

CITY OF BERE, OHIO

**MINUTES OF A COUNCIL WORK SESSION
JANUARY 9, 2023 - 7:00p.m.**

A Work Session of Berea City Council was held in the Council Chamber on January 9, 2023 and was called to order at 7:05p.m. by President of Council Jim Maxwell with the following members present: Mary K. Brown, Erika Coble, Leon Dozier, Chris McManis, Rick Skoczen, Lisa Weaver and Gene Zacharyasz. Also present via Zoom: Mayor Cyril M. Kleem and Director of Law and Public Safety Barb Jones.

All who were able rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

This meeting was open to the public in accordance with all legal requirements including C.O. Section 109 and Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chair: Rick Skoczen; Members: Brown and McManis

Mr. Skoczen called the meeting of the Coordinating Committee to order at 7:06p.m., and asked the Clerk to read the title of proposed Ordinance No. 12-2, which is as follows:

ORDINANCE NO. 12-2: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 181.02, ELECTED OFFICIALS, OF CHAPTER 181, COMPENSATION AND CLASSIFICATION FOR SPECIFIC POSITIONS, OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF BERE TO PROVIDE FOR COMPENSATION FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS FOR TERMS OF OFFICE COMMENCING IN JANUARY 2024.

Mr. Skoczen opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Maxwell reminded Council that the determined compensation will be for those who assume office in January of 2024, adding that this piece is introduced every four years and State law does not allow changes mid-term. He referenced memos from Mayor Kleem, and stated his opinion that the Mayor's salary is not commensurate with the amount of work that is called to be done.

Mr. Skoczen agreed, adding that this Council must determine how best to get salaries closer to where they need to be, and more in line with comparable communities.

Mr. Zacharyasz added that he has been told the Mayor's salary holds people back from running because, in many cases, it would constitute a pay cut and the salary is not worth all that the job entails, or the responsibility with which it comes. With regard to Council compensation, Berea is one of the lowest salaries of all surrounding communities.

General discussion commenced concerning an idea suggested by the Mayor that would equate the Mayor's salary to a Class 32 on the classification and compensation scale of the City's Personnel Plan. Mayor Kleem responded that the salary would not be on the schedule, but the salary range of Class 32 would be used as a reference for where the Mayor's salary should be. Mrs. Jones added that any time the schedule is amended, the Mayor's salary would not change, but Class 32 would simply be used as a solid comparison for where the salary should be in the

future.

Mr. Skoczen stated that Berea's budget is one of the highest of all surrounding communities, and we do have a Water Plant and host the Municipal Court. The Mayor of this City has a lot he or she is in charge of, and should be compensated accordingly.

Mrs. Brown commented that "raise" or "increase" are not bad words. In the private sector it happens every year, and while she is appreciative of the fact that Berea's elected officials have halted or minimized raises during tough economic times, other communities continued to raise salaries and Berea now lags far behind. People assuming the position of Mayor should not have to take a pay cut, and Council Members work evenings, weekends, days and nights and should be compensated appropriately, as well. People should be rewarded for hard work and it is time to draw our salaries more in line with other communities.

Mrs. Coble stated that her constituents demand a lot from her, and she works hard to follow through. She supports a fair salary for future Council Members who support their constituents and put in the time and effort that is expected of them.

Mr. McManis agreed that salaries are more competitive now than ever, but he questioned the compensation packages offered in other Cities. He felt the entire package should be considered, as well as the City's financial outlook. Mayor Kleem responded that benefits packages have been considered in the past, but discussions became enormously cluttered with numbers and information that pitted employees against one another and caused points of division.

Mr. Zacharyasz noted that, perhaps, the Mayor's car allowance should be modified, since prices have increased so much. Mayor Kleem agreed that prices have jumped, and the vehicle he drives now is a City vehicle, but he purchased it used with 77,000 miles. He noted that the car allowance has remained the same since 2007.

Mrs. Weaver stated that if pay raises had occurred on a regular basis, the City would not be in the position it is right now, and Mr. Dozier agreed, stating that his former employer would give what was an expected cost of living adjustment each year, and although he has since retired, he just received an 8% adjustment in his social security, which is substantial.

Mr. Skoczen said that it seems all of Council is in agreement that elected positions in the City are underpaid, but asked what avenue should be followed to get these salaries where they need to be. Mr. Maxwell reminded everyone that the salary must be a fixed number, and not a changing formula. He referenced the suggestion the Mayor put forth regarding the Judge's salary. The Municipal Court Judge's salary is set by the Ohio legislature, and perhaps the Council could consider using that as a benchmark.

Mr. Maxwell continued by noting that Council needs to get to a number so that those interested in running for office know the compensation. Mrs. Jones agreed, stating that she does not want anyone to run in to an ethical issue where Council Members who have already filed petitions are voting on the issue of compensation. Mr. Skoczen clarified that current Council Members should not file their petitions until this piece is adopted, and Mrs. Jones responded that she reached out to the State Ethics Commission, just to be safe, and while she does not yet have a formal opinion, she cautioned Council Members to be aware of the potential issue.

Mrs. Brown suggested adding an emergency clause to the legislation, as well.

