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Hidden Perks for RI Council Members — Town-by-Town Breakdown

Tuesday, July 03, 2012

Dan McGowan, GoLocalProv News Editor



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City and Town Council members in some communities across the state are benefiting from incentive packages that include expense accounts, health benefits, pensions, travel reimbursements, and stipends on top of their annual salaries, according to a recent survey conducted by the [Division of Municipal Finance](#).

The survey found that the packages vary by community, with Providence Council Members earning by far the most in salary (\$18,765 & \$20,850 for Council President Michael Solomon). Council members are also entitled to receive a pension as well as health and dental benefits, although not all of the members opt to participate in those programs. Council members also [receive city cell phones](#).



But the capital city is not alone.

On Block Island, First Warden Kimberley H. Gaffett earns \$10,000 annually while the standard Council pay is \$5,000. Those Council members are also entitled to health and dental benefits, a pension and they can be reimbursed for travel expenses related to work.

In Warwick, Council members earn \$10,000 annually and are eligible for health, dental and vision benefits as well as group life insurance and a pension. In East Providence, the average Council members earns \$3,500 annually and can enjoy health, dental and vision benefits. Those members do not receive a pension.

Not Concerned with Perks

While the majority of Council members across the state earn less than \$5,000 each year, some candidates running for office say even that may be too much for a public servant.

Thomas Browning, a Moderate Party candidate in South Kingstown, said he was unaware Council members in his town receive even a dime in compensation. His town is at the low end of the totem pole, with the President earning \$3,000 and rank-and-file members earning \$2,000. They do not receive any health benefits, a pension or perks.

"[I] had been unaware that council members in South Kingstown received any pay," Browning said. "I am running for office as a favor to my friends and neighbor that have ask me to represent their wishes and interests. I am not interested in pursuing any further financial gain from public service."

Smithfield Democrat Suzy Alba said she isn't concerned with compensation levels in her community either. In her town, the Council President earns \$4,500 and Council members pick up \$4,000 and nobody receives any additional benefits.

"If elected to the Town Council in Smithfield this year, I will responsibly serve my community despite what monetary compensation and benefits are being offered to me in return," Alba said. "In fact, in my first term, I will not accept any compensation for my service to the town."

Alba said she hoped that no candidate or incumbent would ever let money influence their decision to run for office and serve their constituents. She acknowledged that she was unaware of the large disparities in benefits packages depending on the city or town, but said that is something each community should consider on its own.

"I believe that every community across our state should thoughtfully consider whether compensating council members comes at a cost to the services provided to taxpayers," Alba said.

Eliminate the Benefits

If Republican Lyn Jennings picks up the Ward 8 Council seat in Warwick, she not only plans to give up the benefits she is entitled to, she also intends to lead an effort to get rid of the benefits completely or force Council members to pay for them.

Jennings said Council members who take advantage of the health, dental and vision plans pay just \$28.00 each week toward a package with a value that "far exceeds the annual \$10,000 salary." She said she isn't sure taxpayers would agree with subsidizing costs for elected officials and called the package "an egregious example of wasteful spending."

"I have very strong opinions about city council members receiving taxpayer subsidized benefits for a part-time position," Jennings said. "These kinds of benefit packages should not be offered. One of my first acts will be to introduce a resolution to eliminate these benefits or to at least mandate that any council member who wishes to participate in the city's benefit package must pay for them in full."

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An Abuse of Taxpayer Money

Despite the fact that serving as a Council member can often be a full-time job, not a single candidate GoLocalProv spoke with willing to defend the compensation packages handed out in their communities. Lincoln Council candidate Felix Fernandes said representing his district would be a privilege and that he was uninterested in profiting at all.



In Lincoln, the average Council member earns \$2,500 and the town budgets \$4,000 for expenses plus another \$5,000 for professional development and training. Fernandes said he believes that a city or town should not be responsible for healthcare coverage and or any other benefits for its Council members.

"To offer such things should be viewed as an abuse of taxpayer money," he said. "Taxpayer money belongs in the pockets of the taxpayer; it does not belong paying for Council members' perks. We need to operate our cities and towns like businesses in many ways and in doing so, we should ask ourselves 'would we get any fewer applicants for the job if we did not offer such perks?'"

