

## Blue Ribbon Committee Meeting Minutes

September 11, 2024

### 1. Roll Call

The Committee convened at 6:30 PM. Present were Committee Chair Jack Bartley and Members Sarah Baker, Jimmy Mello, Susan Falkoff, Linda Scott, and Marcy Murningham. Also present were Municipal Policy Analyst Doug Newton and City Councilor Lisa Feltner in the audience.

### 2. Discussion

The Committee began by discussing its proposed questions to ask City Councilors at a subsequent meeting. The proposed questions were the following:

1. *How many hours per week or month would you say that you spend as a city councilor? If possible, please clarify time spent in Council or Committee meetings as opposed to less formal constituent meetings.*
2. *What do you believe should be the future process for determining the salary of City Councilors?*
3. *What do you perceive as adding complexity to the job of a City Councilor? The Committee has discussed a residential vs. commercial tax base, population size, and budget size. Are we missing anything?*
4. *Is there another job that you view as comparable to the job of a City Councilor in Watertown?*
5. *What skills does someone need in order to do the job of a City Councilor?*
6. *How has your job changed over the years?*
7. *Is there anything else you would like to say or wish we had asked?*

As to Question 1, Linda Scott proposed adopting a list of Councilor activities so that Councilors can essentially fill in the blank to indicate how many hours they spend on each. Sarah Baker expressed willingness to adopt this approach, and Marcy Murningham agreed. Jack Bartley said that this open-ended approach is helpful in allowing the Councilors to respond as they see fit. Susan Falkoff suggested that the Committee add “community meetings” to Linda’s list. There was consideration given to instructing Councilors to exclude political matters, but this was put aside. Ultimately, the Committee unanimously approved the following question:

*How many hours per week or month would you estimate that you spend as a city councilor?*

*This is a list of potential activities that you would be responsible for as a Watertown City Councilor in an average month. If we’ve missed any activities, please add them below in the “other” spaces:*

*City Council Meetings*

*City Council Committee Meetings*

*Other meetings (with city staff, boards and commissions; community activities and outreach, etc.)*

*Constituent services (telephone calls, e-mails, etc.)*

*Research on City Topics*

*Paperwork (minutes, reports, etc.)*

As to Question 2, the Committee discussed avoiding a “gotcha” question that puts Councilors on the spot. Sarah Baker mentioned that the Committee has considered factors such as inflation and a recurring Blue Ribbon Committee for future determinations of Council salary. Ultimately, the Committee unanimously decided not to ask Councilors this question.

As to Question 3, Linda Scott suggested adding population density to the list of factors. Various ways of phrasing this question were proposed. Ultimately, the Committee decided to ask: *We have been looking at what other communities with similar forms of government pay their elected officials. What variables make a community relevant for comparison? For example, a residential vs. commercial tax base, population size, and budget size?*

As to Question 4, the Committee unanimously agreed to strike this question.

The same decision was made to Question 5, as it was removed. The Committee reasoned that any member of the public can run for Councilor if they so desire, and as such this question is not necessary. Marcy Murningham dissented, asserting that public discussion of the types of knowledge and competence necessary for high City Councilor performance, including a willingness to learn, helps increase and improve relevant voter information so voters can make better decisions.

For Question 6, the Committee opted to simplify the language as members were uncertain how actionable specific points would be. The following language was unanimously approved: *How have you seen the roles and responsibilities of a Councilor change during your tenure?*

Question 7 was kept on as a final “catch-all” question which would give the Councilors the opportunity to voice any other suggestions they may have.

The Committee concluded with a brief discussion of scheduling its next meeting in late September or early October. The Committee also approved allowing Councilors to respond to these questions in writing if they choose.

3. Public Comment

Councilor Lisa Feltner suggested that the Committee make sure Councilors have adequate time to prepare responses to each of these questions.

4. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 7:22 PM.