

**Town of Auburn
Joint Personnel Board
Board of Selectmen, Library Trustees & Police Commission
October 19, 2021**

Selectmen Present: Keith Leclair, Todd Bedard and Michael Rolfe

Library Trustees Present: Nancy Mayland, Elizabeth Michaud and Marilyn Cavanaugh

Police Commissioners Present: David Dion, Dennis McCarthy and Patrick Bergeron

Also Present: Finance Director Patricia Rousseau and Town Administrator Bill Herman

Mr. Keith Leclair convened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Discussion of Potential Amendment to the Town of Auburn Personnel Policy

Keith Leclair noted the Board members have had informal discussions in the past concerning potentially making changes to the Town's Earned Time provisions and that now might be a good time to have a more formal discussion about potential adjustments. He noted there was not a specific proposal to consider, but he believed there had been general agreement the current allowance of being able to accumulate a total of 360 accrued hours was a generous benefit. He reported due to the recent negotiations for a collective bargaining agreement with the Auburn Police Union, a look at many municipalities in the region showed this was an area where Auburn provided a substantially more generous benefit than most communities.

Mr. Leclair suggested there were a couple of ways adjustments might be made. One could be in the time frame by which time is earned and to spread out the time frame, so it took longer to accrue time. Another way was to reduce the maximum amount of accrued time that is allowed to be carried forward year to year. As he has thought about it, Mr. Leclair felt in making any change current employees should be held harmless from the change and it would only apply to new employees hired after the change is made. He indicated he felt they shouldn't change how time is accumulated but limit the maximum amount of time that could be accrued and carried forward. He had personally been thinking about a 180-hour maximum accrual for carry over.

There was general agreement among the Board members the current amount of maximum accrual was generous. It was also noted by several Board members for some employees, particularly those in one-person departments or offices, it could be hard to take off a lot of time from work as there wasn't someone to fill in and cover the work efforts while they were away.

Dennis McCarthy noted there were several considerations, particularly with an aging workforce. He said the ability to earn time is usually greater the longer one has been with an employer, and some want to have an accumulated amount of time available more for potential medical issues than vacation. He indicated his community has established a maximum amount of time that can be accrued that would be paid out to the employee when they left service, but the employee was able to accrue more time than that in general. They just would not be paid for it at the time of their departure from employment. In another community he has worked in, the maximum amount of accrued time that would be paid out was based on a sliding scale that was dependent upon the length of service to the community.

Several board members expressed concern for being able to attract new employees in the future and wanted to keep that in mind as any change in perceived benefits is contemplated.

David Dion and Patrick Bergeron questioned how a potential change in the area of earned time would affect the members of the Auburn Police Union. Mr. Leclair and Mr. McCarthy reported it would not affect them as earned time is addressed in the collective bargaining agreement. However, looking towards the future, it should become the topic of future negotiations if a change is made in the general Town Personnel Policy.

Mr. McCarthy noted if the Board decided to make an adjustment in this area, it should be noted that it is to make the Town policy more in line with private industry.

Nancy Mayland noted in library circles. Auburn is very competitive in terms of pay and benefits, and that the employees are happy with their employment circumstances.

Patricia Rousseau indicated she has largely worked in the private sector, and she has never worked in a situation where the employees could accrue time and carry it forward.

Mr. Leclair stressed the more he has thought about it, he would not want to touch how the time is earned and accrued, but to adjust the cap on how much can be carried forward from one year to another for new hires. There was discussion about the potential of a maximum accrual of 160 hours or 200 hours.

Mr. Leclair also noted he felt the charts and verbiage in the Town policy should be changed from number of days to the number of hours, as Earned Time is accrued in terms of hours.

Patrick Bergeron moved to recommend changing the maximum accrual of 360 hours of Earned Time to 160 hours of Earned Time for new hires who work 40-hour work weeks. Seconded by Nancy Mayland. A vote was taken; eight were in favor and one (McCarthy) opposed, the motion carried.

