

Proposed Charter/Code Changes

Raise the Pay

By CM Rob Oppenheim

I am proposing changing elected officials' honoraria. If the legislation passes, it will take effect in July 2007—twelve years after the last change. The proposed changes are printed below. The new amounts are \$900/month for the mayor and \$450/month for council members. This may change as it is debated.

Participation

Elected officials function mostly as volunteers, and it takes time and dedication to do good work. It's all part of the job: We need to be well informed, actively seek opinions, and propose sound solutions. The meeting schedule can be daunting: there are the council meetings along with M-UTC, Finance, and committee meetings like Recreation Board and Traffic and meetings with neighboring towns, county and state officials. We also need to communicate with constituents, hear concerns and ideas, and help residents stay involved and informed.

Here are two ways to encourage council members' participation. The carrot—offer more money for more work. The stick—tighten attendance requirements.

Pay for Work

Compensation could be linked to participation—up to a monthly limit. If this were implemented, it would encourage attendance, discourage tardiness (no pay for late arrivals), and would reward hard work and ensure that the town is getting value for its money.

As it is now, many working people cannot afford to put in the 40 to 60 hours each month that it takes to be a dependable, effective representative. One consequence is to limit the pool of willing candidates. Reasonable compensation would enable more to participate.

Pay-for-work could be based on public activity: Meeting attendance, legislative contributions, and *Town Crier* submissions could be considered. Yes, the mayor and council do lots of other work, but public activity can be a good barometer of total activity.

The proposed Town Charter changes would allow enactment of a pay-for-work plan. That doesn't mean it will happen, only that it could happen. Some council members strongly oppose the idea, and I leave it to them to put forward their positions.

Allow Council to Reject Raise

The charter changes also allow for a newly elected council to rescind an increase. So if people find the change is too much then they can elect a council that rejects the raise.

Changing the effective date for adjusting compensation from June to July would accomplish two goals. The new rate would begin with the fiscal year on July 1, so it would not affect the budget retroactively. That also would allow a newly elected council to rescind any increase members found objectionable.

Required Attendance

Now here's the stick (twig?): Work sessions and legislative sessions would both count for attendance. Each member would be required to attend at least one council meeting every two months, instead of one every three months, or risk removal from office.

Is It Enough?

I should have proposed a higher amount for council members; \$600/month would have been better. What do you think? Express your opinion on TownTalk and at the Work session, Monday, Sep. 25, 2006 and the legislative meeting, Monday, Oct. 2, 2006, 8 p.m.

Proposed Charter Changes

In the following Charter and Town Code changes, *italics* indicates new text, ~~deleted text is struck thru~~, and comments are in square brackets.

§ 203: Compensation of Council Members

Each council member shall receive *a salary or pay-for-work compensation* ~~an annual salary~~ that shall *apply equally to be equal for* all council members and shall be as specified from time to time by ordinance passed by the council in the regular course of its business; provided, however, that the salary specified at the time any council takes office shall not be changed during the term for which that council was elected. The ordinance making any change in the salary paid to the council members, either by way of increase or decrease, shall be passed prior to a regular biennial town election and shall become effective on the first of *July* ~~Monday in June~~ following that town election. *A majority vote of the council may rescind an increase to its compensation anytime prior to it becoming effective.*

§ 204: Meetings of the Council

The council shall meet at least twice ~~once~~ a month. [The remainder of the paragraph is unchanged].

§ 209: Vacancy

(a) A vacancy shall be declared to exist if a council member resigns, is deceased, is recalled, is convicted of a felony, fails to retain all the qualifications necessary for his election, fails to attend *four (4)* ~~three (3)~~ consecutive regular *legislative and/or regular monthly work session* council meetings without being excused by the council, or

if no one is elected in an election. *It is the responsibility of the chair to declare to the council in open session when any of the aforementioned conditions have been met.*

§ 403: Compensation of Mayor

The mayor shall receive *a salary or pay-for-work compensation* ~~an annual salary~~ as set from time to time by ordinance passed by the council in the regular course of its business; provided, however, that the salary specified at the time the mayor takes office shall not be changed during the term for which the mayor was elected. The ordinance making any change in the salary paid to the mayor, either by way of increase or decrease, shall be passed prior to a regular biennial town election and shall become effective on the first of ~~July~~ ~~Monday in June~~ following that election. *A majority vote of the council may rescind an increase to the mayor's compensation anytime prior to it becoming effective provided they also rescind any increase in the council's compensation.*

§ 405: Vacancy

(a) A vacancy in the office of mayor shall be declared to exist in the event of the mayor's death, recall, disqualification, permanent incapacitation, conviction of a felony, ~~or~~ resignation from office, *or fails to attend four (4) consecutive regular legislative and/or regular monthly work session council meetings without being excused by the council. It is the responsibility of the chair or acting chair to declare to the council in open session when any of the aforementioned conditions have been met.*

Proposed Code Change

§ 2-7. Compensation of elected officials

(a) On and after ~~July 1, 2007~~ ~~June 5, 1995~~, the Mayor shall be compensated at the rate of *nine hundred dollars (\$900)* ~~four hundred dollars (\$400)~~ per month.

(b) On and after ~~July 1, 2007~~ ~~June 5, 1995~~, the members of the Council shall be compensated at the rate of *four hundred fifty dollars (\$450)* ~~two hundred dollars (\$200)~~ per month.