



League of Women Voters® of Portland

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July 7, 2023

To: Independent Salary Commission
From: Carolyn Buppert, League of Women Voters of Portland (LWVPDX) President
Janice Thompson, LWVPDX member
Re: Support for Draft Pay Level Proposals

The LWVPDX thanks the Independent Salary Commission (ISC) whose work provided a thorough lesson in how human resources professionals make compensation decisions. We especially appreciated your robust equity focus and legal consultation. Your efforts inspired the League to do some additional research and analysis that may merit inclusion in the final ISC report.

Equity

In the human resources realm of pay equity it is notable that in June an ISC member won an HR Leadership Award from the Portland Business Journal.¹ Furthermore, the authors of Anti-Oppressive Pay-Beyond Pay Equity resources, which the ISC used, have advised a range of clients including Nike, Intel, and Kaiser Permanente.^{2,3} In other words, the pay equity approach the ISC used appears to be entering the HR compensation mainstream. It also aligns with the City of Portland's equity values.

The League appreciates the ISC's consideration of the following factors when developing its pay proposals:

- Market averages from cities with comparable populations
- Current wages of Portland elected officials with cost of living adjustments (COLA) at the level used to adjust the pay of City of Portland employees
- The thriving wage for a single parent of one child in Portland, which is beyond basic survival and reflects our city's cost of living, but is not a luxury pay level

Regarding Portland's cost of living, we note that a May 2023 analysis of the income level needed to afford a city's median-priced home lists Portland as the 11th highest in the United States.⁴ Portland's median-priced home affordability income level in this analysis is \$136,147 which is 40% higher than the national average.

Jobs Are Full Time

The League supports the ISC's recognition that the jobs of all Portland elected officials are full time.

With the end of the commission form of government, in 2025 the mayor will focus on city operations along with a city administrator. Adding a city administrator and ending the

¹ Rut Martinez-Alicea, Oregon Food Bank Director of Equity, People & Culture, <https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/event/168769/2023/hr-leadership-and-healthiest-employers-of-oregon-awards>

² Rashmi Dixit, <https://oame.org/member-directory/#!biz/id/6372a8ed746b2c7e8d40e326>

³ Kate Dixon, <https://katedixon.org/about-kate-dixon/>

⁴ <https://www.hsh.com/finance/mortgage/salary-home-buying-25-cities.html>

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To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.

mayor’s legislative role, however, does not mean that the mayor’s job is no longer full time.

Starting in 2025 under the new system, councilors will focus on policy development and legislation and no longer manage bureaus, but their jobs, like the new mayor’s job, will remain full time. Indeed, new councilors must now work within their districts to gather timely and meaningful public input on policy proposals while at the same time they will make legislative decisions on a citywide basis. In other words, councilors will also be working with councilors from other districts in committees and as a full group and not just within their own district.

Portland Auditor candidates must meet a professional certification requirement. The charter reforms did not change the scope of the Auditor’s job and it remains full time. Market comparisons were of particular importance in the ISC’s decision to recommend a significant increase in pay for the Portland Auditor.

ISC Proposed Salaries are Appropriate

For the reasons cited above, the League views the proposed pay levels, outlined below, as both appropriate and thoughtfully developed.

- Councilor - \$142,404
- Auditor - \$168,758
- Mayor - \$174,463

The councilor pay level is the thriving wage for a single parent with one child in Portland. This pay level was also consistent with market comparisons in the professional judgment of ISC members. From that thriving wage base, the higher pay levels for Mayor and Auditor were consistent with market analysis for those positions.

Pay Comparisons: Adding COLAs is Appropriate and Demonstrates the Value of the Independent Salary Commission

For the past five years, cost of living adjustments (COLA) given to the city’s non-represented employees have not been applied to Portland’s elected officials. This is reflected in the title for the table below.

Pay Comparisons – No COLA for 5 Years			
	FY 2023-23 wages without COLA	Proposed	% Increase
Councilor	\$125,694	\$142,404	13%
Auditor	\$125,694	\$168,758	34%
Mayor	\$149,261	\$175,463	18%

COLA adjustments maintain the value of wages. It is certainly the prerogative of elected officials to decline COLA adjustments, but we note that this practice might be linked to seeking political advantage, especially in a re-election year. From a pay equity perspective, this practice can be detrimental to office holders and candidates with more challenging family finances than those of elected officials who can afford to forgo COLAs. For this reason, the League suggests that the ISC also include in the body of its final report the following table that puts the percentage increases into a COLA applied context.

Pay Comparisons – COLA Applied for Past 5 Years			
	FY 2023-24 wages with COLA	Proposed	% Increase
Councilor	\$134,098	\$142,404	6%
Auditor	\$134,098	\$168,758	26%
Mayor	\$159,245	\$175,463	10%

More broadly, the potential for forgoing COLA adjustments to depress pay levels in a way that might benefit incumbents demonstrates the value of including an ISC in Measure 26-228. Future salary commissions, which will meet every two years, can regularly review and, if appropriate, incorporate COLA adjustments into pay decisions. We suggest that the ISC's final report stress that the charter requires that its members must be HR professionals. This may seem like a minor issue, but we note the recently adopted legislative referral for a constitutional amendment to create a salary commission for state elected officials does not include this professional experience requirement.⁵

Proposed Office Holder Salaries Compared to Top Employee Salaries

To look at the ISC proposed salaries from another perspective, the League compared them to the salaries of City of Portland employees at the high end of their pay levels. The Bureau of Human Resources presumably has more recent data; we used an *Oregonian* database with FY 2021-22 salaries.⁶ According to the *Oregonian* data, there are 72 City of Portland employees whose salaries are higher than the proposed \$175,463 pay for mayor. There are 280 City of Portland employees whose salaries are higher than the proposed \$142,404 for councilors.

These differences between office holder and top employee pay reflect the need for competitive salaries to attract employees with high levels of expertise and experience. Our point, though, is not that office holder and top employee pay should be identical. Rather, just as top employee salaries need to be competitive, the ISC's proposed pay levels reflect a competitive wage dynamic to attract qualified candidates for Portland's elected positions. Additionally, it seems prudent to avoid significant pay differences between top employees and elected officials, like the one recently in the news regarding the \$77,000 pay for Oregon's Secretary of State compared to the \$238,164 paid to the Deputy Secretary of State.

Multi-Language Pay

The League recognizes the equity value of providing additional pay options for employees with multi-lingual skills and cross-cultural immersion experiences and appreciated the ISC's discussion of their applicability to elected officials. We support the ISC's decision to piggyback on an existing City of Portland Language Access Program with qualifying proficiency requirements that would allow an eligible elected official, if desired, to apply for an additional 4% to their pay rate. Particularly compelling was the testimony of former Oregon State Representative Terese Alonso Leon. She highlighted the value to her constituents of her bilingual skills, but also said there were times she was asked to translate for colleagues which is work outside the scope of her job.

We appreciate the ISC seeking legal input from the City Attorney's office and not moving forward with cross-cultural immersion as an additional pay option. This discussion merits inclusion in the ISC's final report as a topic for a future Salary Commission. It may also be prudent for the ISC to recommend that the Bureau of Human Resources explore this topic since development of a cross-cultural immersion benefit option for city employees could be a helpful first step in considering this option for office holders.

We thank again all the ISC members for their hard work and for the opportunity to submit these comments.

⁵ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SJR34/B-Engrossed>

⁶ <https://projects.oregonlive.com/data-points/city-salaries/2021-22/> Only base pay figures were used for comparison.