endeavor to explain how recommendations were reached.
8. Co-chairs will assure the recommendations are written and complete and may temper the Committee efforts as needed for recommendations to the Council by June 1.

Sub-Committees

Outreach - Stakeholder Voice*

Determine what we want to know and from which key stakeholders

- Design questionnaires for key stakeholders (assuming council and school committee members)
- Determine what public comments would be invited and in what forum(s)
- Provide output/recommendations to BRC

Committee Members:

Claudia

Greg

Peer Group Selection

Who do we want to “compare” ourselves with and why? (could be in or outside MA)

- Benchmarking
- Develop Criteria for Selecting Municipalities
- Provide output/recommendations to BRC

Committee Members:

Sue

Kathy

Sharon

Doug

**Subcommittee may break into two groups by audience after initial strategy setting*

Sub-Committees

Data Availability/Metrics

What data are available and where will we get them?

- Develop list of items to Benchmark
- Determine sourcing for data points
- Provide findings/recommendations to the BRC in consultation with Peer Group Committee

Committee Members:

Karen
Doug
Andrea
Jim

Purpose

What assumptions will we make as we draft recommendations around WHY we pay salaries? What are we solving for?

- Develop list of key assumptions
- Provide output/recommendations to BRC

Committee Members:

John
Don
Tim

Next Steps

- Committees will meet between now and next meeting date
- Develop initial “charter”* to run past broader BRC

**Because the output from these charters/project plans may be included in the final report, it will be helpful to follow roughly the same format for each sub-committee to ensure consistent data collection/analysis*

Charter Format

- Scope of subcommittee defined/key questions we are solving for
- List of action steps
- Timelines associated with action items
- Dependencies/Integration points (things the team will need to support their work and ways your findings may connect with other sub-committees)
- Key findings
- Recommendations