



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 4, 2024

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER/s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Introduction and First Reading. Passage on First Reading. Consideration of an Ordinance to amend and reordain Section 2-1-4 (Compensation of Members) of Article A (General Provisions) of Chapter 1 (The City Council) of Title 2 (General Government) of the Code of the City of Alexandria, Virginia 1981 as amended, to increase the compensation for the Mayor and City Council Members effective January 2025.

ISSUE: What compensation levels should be set for the Mayor and Members of City Council for the next term of Council?

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council:

- 1) Introduce and pass on first reading an Ordinance (Attachment 2) establishing for the next term of City Council the annual compensation for the Mayor at a minimum of \$60,000, and the compensation for the other members of City Council at \$55,000 minimum.

- 2) Set the ordinance for second reading, public hearing, and final passage on June 15, 2024.

BACKGROUND: At its December 12, 2023, Legislative Meeting, the Council discussed whether to increase its annual salaries for the upcoming term of Council. Council salaries were last increased to \$41,500 for the Mayor, and \$37,500 for Council members effective with the Council term beginning January 1, 2019. Since 2019, there have been no adjustments to City Council salaries, despite an increased cost of living. During this six-year period, the responsibilities of the City Council as well as the time commitment required of the City Council have increased substantially.

Even with the proposed compensation increase, City Council salaries are still below those of Prince William County, Loudoun County, Fairfax County, and Arlington County. In addition, there is justification for the Council to increase its compensation from the level identified in the proposed ordinance to move toward the average of the comparable jurisdictions. Finally, there is a need to consider that the compensation set in the ordinance will not change for the next three years starting in 2025.

City Council salaries are set forth in Section 2-1-4 of the City Code and governed by City Charter Section 3.05. An increase in the compensation for the City Council and the Mayor must be by ordinance to amend the City Code. Such an ordinance may not become effective during the term of office of the Members of Council and the Mayor in which the vote to increase the compensation is cast and must be adopted at least four months prior to the date of the next general election of the Members of the City Council and the Mayor. Therefore, should the City Council increase the compensation for Members of Council and the Mayor, it must adopt an ordinance to amend the code no later than July 5, 2024. After that, another increase in compensation for the Members of City Council and the Mayor may not take effect until January 2028.

DISCUSSION: There are many ways to look at how to provide compensation for the responsibilities of Alexandria's Mayor and Members of Council. Factors included in the compensation analysis included the following:

- 1) Market analysis of Northern Virginia comparators
- 2) Inflation and Cost Factors
- 3) Level of complexity and designation as an independent City
- 4) Consistency with other annual compensation adjustments

A comparison of similar salaries for Northern Virginia mayors, chairs, and members finds Alexandria (\$41,500/\$37,500) at the low end of the range, and Fairfax County at the high end of the salary range (\$138,283/\$123,283). The salaries of comparable jurisdictions show Prince William (\$84,739/\$74,282), Loudoun (\$86,064/\$70,916), and Arlington (\$94,734/\$89,851) having somewhat similar salaries. The average compensation for these three jurisdictions is approximately \$89,000 for the Mayor/Chair and approximately \$78,000 for members. Including the existing compensation for Alexandria Mayor and City Council results in an average of approximately \$77,000 and \$68,000 for the officials.

While Alexandria is smaller in geography and population in comparison to other major Northern Virginia jurisdictions, the City's issues are complex, encompassing mixed-use density, historic preservation, urban redevelopment, and inter-jurisdictional transportation challenges. Unlike some adjacent counties where the Virginia Department of Transportation manages and maintains roads, Alexandria is responsible for its roads, sidewalks, sewers, and all associated utility coordination. This adds to the Council workload given the complexity of related infrastructure and land-use considerations.

The nature of City Council responsibilities has changed over time, now focusing greater time on complex regional and state-wide issues. More time is also devoted to regional issues such as transportation and housing, which require attention and more evening meeting attendance by elected officials. Further, as a likely result of electronic media and increased expectations of quick government response to citizens inquiries, and requests, the Mayor and Council members now devote more time to constituent matters. This means the number of hours that the Mayor and Council Members devote to City matters to be responsive have increased substantially over the last several decades. Additionally, the workload of the Council has also grown because of the City's increased focus on long-term strategic planning, master plans, and more detailed small area plans.

It is important that the City of Alexandria provide employees and City Council with compensation that is commensurate with the community's expectations of quality services, responsiveness, and professionalism.

FISCAL IMPACT: If the amounts of \$60,000 and \$55,000 are approved, the annual added impact to the City's budget would be approximately \$123,500 per year.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 - Ordinance Cover
Attachment 2 - Proposed Ordinance
Attachment 3 - Northern Virginia Jurisdictions

STAFF:

Cheran Ivery, City Attorney
Sermaine McLean, Chief of Staff