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# Elected Salaries in Denver

Charter Review Committee  
Monday, Nov 6, 2023

# Agenda

- Denver's elected official salaries and raises
- Problem we are trying to solve
- Research on other cities and municipalities
- Process of ballot measures
- Questions for Committee on Charter Change

# Elected Pay in Denver

The process for Denver council members to modify their salaries is dictated by Denver's city charter. Section 9.2.2 of Denver's charter states:

- (A) After January 1 of any general election year for elected Charter officers, but before the general election, the salaries of such officers shall be fixed by ordinance for the ensuing term within the limits set forth in this section. The salaries shall not exceed the lesser of:
  - (i) The current salaries adjusted for the cumulative percentage change over the preceding four years in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, Denver-Boulder-Greeley, or its successor index; or
  - (ii) The current salaries adjusted for the cumulative percentage change over the preceding four (4) years in the mean salary of employees in the Career Service.”<sup>1</sup>

# What Problem are we Trying to Solve

Though spelled out in Denver's city charter a public perception persists that council members are increasing their own salary every four years.

By potentially changing the way in which Denver addresses elected salaries and raises we can change the public perception while keeping our pay scales competitive.

# Research

Research showed our peer cities generally use three specific processes in which elected officials' compensation are addressed.

These included: external commissions, tying salaries to other elected officials, and using set formulae to determine salaries.

Nine peer cities were looked at in the research. Those cities were:

- Baltimore, MD
- Columbus, OH
- Detroit, MI
- San Francisco, CA
- Jacksonville, FL
- Memphis, TN
- San Diego, CA
- Indianapolis, IN
- Philadelphia, PA



# Research – External Commissions

- An ad hoc commission or civil service commission evaluates salaries of elected officials and recommends changes
  - ✓ Baltimore, Columbus, and Detroit all use an ad hoc style commission
    - Baltimore has a 7-member commission with 3 members appointed by the mayor, 3 by council, and 1 by the comptroller. Members confirmed by council and serve 4-year terms. All changes recommended must be approved by council ordinance.
    - Columbus has a 5-member commissions with 2 members appointed by the mayor, 2 by council, and 1 jointly by mayor and council. Council must approve any recommendations.
    - Detroit has a 7-member council appointed by the mayor and confirmed by council. Recommendations are adopted unless 2/3 of council reject
  - ✓ San Francisco uses a civil service commission
    - This commission covers all city employees, and its 5 members are appointed by the mayor for six-year terms

# Research – Salaries Tied to Other Elected Officials

- Jacksonville, Memphis, and San Diego tie their elected officials' salaries to a certain percentage other elected officials
  - ✓ Jacksonville's charter states that their council members' salaries shall be equal to  $\frac{1}{2}$  the salary of the Duval County (their county) commissioner.
  - ✓ Memphis' charter states that their council members' salaries shall be equal to the salary of the Shelby County (their county) commissioners.
  - ✓ San Diego's charter states that their council members' salaries shall be equal to 60% of the salary of the judges of the superior court of the State of California.

# Research – Specific Formulae

- Indianapolis and Philadelphia use a specific formula, set in their charter, and adjust salaries each term automatically
  - ✓ Indianapolis
    - The Indiana State Legislature passed updates that govern the compensation for elected officials. Elected officials receive the same cost of living increases that city employees receive.
  - ✓ Philadelphia
    - Annual salary increases are automatically adjusted by multiplying existing salary by the Consumer Price Index multiplier, unless the multiplier is less than one, then no change is made.



# Conclusions

Staff conclusions were to adopt a specific formula approach in Denver. This could be accomplished with a charter change that:

**Strikes the language contained in section 9.2.2 (A) stating:**

- *“The salaries shall not exceed the lesser of:”*

**and replace it with:**

- *“The salaries shall be fixed as the lesser of:”*

This language change would remove the appearance of impropriety and dictate a specific salary increase each four years.

# Next Steps

- Follow up on charter review questions, requests for information, and any outstanding items
- Return to Finance and Governance Committee with completed ballot measure
- Present to Council for referral to 2024 ballot

# Questions & Discussion