Council Presidents and Members Salary and Fringe Benefits 2012

City/Town	President's Salary	Council's Salary	Health 1	Dental Plan 2	Vision Plan 3	Group Life 4	Retirement 5	Other 6
Barrington	1,000	500	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bristol	6,000	5,500	No	No	No	No	No	No
Burrillville	7,000	6,500	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Central Falls	0	0	No	No	No	No	No	No
Charlestown	3,000	2,500	No	No	No	No	No	No
Coventry	4,500	4,500	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Cranston	5,000	4,000	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Cumberland	3,000	2,400	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
East Greenwich	2,100	1,800	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
East Providence	4,500	3,500	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Exeter	1,218	1,218	No	No	No	No	No	No
Foster	1,825	1,825	No	No	No	No	No	No
Glocester	3,000	2,500	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Hopkinton	3,000	2,225	No	No	No	No	No	No
Jamestown	1,999	1,692	No	No	No	No	No	No
Johnston	6,909	6,448	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Lincoln	3,000	2,500	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Little Compton	6,372	2,123	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Middletown	4,000	2,500	No	No	No	No	No	No
Narragansett	2,100	2,100	No	No	No	No	No	No
New Shoreham	10,000	5,000*	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Newport	4,000	2,000	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
North Kingstown	3,600	2,400	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
North Providence	8,000	8,000	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
North Smithfield	2,000	2,000	No	No	No	No	No	No
Pawtucket	8,425	7,372	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Portsmouth	1,500	1,200	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Providence	20,850	18,765	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Info. not provided	
Richmond	1,500	1,250	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Scituate	2,500	2,000	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Smithfield	4,500	4,000	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
South Kingstown	3,000	2,000	No	No	No	No	No	No
Tiverton	2,900	2,400	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Warren	1,500	1,125	No	No	No	No	No	No
Warwick	10,500	10,000	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
West Greenwich	2,950	2,459	No	No	No	No	No	No
West Warwick	6,000	5,000	No	No	No	No	No	No
Westerly	4,326	3,786	No	No	No	No	No	No
Woonsocket	9,250	9,000	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

*New Shoreham: Second Warden's Annual Salary is \$7,500

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David Beagle

6:45am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

I hope we don't see a "Hey!!! I want what they have" movement across the state.

Chris MacWilliams

7:35am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

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Walt Barrett

7:54am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

What is included in column 6 (other)?

vinny coia

8:02am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

why any benefits in addition to salary in any municipality ?
mr mcgowan . i was wondering if you or any of the readers are aware of a site that lists annual salaries and ot in addition to benefits for municipal / state employees ?

Eloise O'Shea-Wyatt

8:22am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

Of course they should receive a salary and benefits for the work they do. Perhaps if they were paid a decent salary and benefits they would feel a greater responsibility to the citizens and taxpayers who are paying them. Here in America we only see people's worth by how much they are paid. We don't seem to value real honest public service, yet that is what we want.

Rufus Mikatis

9:00am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

Walt hits the head on this one; Never mind the benefits this list is perfect example of how and why little RI cannot and should not have 39 separate cities/towns. Maybe it made sense in 1880 but this is the 21st century, people arent confined to horse and buggy and the local market. It makes no sense and we cannot afford it. CONSOLIDATE/REGIONALIZE or else.

Charles Beckers

9:25am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

These are, by-and-large, part-time jobs. How much would you expect to get paid in salary for a part-time job? Probably more than most of these elected officials. But, would you expect benefits from a part-time job? Probably not. 'Nough said.

Rufus Mikatis

9:28am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

Charles;
So true, the perks are what they really want. And for part-timers working with no benefits, I know because I am one of them. Just an hourly wage with NO benefits but it is a job so in RI I guess I cant complain.

Harold Stassen

9:33am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

What's the old adage; "you pay peanuts and you get monkeys!"
I wouldn't want to responsibility or the time demands that goes with being a councilperson. Certainly, those that choose to do so are entitled to reasonable compensation and possibly some benefits. Of course, agreeing to what they should be is a challenge. If we are not guarded in our skepticism, we'll be asking candidates to pay cities/towns for the "privilege" of serving us. Let's try to keep it real folks.

John Joseph

10:22am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

@Chris MacWilliams: I concur. There are five counties in the biggest little. Why do all the little rhodey electorate insist on having 39 of everything? Too many chiefs. WHERE ARE OUR LEADERS? Oh, busy paying each other off with favors and brown envelopes.

David Beagle

11:11am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

How about a town by town break down of how many elected officials have ties to public unions, or otherwise benefit from the issues they vote on?

Pippa Jack

11:56am on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

no perspective from people who've held local office, huh? just candidates trying to sound electable. reality check: this is a more than full time job, and the bennies outlined above are peanuts compared to evenings away from family, lost income, and having to grow a hide as thick as a rhino. the real problem is that only zealots, the wealthy and the crooked - hello, n prov! - can afford to be a council person.

lynette kapsinow

12:43pm on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

I don't have any issues with the salaries and benefits, for those councilpersons serving each city. What I do strongly object to is any form of a pension plan. As we in Providence have experienced first hand this has led to many pension abuses.

ed cianci

12:49pm on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

please do the same report for the school committees - this might surprise people even more

pearl fanch

1:27pm on Tuesday, July 03, 2012

The ENTIRE SYSTEM needs to be blown up and start from scratch.

No need for 39 communities.

This is the only state where counties don't mean anything.

If people took a step back and actually saw how other states are run, they'd realize how TOTALLY screwed up RI is. In soooooooooo many ways.

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