

SAN JOSE

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Merc

Council members should be paid more

In the good old days, by which I mean the 1980s, Mercury News reporters gathered on Friday nights for beer and popcorn at Manny's Cellar, a legendary San Jose watering hole.



**Scott
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Columnist

One early summer night in 1984, we were re-
prising the week when a call came into the bar from an elected

county supervisor who asked for the young reporter who covered county government.

It appeared that conscience was gnawing. The supervisor was leaving town but could not do so without telling the reporter what had happened the previous Wednesday. The board had pushed a fast one past the media and public.

With minimal discussion — the key facts were in a salary ordinance, without actual dollar amounts — the supervisors agreed to tie their own salaries to what judges made.

The measure had a scale that eventually pegged a supervisor's salary at 80 percent of what county judges make. (According to Transparent California, Santa Clara County supervisors each took home more than \$152,000 in 2016.)

The beauty of this move, which was credited to then-Supervisor and now U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, was that the supervisors would never again have to deal with the political unpleasantness of voting on their own salaries. As judicial pay went up, so did theirs.

The San Jose City Council can only look with envy upon their brethren in the county's "Rusty Bucket" building.

As part of the city charter, they have a salary setting commission, which makes recommendations every other year. But

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Submitted by Eileen Consignio.

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the council members ultimately have to vote on their own raises, a task that makes root canal look attractive.

Not surprisingly, this has made them cautious. Last month, they agreed to a 3 percent raise, to \$94,800 per council member, with another 3 percent next year. (They also get a \$500 monthly car allowance.)

That raise matched what many of the city's rank-and-file workers got — though the salary setting commission had recommended a 10.8 percent bump for the council.

You might shrug and say, "What's the problem?" Here's the answer: The council members deal with tens of millions of dollars at ordinary meetings. In Silicon Valley, it's penny-wise and pound-foolish to pay them such a modest wage.

Being a politician is not easy. We want the best people we can get for the job. A salary of around \$130K for a council member and \$180K for a mayor would be more fitting. It would promote more competition for the jobs.

With San Jose's creaky structure now, it's almost impossible politically to get to that number. The council has asked City Attorney Rick Doyle to draft a char-

ter change that would take the duty of salary-raising away from them.

Let me offer a modest suggestion. I've run this past a couple of people at City Hall. It may encounter political and legal problems, but they think it has promise.

My charter change would specify two things: From now on, the council can only vote yes or no on the salary setting commission's recommendations. And no council member can receive a raise until he or she has been re-elected.

Consider how this might impact a newish council member, Lan Diep, elected in 2016 to represent the Berryessa district. Let's assume the council approved recommendations for a 10 percent bump this year and another 10 percent in 2019.

Diep would get none of that until after he is re-elected in 2020. In effect, the voters have the ultimate say about whether he's earned the higher salary.

For downtown Councilman Raul Peralez, who is up for re-election in 2018, a raise would potentially come earlier. If he is re-elected, he would get a 10 percent raise shortly afterward. Councilman Don Rocha, who is termed out in 2018, would get no raise — though his successor would.

Because this plan offers political cover, it would encourage bolder raises. Vot-

ers don't like a politician who votes for a pay raise this week and cashes in next week. But if it is delayed until the next election, the council might approve the recommendations of the commission.

Of course, my idea would mean that at any given point, some council members would make more than others. But they understand re-election. It's the way they validate their record. Besides, they'll catch up in two years.

Politically — I almost hate to mention this — the charter change could be sold to the voters who would have to approve it as a way of checking runaway impulses. You could call it a measure to "Control City Council Compensation," or the four C's for short.

In legalese, it might read something like this: "No pay raise approved by the City Council for itself shall take effect until a council member has been re-elected by a vote of the people. The council shall have the power only to vote yes or no without amendment on recommendations from the salary setting commission."

Okay, it's not as elegant or as furtive as the old Lofgren razzle-dazzle. It would demand more work. But in the end, we'll all benefit if council members make a few more shekels. It's a cheap investment in better government.

Factors to determine Mayor and City Council Salaries

1. Fairness – Salary commensurate with the duty and responsibility
2. History of salary and increases and decreases
3. Compliance with city charter
4. Salaries Compared to Organization/Budget Leadership
5. Salaries Compared to San Jose city staffers
6. Salaries Compared to similar positions in California and same size cities
7. Interviews with Council Members
8. Cost of living in San Jose
9. Attractiveness of Salaries for Prospective Council Members
10. What best serves the citizens of San Jose

Submitted by David Burkhard.

						submitted by Doug Ludlow	
Ave. Salary / Rent Data From:	https://www.census.gov/quickfacts						
Mayor Salary from:	Background research conducted for the Salary Setting Commision - documents are available online.						
	COST OF LIVING & MAYORAL / COUNCIL SALARIES						
	City	Median Household Inc	Median Rent	Mayor	City Council / Supervisors		
	San Francisco	\$96,265	\$1,709	\$326,527	121,606		
	San Diego	\$71,535	\$1,503	\$100,464	\$75,386		
	Oakland	\$63,251	\$1,255.00	\$202,999.92	\$85,382		
	Los Angeles	\$61,015	\$1,322	\$245,303	\$189,464		
	Sacramento	\$54,615	\$1,114	\$127,732	\$63,272		
	Fresno	\$44,853	\$931	\$130,000	\$65,000		
	San Jose	\$96,662	\$1,822	\$132,612.00	\$97,602.00		
	COST OF LIVING TO MAYORAL SALARY RATIOS				COST OF LIVING TO COUNCIL SALARY RATIOS		
	City	Income / Mayor Salary	Rent / Mayor Salary		City	Income / Council	Rent / Council Salary
	San Francisco	0.2948148239	0.0052338704		San Francisco	0.79	0.0140536
	San Diego	0.7120461061	0.0149605829		San Diego	0.95	0.0199374
	Oakland	0.3115814036	0.006182268446		Oakland	0.74	0.0146986
	Los Angeles	0.2487331993	0.005389253291		Los Angeles	0.32	0.0069776
	Sacramento	0.4275749225	0.008721385401		Sacramento	0.86	0.0176065
	Fresno	0.3450230769	0.007161538462		Fresno	0.69	0.0143231
	San Jose				San Jose		
	Average Ratio	0.3899622554	0.007941483149			0.73	0.0145995
	APPLYING MAYORAL SALARY / COST OF LIVING RATIO				APPLYING COUNCIL SALARY / COST OF LIVING RATIO		
	Suggested Salary	\$247,875	\$229,428		Suggested Salary	\$133,125	\$124,799
	Ave:	\$238,652			Ave:	\$128,962	