

**City of Tacoma**  
**Citizen Commission on Elected**  
**Salaries**

September 1, 2015

Decision Presented to City Council

Per Section 2.3 of the Tacoma City Charter, a Citizen Commission on Elected Salaries will determine the compensation and salary of the Mayor and each Council Member. The Commission shall set the salary and any salary changes for the Mayor and Council Members. The salary and any salary changes set by the Commission shall be adopted by the City Council.

Determinations for any change in the salaries of these elected officials shall be filed with the City Clerk and transmitted to the Council for adoption no later than September 1 of the calendar year.



City of Tacoma  
Citizen Commission on Elected Salaries

Terry Mensonides, Chair  
Ronald Malm, Vice Chair  
Robert Anderson  
Dianne Conway  
Karen Robinson  
Richard Wilkinson  
Joseph Zawacki

**TO:** Mayor Strickland and the Tacoma City Council  
**FROM:** Citizen Commission on Elected Salaries  
**DATE:** September 1, 2015  
**SUBJECT:** City of Tacoma Elected Officials Salary Decision

**DECISION**

The Citizen Commission on Elected Salaries (Commission) respectfully decided the following changes in the annual salaries of City of Tacoma elected officials, effective January 1, 2018:

Mayor	\$76,000
Council Member	\$38,000

Also effective January 1, 2018, the Commission respectfully decided to eliminate the annual 2.75% salary increase for all future years.

**COSTS**

Total costs for implementing these changes in FY 2016 are \$0.00.

**DISCUSSION**

Under provisions of the City Charter and state law, the Commission has the authority to set the salary and compensation of the Mayor and Members of the City Council. The Commission's decisions must be implemented without modification. Such authority is sobering and one the Commission did not take lightly.

The Commission will continue to study the appropriate salary and compensation of the Mayor and Council Members in the coming months. Based on what it learns, and prior to September 1, 2016, the Commission may determine additional changes are necessary. Any future changes (increases or decreases) will be implemented in accordance with the schedule set forth in any such action and applicable laws and regulations at the time such a decision is made. **The Commission did not address, with this decision, salaries and benefits or any scheduled increases for the period January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2017.**

The Commission's decision on 2018 salaries reflects several considerations that surfaced during the Commission's deliberations.

1. The majority of Commission members were concerned with what appear to be elected official salaries significantly out of step with the salary of elected officials in other Council-Manager jurisdictions within Washington State. [See Exhibit 1]
2. Commission members were challenged by the short time window for action. This timeframe, less than a month, made it impossible for the Commission to research and compare aspects of elected official compensation to the extent desired. The Commission felt that inaction by the September 1, 2015 date would hamper its' ability to implement changes within a timeline it believed reasonable. The majority felt it was important to make a decision now, in a direction it believed most appropriate, and refine that decision after subsequent analysis.

This decision represents a compromise on the part of the Commission in terms of both salary and benefits. It was clear throughout the discussion that there were multiple members with varying opinions. Some favored maintaining the status quo and taking no current action. Others would have preferred more immediate but less substantial change. Some commission members also expressed a desire for significantly larger reductions or a more aggressive timeline which they believed would allow more flexibility pending the outcomes of further research during 2016 and 2017.

Ultimately, the decision represented the direction the Commission believed salaries should move while attempting to be conservative given the short timeframe available for evaluating the status quo.

3. The basis for setting the effective date of January 1, 2018 was driven by two primary factors:
  - a. To allow time for further research and, if warranted, allow for at least some reduction within the next few years.
  - b. To maintain parity in Council Member compensation, so that all Council Member compensation changes become effective on the same date. The idea of parity in compensation was important to a majority of the Commission's members. This rationale is driven by the Commission's understanding, based on the interpretation of state law by the City Attorney, that compensation reductions cannot be implemented mid-way through an elected official's term and only become effective if implemented prior to the start of an official's term or after the official's current term expires.

Furthermore, the Commission understands that such a limitation is not applicable to increases determined by a commission such as this one and that such changes can be made effective immediately. This would allow the Commission to return salaries to the levels scheduled prior to this decision before January 1, 2018, if appropriate.

4. The Commission recognized Tacoma's uniqueness, both economically and geographically, and that such uniqueness may, upon further study, warrant salaries inconsistent with other Council-Manager cities.
5. Additionally, the Commission did not want to create a situation in which a potential candidate would not run for office because such service would be cost prohibitive, while at the same time it recognized that serving as an elected official should also contain a component of volunteerism.
6. The chart below demonstrates the impact of the Commission's decision, should it go in to effect unchanged on January 1, 2018:

	<b>2015 Salary</b>	<b>2016 Salary</b>	<b>2017 Salary</b>	<b>2018 Salary</b>
<b>Mayor</b>	\$96,117	\$98,760	\$101,476	\$76,000
<b>Council</b>	\$48,069	\$49,391	\$50,749	\$38,000

**DISSENTING OPINION**

The minority provided the following comments regarding their dissent:

1. Short time frame to analyze data hindered gathering and analyzing data.
2. Misperception that immediate action is mandated, as opposed to analyzing data and making recommendations with more information at a future date.
3. Current city council compensation is based upon members classified as 90% almost full time.
4. In comparisons to other municipalities it was not delineated if compensation was based on the same time spent performing duties (90% work schedule).
5. Median household income (supplied by staff) in Tacoma seems to indicate that the current salary is set equitably.
6. Reduction of salary may preclude citizens from seeking office as they may not have employment or employer willing to allow the significant time away from work. By reducing the salary citizens simply may not realistically be able to serve and still support household obligations.
7. These dissenting comments are only for salary and do not address the annual rate increases.

# Exhibit 1

## 2015 Elected Official Salaries

City	Population	Form of Government*	Mayor's Salary	Councilmember's Salary
Seattle	626,600	Mayor-Council	\$183,036	\$119,976
Spokane	211,300	Mayor-Council	\$82.65/hr	\$14.94/hr
Tacoma	200,400	Council-Manager	\$96,117	\$48,069
Vancouver	164,500	Council-Manager	\$27,600	\$21,600
Bellevue	132,100	Council-Manager	\$23,400	\$19,800
Kent	120,500	Mayor-Council	\$138,000	\$14,096
Everett	104,200	Mayor-Council	\$167,028	\$26,964
Renton	95,540	Mayor-Council	\$141,204	\$11,400
Yakima	92,620	Council-Manager	\$16,500	\$12,900
Federal Way	89,720	Mayor-Council	\$115,620	\$13,800
Bellingham	82,310	Mayor-Council	\$135,444	\$24,108
Kirkland	81,730	Council-Manager	\$17,136	\$13,464
Kennewick	76,410	Council-Manager	\$14,292	\$11,904
Auburn	73,235	Mayor-Council	\$136,823	\$14,400
Lakewood	58,310	Council-Manager	\$10,800	\$8,400
Olympia	48,480	Council-Manager	\$19,968	\$16,632
Sammamish	48,060	Council-Manager	\$11,400	\$10,200
Puyallup	37,980	Council-Manager	\$16,400	\$14,043
University Place	31,340	Council-Manager	\$20,256	\$16,896

Source: <http://mrsc.org/Home/Research-Tools/Washington-City-and-Town-Profiles.aspx?orderby=citygovtform&dir=down>