Council began discussing numbers and Mrs. Jones noted that the Judge's salary is set through 2028. The annual salaries are, do to rounding issues, approximately as follows:

2024 - \$151,375

2025 - \$154,024

2026 - \$156,719

2027 - \$159,461

Council considered the salary for the Mayor at 80% that of the Judge, 85% that of the Judge, and 90% that of the Judge. At 80%, the Mayor's salary, over the next 4 years, would range from approximately \$123,000 to \$127,000. At 85%, the salary would range from approximately \$128,000 to \$135,000. At 90%, the salary would range from approximately \$136,000 to \$143,000. The salary for Council Member would then be 10% that of the Mayor.

Mr. McManis still thought that the entire compensation package should be considered, and Mr. Maxwell felt that the Judge's salary is simply being used as a benchmark to forward discussion. Mr. Skoczen noted that, even at 90% that of the Judge's salary, the salaries for all elected officials would still be at the lower end of the communities around Berea.

Mayor Kleem informed Council that had the 3% raise occurred every year since 2008, the position of Mayor would have garnered about \$133,437 in 2022. He also reminded Council that the President of Council does, currently, make \$1000 more than Members of Council. Mr. Skoczen and Mrs. Brown both supported the increase for the role of President because the job entails running meetings, managing the Clerk and budget, and various other duties that demand more work.

Mrs. Brown stated that she never realized how underpaid members of Berea City Council are when compared to other comparable Cities. Mrs. Coble said that when compared to other Cities, Council Members make higher than 10% that of the Mayor's salary. Mr. Skoczen added that, at 10% of the Mayor's proposed salary, Berea City Council would still be the lowest paid Council in the area.

Mr. Skoczen explained that he would like a sound explanation for where these new numbers came from, so that the public can be informed. No one is being greedy. The increases simply bring Berea more in tune with surrounding communities. Future Councils will be considering different things when the time comes, but for now, it seems the proper time to address the significant pay gaps.

General discussion commenced concerning the Clerk's salary, and Mayor Kleem agreed that the pay ranges for a couple positions in the City should be evaluated and increased more than 3%, and that can be considered once this discussion has concluded.

Mr. McManis suggested increasing the salary for President of Council, and reemphasized his need to understand the full compensation packages. Following this, significant debate ensued regarding whether the Mayor should make 80% that of the Judge, 85% or 90%. Mrs. Jones noted that at 80%, both Chiefs will likely come to make more than the Mayor over the next 4 years, and Mr. McManis felt that the position of Police Chief and Fire Chief bring with them greater risk, and that can not be ignored. Mr. Skoczen felt that any person in a public service job is at risk, and the Mayor will be responsible for managing a \$70,000,000 budget.

General discussion commenced concerning the threats to First Responders and Safety Services, and while everyone agreed that the City is lucky to have such incredible Safety Departments, Service Department personnel have enormously dangerous jobs, and the Mayor has been under Police protection at times, at well. Mayor Kleem stated that all of these jobs come with risks, and all come with some sort of benefits package, but these things are just causing the real conversation to meander. While he can't say if it is more difficult to be the Mayor in Strongsville or Berea, he feels the Mayor of East Cleveland should be making the most money, but that is likely not the case, and there are just so many variables that can be considered.

Mr. Maxwell said that it comes down to what the Council thinks a Mayor is worth to the community.

Mrs. Brown suggested 90% that of the Judge, but with a 3% annual increase.

Mr. McManis felt that the salary should be 85% that of the Judge, and that the car allowance should be increased a bit. He thought this was good progress, and added that the entire pay gap does not need to be made up over the next 4 years.

Mr. Maxwell stated that he is excited about this discussion, but noted that the vote does not need to be unanimous. He complimented Mr. Skoczen and his running of this meeting, but said that it is time to finalize some numbers.

Council Members disagreed on the exact percentage, but tentatively agreed that 90% was in play. Mr. Zacharyasz felt that Council Members should make 10% that of the Judge, and the President should get an extra \$2000 per year. Mayor Kleem reminded Council that the salaries for their positions have remained flat for a while, as well, and thus \$15,000 a year is more than justified, in his opinion. At some point, the City needs to catch up to other communities.

Council and Mayor Kleem agreed that the car allowance should remain where it has been, and it was determined that an emergency clause will need to be added to the amended Ordinance, as well as whereas clauses that explain the Judge's salary part of the discussion and demonstrate Council's reasoning.

Moved by Mrs. Brown, seconded by Mr. McManis, that Ordinance No. 12-2 be placed on the January 17, 2023 Regular Council Meeting agenda for third reading. Vote on the motion was all ayes and no nays. The motion carried.

Seeing no further business before the Coordinating Committee, Mr. Skoczen declared the meeting adjourned at 9:07p.m.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. McManis announced that a 14 year old student from Berea has skipped high school and is proceeding on to Baldwin Wallace University, and he felt that was worthy of celebration and congratulations. He complemented the young man on his hard work, adding that he is a product of our community.

Mayor Kleem suggested honoring the student with a formal Resolution.

Mr. Skoczen reminded everyone that the next Regular Meeting is on Tuesday, January 17, 2023, since January 16th is the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

With no further business before Council, adjournment was moved by Mrs. Brown, and seconded by Mr. McManis. Vote on the motion was all ayes and no nays, and thus the Work Session adjourned at 9:08p.m.

Alycia Esson
Clerk of Council

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

The Work Session of the Council of the City of Berea, Ohio, held on the 9th day of January, 2023, was conducted in compliance with Codified Ordinances Section 109 and Ohio Revised Code Section 121.22.

Alycia Esson
Clerk of Council