

Holyoke's city councilors vote against salary bump for themselves, mayor

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HOLYOKE — The salaries for Holyoke's elected officials will remain as they are, after a 2–9 vote Wednesday ended a proposal to raise their pay — a move some councilors called “inappropriate” amid economic hardship in the community.

The failed measure would have increased the mayor's salary by 40% and city councilors' pay by 30%.

Supporters argued that the raises were long overdue and necessary to attract qualified candidates, but opponents — including Mayor Joshua Garcia and Councilor Kevin Jourdain — said the timing was wrong, especially with many residents struggling financially.

“I am thankful to my colleagues who joined me in rejecting this bad idea. I am also glad we rejected the idea of sending it back to committee for a vote to be taken after the election,” Jourdain said in a statement. “Many at our prior meeting declared their public support for these pay raises, so I am thankful many of them reconsidered their position after thinking about this more and listening to the public.”

City Councilor Kocayne Givner and council President Tessa Murphy-Romboletti were the only members who voted in favor of the pay raise Wednesday night. City Councilors Patti Devine and Jenny Rivera were absent.

Before the vote, Councilor Israel Rivera asked the council to send the proposal back to the ordinance subcommittee for more discussion.

That idea was also rejected, with only three councilors — Rivera, Juan Anderson-Burgos and Givner — voting yes.

Although Rivera introduced the order to the full City Council, he said during Wednesday's meeting that it made more sense to send the measure back to the subcommittee for future consideration.

Rivera said he had no personal stake in the proposal and was simply following procedure in his role as ordinance subcommittee chair. He said he advanced the measure to encourage negotiation and discussion.

“But as the other councilors mentioned, that never happened, so ... it is the will of the body,” Rivera said.

The conversation started [more than a decade](#) ago. In April 2015, the City Council asked its Ordinance Committee to review a report about pay for elected officials, nonunion workers and supervisors.

At the time, consultant's study presented to the Holyoke City Council proposed a 50% pay raise for councilors and a 35% increase for the mayor, boosting the mayor's salary from \$85,000 to \$115,000.

The report, aimed at modernizing compensation for nonunion employees and elected officials, came amid budget constraints and an election year. Then-Mayor Alex B. Morse said the goal was to professionalize government, though he wasn't advocating for a raise himself.

The council also previously asked the city Personnel Office to study pay for elected officials and suggest new salaries, Garcia said previously. Staff followed instructions, and Garcia made it clear that he didn't want to be involved in the study.

Rivera said the latest process started with an order filed in March 2021, after years of discussing the salaries of workers in City Hall, both elected and hired.

During Wednesday's discussion, City Councilor Meg Magrath-Smith said the new salary proposal has become a distraction.

She recalled that the last time the council considered raises, the measure failed, was reconsidered and then tabled. Now, she said, there's a mistaken belief that the council fully supports the idea.

"I haven't heard anyone say they want to move forward with raises for the mayor or council," Magrath-Smith said. "Every conversation I've been part of has treated this as a nonstarter."

She added that, while the council might consider a small increase for some positions, the broader proposal has caused confusion and public concern.

"I'm happy to put this to rest," she said. "There's been a lot of misinformation, and that's not helpful to the public. ... I just want us to vote and move forward."

During the discussion on Wednesday, Jourdain pushed for a final vote to ensure the public knows where each councilor stands on the issue.

Jourdain also clarified that he never claimed Garcia had asked for a raise and reaffirmed his stance that the council should not approve the raises, which is why he took a strong position at the last meeting.

"Now is not the time," he said. "I agree wholeheartedly with the mayor; this is not the time to be doing these increases."

Jourdain added that delaying the vote by sending the proposal back to committee would only confuse the issue.

"Sending it back is sort of like punting the football for another day. I think we should take a stand, vote on the issue, put it to rest one way or another, and move forward," he said.