Patrick Bergeron moved to recommend changing the maximum accrual of 315 hours of Earned Time to 142 hours of Earned Time for new hires who work 35-hour work weeks. Seconded by Elizabeth Michaud. A vote was taken; eight were in favor and one (McCarthy) opposed, the motion carried.

While the topic of Earned Time was being discussed, the Town Administrator asked if the Joint Board wanted to consider the potential of offering pro-rated amounts of Earned Time to part-time employees. This was an issue that had been brought before the Board of Selectmen earlier this year and the Board had indicated then it would be an issue for the Joint Personnel Board to consider. The Town Administrator simply was noting it for the Board while they were meeting on the overall topic.

All Board members offered comments that this was not an extended benefit they felt the Town should offer. Mrs. Michaud expressed the thought that Earned Time is provided to full-time employees who should be encouraged to take some time off from work to recharge and refresh to maintain a high-performance level. There is not that type of break needed for individuals who are working part-time hours. Board members agreed with that sentiment.

Consideration of Potential COLA / Step Increase for FY 2021 Budget

Mr. Leclair noted the Board has jointly determined the potential of a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Town employees, Step increases for Town employees, or potentially both to be included in the ensuing year's budget. Mr. Herman had provided the Board with a spreadsheet prepared by Finance Director Patricia Rousseau that details what current wages are for all Town and Library positions; what the amount would be if a 5.25% COLA were applied; what the amount would be if a 2% Step were applied, and what the amount would be if both were applied.

Mr. Leclair noted the spreadsheet calculated the bottom line of wages at current levels with no changes totaled \$2,282,041; the bottom line with a 2% Step increase only is \$2,297,982; the bottom line for a 5.25% COLA only was \$2,337,244, and the bottom line for a Step and COLA increase is \$2,349,122.

Mr. Herman noted no increase is for a full 12 months in that if a COLA is granted, it would take effect April 1st, while Step Increases are presented at an employee's anniversary date, which are spread throughout the year.

Mr. Leclair reviewed the decision made in the FY 2021 budget process to not fund a COLA due to the financial unknowns from Covid for both individuals, as well as the Town as an entity. He observed financially, things turned out much differently than anticipated and that we were in a different economy today than we were then. He felt to remain competitive in the general workforce and to be fair to the Town workforce, it would be appropriate in FY 2022 to issue a 5.25% COLA as determined by the Town's formula.

David Dion moved to recommend budgeting for the provision of a 5.25% step increase for all employees which totals approximately \$2,337,244. Seconded by Nancy Mayland. A vote was taken; all were in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Discussion ensued among the Board members as to whether the Town should also budget for the potential issuance of step increases in 2022. There was considerable discussion that a combined 7.25% increase in payroll was too much for any given year, and that the COLA already approved was an appropriate action. Discussion ensued about potentially providing a one-time year-end bonus of some amount that would not be added to base pay instead of issuing a step increase. Other discussion concerned the potential of changing the step system allocations or percentages in some manner.

Todd Bedard moved to not issue step increases in FY 2022. Seconded by Patrick Bergeron. A vote was taken; four were in favor (Bedard, Leclair, Rolfe and Bergeron) and five were opposed (Mayland, Michaud, Cavanaugh, Dion and McCarthy). The motion failed.

Board members discussed potential other alternatives, like a one-time one (1%) percent bonus instead of a step increase. There was consensus that the Board should follow current policy and not attempt to do something different.

David Dion moved to recommend budgeting for the provision of a 2% step increase for all employees in addition to the COLA previously approved for a grand total of approximately \$2,349,122. A vote was taken; five were in favor (Dion, McCarthy, Mayland, Michaud and Cavanaugh) and four were opposed (Leclair, Bedard, Rolfe and Bergeron). The motion passed.

Approval of Minutes – November 19, 2020

Nancy Mayland moved to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2020 meeting as presented. Seconded by Todd Bedard. A vote was taken,

seven were in favor and two (Dion and Bergeron) abstained). The motion carried.

Adjourn

Todd Bedard made a motion to adjourn; Bergeron seconded the motion; all were in favor, the motion passed unanimously, and the meeting stood adjourned at 8:05 P.M.