

## CITY OF GARDNER INFORMAL MEETING OF FEBRUARY 21, 2023 IN CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Informal Meeting of the City Council was held in the City Council Chambers, 2 nd Floor, City Hall, on Tuesday evening, February 21, 2023.

CALL TO ORDER Council President Kazinskas called the meeting to order at 6:15 o'clock p.m.

ATTENDANCE Councillors present were President Elizabeth Kazinskas and Councillors Ronald Cormier, Aleksander Dernalowicz, George Tyros, James Walsh, Paul Tassone, Karen Hardern and Judy Mack. Councilors absent were James Boone, Dana Heath, and Craig Cormier.

President Kazinskas announced "For the public watching this evening we are meeting informally tonight regarding Agenda Item 10885 An Ordinance to Amend the Code of the City of Gardner, Chapter 171, Thereof, Entitled "Personnel" to Change Compensation Schedule 1, Yearly Salaries, Mayor and City Councilors. This item was in the City Council and Referred to the Finance Committee 1/17/2023; Referred to Committee of the Whole 2/6/2023. Regarding tonight's informal meeting topic, we have included a letter and proposal from Councilor Mack from June 2022. The City Council voted at our August 1, 2022 meeting to revisit this item in January 2023. I recently put in a new proposal to be considered at the City Council's Regular Meeting this evening which we may vote on if we so choose. I would like to note that this item, the salary schedule, is being considered at this time per City Ordinance. It is Chapter 171, Yearly Salaries for Various Positions. For the public watching,

"The yearly salaries for the Mayor, Council President, City Councilors and various other positions shall be as set forth in Schedule 1 included at the end of this chapter. On or after January 1 of each odd-numbered year beginning in 2007, the Finance Committee of the City Council shall report to the Council, as a Committee of the Whole, its recommendations for adjustment, if any, to the salaries of the Mayor and City Councilors."

I just wanted to make sure that those watching are aware we do have a City Ordinance for year salaries. The informal meeting discussion is now open. I do have information which I'd like to share about the proposal, which is in the packet I put forward.

- This proposal represents a 1 percent increase for each year since the last time a pay raise was given, and 1 percent for each year of the upcoming term. The last pay raise was January 2018.
- The item would not go into effect until January 2024, when the new elected city officials are sworn in.
- This item would not affect the current council.

- Adds Acting Mayor to the Compensation Schedule. We saw 2 Acting Mayors in 2020. It compensates that position with the weekly pay the Mayor would receive.
- The same raise was given to all position across the board
- The current Mayor's salary is \$92, 196. The raise would constitute \$7,640, or 8.2 %
- The Council President's salary goes up by \$887.15
- City Counselor's raise would be \$607.01
- All of these reflect an 8.2 % raise
- The increase is large because there has not been a pay raise since 2018
- The Nicholson Administration has brought a substantial amount of revenue to the City in grants, ect.
- In this sense, the Mayor's raise pays for itself
- Councilor raises are smaller
- I support these raises, as we are in a good financial position to do so

Councilor Mack expressed her appreciation for President Kazinskas' proposal.

- The Mayor's salary has been stagnant for too long.
- We are doing this in conjunction with a salary survey for non-union employees
- The responsibilities of the Mayor have changed over the years
- We want to incentivize people to occupy the position in the future
- My proposal was 2 percent annually for City Council and School Committee, and \$15,000 spread over 3 years for the Mayor
- I endorse Counselor Kazinskas proposal as fair and equitable and look forward to discussion

Councilor Walsh asked what the recommendation of the Finance Committee was regarding the Mayor's salary, per their duties in City Ordinance Chapter 171.

Councilor Ron Cormier replied that the Finance Committee has taken no action regarding President Kazinskas' proposal.

Councilor Walsh expressed a desire to the Finance Committee' recommendation in compliance with the ordinance, but expressed general support for the proposal, particularly in regards to a salary for the Acting Mayor. However, he did not think the salary should be the same as that of the Mayor, noting the limits of that position's authority. He proposed 75 percent instead.

Councilor Ron Cormier expressed his willingness for the Finance Committee to take up the item. He also advocated a system in which pay raises are addressed on an annual basis, in order to avoid the large sums being proposed. He reiterated the Council was not voting on its own raises, but rather the positions themselves.

Councilor Mack expressed support for all city salaries being on a step scale. She expressed support for installing a cost of living increase.

Councilor Ron Cormier agreed with Councilor Mack.

Councilor Walsh noted that the ordinance in question was amended in order to address the need for regular pay raises

Councilor Tyros expressed his agreement with his colleagues. He said the item in question was largely a matter of catching up, and that the Council should consider it separately from the salary study being conducted. He said this raise was long overdue, and that jaws would hit the floor if these positions were included in the salary study.

Councilor Tassone said he looked forward to hearing what the Finance Committee was going to present to the full Council. He said he certainly thought there was room for an increase, particularly in regards to the Mayor's salary.

Councilor Dernalowicz said that if the Council did not address the issue now, it would be until 2026 that they did so, which would be nearly a decade since the last raise, and the increase would be even larger. He noted they could not keep kicking the can down the road. He noted the upcoming election gave other people the opportunity to occupy these positions.

The Informal Meeting then concluded.

**Accepted by the City Council: March 20, 2023**