

Yuba City City Council under fire for salary bump

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The Yuba City City Council will receive a higher salary and an increased travel allowance, action that prompted criticism from local taxpayers.

The council approved the increases at a meeting Tuesday night. Councilmembers' monthly salary will increase from \$500 to \$600, while their travel allowance was upped from \$375 to \$500 per month.

Both increases will lead to an additional \$16,500 in annual costs for the city.

The travel allowance was originally proposed at \$550 per month, but the council lowered the amount to \$500 after hearing comments from Pat Miller, president of the Sutter County Taxpayers Association.

Miller said \$550 a month equates to driving 956 miles per month and more than 11,000 miles each year, using the IRS mileage reimbursement rate.

"I find it difficult to believe that you folks are driving 11,000 miles on city business," Miller said. "To give you a blanket \$550 a month is extremely questionable. That appears to be excessive in driving to various meetings in Yuba and Sutter counties and even Sacramento."

Vice-Mayor John Buckland said he drives about 850 miles a month on city business, which includes meetings with the Sacramento Area Council of Governments.

"I do agree that maybe \$550 is a little excessive, by a couple dollars," Buckland said. "I think (\$500 per month) is a reasonable amount. I don't have to make money doing it. I enjoy what I do, but I don't expect to have to go out of pocket when doing the business of the citizens."

Mayor John Dukes said he travels between 700 and 800 miles per month.

"It's not just driving around Yuba City. We go up to Willows to Sacramento to Beale Air Force Base. It adds up," Dukes said. "It's not about making money on this, we just want to be compensated."

The \$100 increase in the monthly stipend was scheduled to go into effect in 2008, but the council deferred the increase to set an example during a tough economic time for the city, Dukes said.

Using a conservative estimate of a 20-hour work week, the council makes below minimum wage at \$6.25 an hour, Dukes said.

A supervisor for Sutter County makes \$2,800 a month.

"This money simply covers a minimum amount of expenses," Buckland said.

"We say it with pride, how much we get compensated for how many hours we work. We enjoy the work we do."

The City Council's pay is set by state government code and is based on the population of the city.

Councilmembers are eligible to receive increases of up to 5 percent each calendar year, but councilmembers are prohibited from adopting ordinances that set future increases in salary. Rather, the increases are set from the last adopted increase.

Adjustments in the councilmembers' salary are prohibited during their term in office and would go into effect after the next municipal election. In this case, since the increase was approved in 2008, the raise will go into effect immediately, said Terrel Locke, city clerk.

MISLEADING HEADLINE

The headline "Council under fire for salary bump" on the September 3 article is misleading and infers that SCTA was/is opposed to the increase in pay for Yuba City City Council members and that certainly is not true – we did not object to raising the salary from \$500 to \$600 a month and believe it is long over due. Our issue is/was with raising the travel allowance to \$550 a month for city council members without documented justification and because it is not transparent as to where our elected officials are going. The city apparently used the American Automobile Association's cost to OWN a vehicle which included car payment, insurance and registration to justify the increase. We would like the city to use the federal IRS reimbursement rate which is currently 57.5 cents per mile.

Sutter County gives the supervisors an option of a \$100 a month stipend with no documentation, or exact expenses with documentation, for travel inside Sutter and Yuba counties. Outside of Sutter or Yuba counties, they receive actual mileage at the IRS approved mileage rate. Perhaps the city could adopt something similar to the county.

Our concern is that your readers might get the impression that SCTA is opposed to any pay increases for government leaders/employees, even when there is documented justification, and that is categorically untrue! We just want spending of our tax dollars to be justified and transparent.

**Patricia A. Miller, President
Sutter County Taxpayers Association**