

# Resolution to make council positions full time with raises and support staff, readjust executive salaries

## OBJECTIVES:

- Provide legislative and research support to council members ASAP
- By 2025 make Bellingham City Council and Whatcom County Council full time, with commensurate salary increases
- Rationalize executive salary policies
- Tie salaries of elected officials to a multiple of the minimum wage

WHEREAS current salaries of Whatcom County elected officials are:

- County Executive \$209,268 (currently 3% above the Prosecutor)
- Prosecutor \$203,172 (matching Washington State Superior Court Judge)
- Sheriff \$181,188
- Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer \$136,536
- County Council \$58,248

([https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/\\_03302023-3338](https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_03302023-3338), E)

WHEREAS on July 1, 2023, Superior Court and Whatcom County Prosecutor Salaries will rise to \$217,391, and on July 1, 2024 to \$228,261, the salary of the **Whatcom County Executive will rise to \$223,913 and then \$235,109.**

WHEREAS by [BMC 3.12.020](#) “The annual salary for the mayor shall be five percent above the highest salary level of department head positions and shall be increased annually by the same percentage amount as salaries are increased for exempt employees, unless the council directs otherwise by budget or other ordinance.”

WHEREAS the [2023 salary](#) of the Bellingham Mayor is \$221,196, 5% above the salaries of the highest paid department heads, those being the Fire and Police Chiefs (\$210,660).

WHEREAS, the Bellingham Mayor has seen a 25% pay increase in his four years in office ((221-176)/176) and has a benefit package 70+% greater than the previous Mayor ((62-36)/36) (City of Bellingham Ordinance 2021-03-012

( <https://tinyurl.com/3r3etu92> ) (<https://bellingham.municipal.codes/enactments/Ord2021-03-012>)

(<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-ACFR.pdf#page=117>) (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/December-2020-Financial-Report.pdf#page=4>) (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/August-2020-Financial-Report.pdf#page=4>)

([https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/20\\_PLANE\\_DEPTHEAD\\_JAN.pdf](https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/20_PLANE_DEPTHEAD_JAN.pdf))

([https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/23\\_PLANE\\_DEPTHEAD\\_JAN.pdf](https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/23_PLANE_DEPTHEAD_JAN.pdf))

(Bellingham Public Records request: B017989-060623)

WHEREAS the Washington State Governor’s salary is \$190,632, rising to \$198,257 on July 1, 2023, and \$204,205 on July 1, 2024, and Legislators’ salary is \$57,876, rising to \$60,191 on

July 1, 2023, and \$61,997 on July 1, 2024 (<https://salaries.wa.gov/salary>). **That means the Whatcom County Executive and Bellingham Mayor are paid well more than the governor.**

WHEREAS no administrative training and qualifications are required to serve as either Mayor of Bellingham or Whatcom County Executive.

WHEREAS in November 2022 the 2023 salary of Bellingham City Council almost doubled to \$67,000 plus benefits without a vote of the council and without requiring anything in return (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/city-council-salary-commission-report.pdf>) and “The Salary Commission is a limited-term commission, each commission forming once every eight years and disbanding after its work is complete, in accordance with [BMC 2.98.020](#). Commission members are selected by the Mayor and confirmed by the Bellingham City Council. ... The direction of the Salary Commission is final.”

WHEREAS setting salaries by committees of appointed citizens is often arbitrary, with erratic outcomes. For many years Bellingham City Council salaries were fixed too low without any adjustments. Then they abruptly jumped higher than state legislators’ salaries.

WHEREAS setting salaries of city and county council members without a vote of the council absolves them of public accountability.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

### **Executive Salaries**

- Only professional administrative salaries should be set at nationally competitive levels. These positions are ideally filled with individuals with education and experience that specifically qualify them for the job. They are also highly mobile. Best practices call for nationwide searches with competitive salaries in order to attract good candidates.
- Elected executives are drawn from a limited geographical area. Even when they have relevant administrative qualifications, those tend to be limited. They should not be paid more than the state governor.
- We should de-link the County Executive’s salary from the Prosecutor’s salary, and de-link the Mayor’s salary from the highest paid department head’s salary.
- After de-linking, we propose setting elected executive salaries at five times the locally applicable minimum wage (at the current \$15.74,  $40 \times 50 \times 15.74 = \$31,480$   $\times 5 = \$157,400$ , or about \$180,000 with passage of Bellingham Initiative 2023-01). That builds in an automatic annual cost-of-living raise. It also ties salaries to those of the lowest paid workers.

### **Council Roles and Salaries**

- The recent 90% increase in city council member salaries should be matched by a commitment of time availability.
- As a first priority, the city and county budgets should incorporate funding and authorization by budget amendment for each Bellingham City and Whatcom County

Council Member to hire a legislative/research aide in order to accomplish their legislative tasks. This would enable the councils to function as an effective check and balance on their executives, and enable individual council members to bring forth their own legislation.

- By the next local election cycle in 2025 propose making both Bellingham City Council and Whatcom County Council full-time positions with suitable increases in salary. With over 90,000 Bellingham residents and Whatcom County approaching a quarter million inhabitants, these are dynamic entities with far greater needs than in the past.
- We propose setting full time city and county council salaries at three times the local minimum wage (currently \$94,440, or about \$108,000 with passage of Bellingham Initiative 2023-01). That builds in an automatic annual cost-of-living raise. It also ties salaries to those of the lowest paid workers.

*Adopted unanimously (37-0-3) at the June 24, 2023 meeting of the Whatcom County Democratic Central Committee.*