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Stoddard County Elected Officials Voted to Increase Salaries by 8%

NOVEMBER 06TH 2023 BY DEE LOFLIN

Stoddard County Elected Officials Voted to Increase Salaries by 8%

The Stoddard County Salary Commission held a meeting on Friday, November 3, 2023 at 9 a.m.

Presiding Commissioner Greg Mathis opened the meeting with a motion by Sawyer Smith, Stoddard County Prosecuting Attorney.

Present were Greg Mathis, Presiding Commissioner, C.D.Stewart, Commissioner Dist. 1, Carol Jarrell, Commissioner Dist. 2, Jacob Clary, Assessor, Josh Speakman, Collector/Treasurer, Cecil Weeks, Clerk, Brett Stidham, Coroner, Sawyer Smith, Prosecuting Attorney, Lorrie Duckworth, Public Administrator, Candy Collier, Recorder, Carl Hefner, Sheriff, Jessica Brown, representing the Juvenile Office, and Dee Loflin, ShowMe Times owner.

Mathis read the minutes from the previous meeting held on October 17, 2023.

Motion to accept the minutes by Sawyer Smith, seconded by Candy Collier, Stoddard County Recorder. All voted yes and motion passed.

Josh Speakman, Stoddard County Collector/Treasurer spoke first about the salary of the County Coroner that was previously voted on in the October 17th meeting. He stated that

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"1. \$14,000 can be put onto the current pay which was set by the Salary Commission. His recommendation is that it goes into effect at the next election period.

2. We need to get the part time vs full time out of our heads and refer to the Coroner as an elected position.
3. The first motion to amend the motion of the prior read motion of the \$2,000 should be taken care of then move on to the next motion."

After some discussion the motion on the floor was to resend the motions as read from the previous minutes as related to the Stoddard County Coroner from the October 17th Salary Commission Meeting was made by Sawyer Smith, seconded by Josh Speakman. All voted yes and motion passed.

Motion to increase the compensation of the Stoddard County Coroner by \$14,000 added to his current pay at the next term of the coroner's elected position made by Candy Collier, seconded by Lori Duckworth, Stoddard County Public Administrator. Some discussion was heard. Not one elected official voted yes; however they all voted no. The Motion did not pass.

Motion to raise the Stoddard County Coroner's salary in the amount of \$14,000 at next term of office plus any COLA (Cost of Living) increases made by Carl Hefner, Stoddard County Sheriff, seconded by Candy Collier. There was some discussion. Josh Speakman stated this is pursuant to MO State Statute 50.327, paragraph 3, August 28, 2022. All voted yes and motion passed.

COLA Increases for the Budgeted 2024 Year

Motion on the floor made by Candy Collier to give all elected and non-elected employees 8% COLA increase, seconded by Jacob Clary, Stoddard County Assessor.

Discussion by several of the salary commission prior to the vote.

"I feel 8% is a good percentage because I looked at inflation around the area and it increased," stated Collier. "I believe 8% is a fair amount."

The cost to Stoddard County would be \$304,000 in 2024 if the increase is set at 8% according to Speakman.

"Inflation has distorted the sales tax in our county and I have to look five years down the road," stated Greg Mathis, Presiding Commissioner. "I look at the loss of Tyson and how that will affect our sales tax. Is our spending sustainable at that point. It has nothing to do with salaries because I think we have a very good financial/benefit package to offer county employees."

"The biggest investment you can make is your employees," commented Collier. "I think we have invested in our financial package and need to continue to do so."

Question from Brent Stidham, Stoddard County Coroner, "Can elected officials take less of an increase or not take any increase at all?" Mathis stated yes; however the motion on the floor is an 8% across the board increase for all county employees.

Stoddard County Prosecuting Attorney wanted to make sure the media and public was aware that his salary and the Sheriff's salary is set by the state. They will not receive the COLA increase only their employees would get the increase.

56.265. Compensation of prosecuting attorneys — training program, attendance required, when, expenses, compensation — definition, prosecuting attorney to include circuit attorney (noncharter counties).

57.317. Compensation of sheriff — training program, attendance required, when, expenses, compensation — minimum compensation (noncharter counties).

"I agree with Greg's physical conservatism," stated Sawyer Smith. "I don't know all the County business and I wish there were other ways to save in the other county business and help the employees. If there were ways to save \$300,000 then offset the employees with that amount then I think the Commission should sharpen their pencil and proceed."

Motion to increase both elected officials and employees an 8% Cost of Living (COLA) increase in their salaries made by Candy Collier, seconded by Jacob Clary as read by Greg Mathis. Cecil Weeks suggested they call for the vote individually.

Vote as follows C.D. Stewart Yes, Carol Jarrell Yes, Jacob, Clary Yes, Josh Speakman No, Cecil Weeks Yes, Brent Stidham Yes, Sawyer Smith Abstained from voting, Lorrie Duckworth Yes, Candy Collier Yes, Carl Hefner Yes, Greg Mathis No. There were 8 votes for yes, 2 votes for no and 1 abstained. Motion passed. The increase will begin January 1, 2024.

Starting Wages for County Employees

There was quite a bit of discussion in both meetings about the low starting wages of employees. The current starting wage is \$16.05 set by former Presiding Commissioner Danny Talkington, Commissioner Carol Jarrell and Commissioner Steve Jordan.

Carl Hefner stated his sheriff's department has been starting employees at \$18.75 per hour plus benefits. Sawyer Smith stated he started his investigator at a higher starting salary.

"Dexter PD is falling behind in pay for their officer's," stated Hefner. "Our guys put their lives on the line and should be compensated for that."

Mathis stated, "I think as the Commission we can look at starting pays for the 2024 budget."

The Commissioners will meet with the Sheriff, Juvenile Office, and Prosecuting Attorney and discuss starting salaries moving forward in 2024. This is a budgetary item and not covered by the Salary Commission.

Motion to adjourn made by Jarrell, seconded by Jacob. The Stoddard County Salary Commission adjourned at 10:06 a.m.

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