

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** OCTOBER 16, 2019

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR, MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** VICE MAYOR ELIZABETH BENNETT-PARKER AND COUNCILMAN CANEK AGUIRRE

**SUBJECT:** COUNCIL AIDE COMPENSATION

---

In 2007, City Council created a Committee to Review the Election Process for Alexandria City Council and the School Board. The Committee was composed of nine members, including former elected officials (three of whom were former Council members – Robert Calhoun, Bill Cleveland, and Joyce Woodson), as well as community members. The report from the bipartisan Committee included the unanimous recommendation that the current half-time aides to each Council member be made full-time, and that the Mayor's staffing be increased a similar amount (from the current equivalent of a full-time person to one and a half full-time persons).<sup>1</sup>

For some historical context, this memo was issued eight days before the first iPhone was released and a year after Facebook opened to the public and Twitter was founded. It logically follows that over the past twelve years since this report was released, the workload of the Mayor and Council members and their aides has increased.

Council briefly considered aide compensation, along with Council compensation, in late 2015.<sup>2</sup> At that time, the Council aides' annual salary was \$21,411 for a part-time position and \$56,589 for the Mayor's full-time aide. In 2015, governing body aide salaries in Northern Virginia jurisdictions (where Council or Board members were considered part-time) were between \$31,380 and \$107,063. However, the low end of that spectrum was from Loudoun County, where Board members were allowed multiple aides and most had one full-time aide and one part-time aide. The part-time aides in Loudoun were eligible for benefits if they worked 20 hours per week or more. Aides in other Northern Virginia localities all received health insurance and retirement benefits.

Alexandria Council Member aides are classified as part-time/temporary and do not qualify under City policy to receive health insurance or retirement benefits. The Mayor's Aide is considered full-time and receives health insurance and retirement benefits.

At the December 8, 2015 legislative meeting, Councilman Smedberg noted the great disparity of tens of thousands of dollars between Council aides' salaries in Alexandria and other Northern Virginia localities.<sup>3</sup> The ordinance Council was considering included raises for the Mayor and Council members. While Council voted unanimously to docket the ordinance for public hearing on December 12, 2015, it was

---

<sup>1</sup> See fourth bullet on page 1 and bottom of page 8 at <http://dockets.alexandriava.gov/fy07/062607rm/di25.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://alexandria.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2530808&GUID=6FF7638F-8BF7-4DDC-B7D0-705089857CBE>

<sup>3</sup> Docket item 33; approximately 6:14 at [http://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=57&clip\\_id=3293](http://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=57&clip_id=3293)

tabled indefinitely at that meeting because the timing fell outside the allowable period for raising Council salaries.<sup>4</sup>

On June 28, 2016, Council made a “one-time adjustment of \$10,000 to the City Council Aides’ salaries to raise their salary to \$31,411.00 annually, with the notation that they will not be *[sic]* merit increases in subsequent years”.<sup>5</sup>

The current Council aide salary is about half of what aides in other jurisdictions made in 2015; and all other jurisdictions provided their aides, whether full-time or part-time, with health insurance and retirement benefits.

The City’s compensation policy states that its intent is to “maintain a competitive compensation program in order to attract, retain, and motivate qualified employees” and that one of the principles that governs compensation programs is that “pay programs are intended to be competitive at a minimum with the average pay of comparator organizations in the primary labor market.”<sup>6</sup>

In all cases, general City employees who are not yet at the end of their pay scale and who meet performance expectations will receive an annual merit-based pay increase ranging from 2.3% to 5.0% of their salary grade and step. The beginning three salary steps are eligible for a 5.0% merit-based pay increase (the following five steps are eligible for a 3.5% increase, followed by a 2.3% increase).<sup>7</sup> If aides were treated similarly to general employees in their eligibility for merit-based performance increases, an aide who started in July 2016 and met performance expectations each year would have received a 5% increase in July 2017, a 5% increase in July 2018, and a 5% increase in July 2019, which would bring their current salary to \$36,465. If that hypothetical aide continued to meet performance expectations, they would receive a 3.5% increase in July 2020, which would bring their salary to \$37,741.

Unlike Council salaries, which were raised last year and which can only be adjusted according to specific timing, aide salaries and compensation packages can be changed at any time. We would like to ask staff to review the total compensation levels and package for Council aides, revisiting comparison information with other Northern Virginia jurisdictions, including how these jurisdictions may address adjustments for inflation and performance.

cc: Mark Jinks, City Manager  
Gloria Sitton, City Clerk  
Morgan Routt, OMB Director  
Shawnda Howard, HR Director

---

<sup>4</sup> Docket item 17. [http://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=57&clip\\_id=3299](http://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=57&clip_id=3299)

<sup>5</sup> <https://alexandria.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2826547&GUID=ADB798A8-40E0-40DD-A65C-01A5EA476109>

<sup>6</sup> Page 18.2 [https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/budget/info/budget2020/Section%2017%20-%20Legislative%20References\(2\).pdf](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/budget/info/budget2020/Section%2017%20-%20Legislative%20References(2).pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Page 18.4 Ibid