

Municipal salaries merit close scrutiny

Slater, Melinda

. **North Shore News**

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Dear Editor: Re: \$100K Club at West Van's Town Hall Worth Every Penny, July 22 Mailbox.

Coun. Nora Gambioli's suggestion that West Vancouver District staff salaries are not "inflated" in part because they are not as high as salaries paid in other jurisdictions, such as the District and the City of North Vancouver, but: "more importantly are still well below the need for someone who wants to live in West Vancouver these days," bears scrutiny.

Coun. Gambioli takes columnist Trevor Lautens to task for presenting numbers with no context whatsoever. While it is helpful to know compensation details for other municipalities, if we're going to put things in context we should also know how municipal salaries compare with the private sector. Government employees tend to be at the very top end of the scale when it comes to remuneration.

What requires consideration is whether municipal salaries and benefits as a whole are out of sync with the private sector. Also, due to substantially escalating pay increases over the past number of years, we must consider if these salaries are sustainable.

Based on Coun. Gambioli's letter, I take it she feels staff salaries and the number of employees on payroll are reasonable. However I suggest this matter should be open to debate. The bulk of the district's budget goes towards salaries; it is a significant component of the overall budget and as such deserves close scrutiny, including by taxpaying residents, regardless of the value of their home.

By the way, I am not some out-of-touch retiree, I still work for a living and I don't earn anywhere near what most of our district staff earn. Through years of hard work and saving, as well as getting into the real estate market at a fortuitous time, I am incredibly fortunate to be a WV homeowner. If you want to ensure district employees can afford to live in West Van then do something about skyrocketing real estate prices because the solution surely isn't to have taxpayers cough up the money so that staff can afford to buy some of the most desirable and expensive real estate in the world.

As far as the idea that most district employees commute here and this is a problem in the event of an earthquake - who are the essential people that need to be here? Fire, police, maintenance and engineering staff? Surely some of these employees live in West Van already, including the chief of police and the district's CAO. What happens if some of these "key" personnel simply choose to live elsewhere? Will the district make residency part of their job description?

Does Coun. Gambioli seriously think district staff's pay should be harnessed to West Van real estate values? As disturbing as that idea is, what's even more disconcerting is the notion that homeowners have no right to complain based solely on the value of their

property and the fact that they already own their home. Aren't these the very people Coun. Gambioli is supposed to represent?

Melinda Slater

West Vancouver

Credit: Melinda Slater; North Shore News

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Dear Editor:

My disappointment at reading Trevor Lautens' column (July 15) [Tracking the \\$100K Club at WV Town Hall](#) is profound. These numbers are presented with no context whatsoever.

Someone who retired 20 years ago may think these salaries sound inflated, but in researching current standards, it is clear that this is not the case; the fact is that staff salaries in West Vancouver are in the 60th percentile of the other municipalities of the Lower Mainland (in other words, 40 per cent of municipalities pay more). In fact, both our North Shore neighbours to the east, the District and the City of North Vancouver, pay more (but they don't have a columnist who feels it is his "unpopular duty" to report it).

More importantly, these salaries are still well below the need for someone who wants to live in West Vancouver these days. In fact, two salaries over \$150,000 are not even enough to buy a house here anymore. As a result, 90 per cent of our municipal workforce do not live in West Van.

That means police, firefighters, engineers, planners, bus drivers, parks and recreation and executive staff are almost all commuting here from elsewhere. This is a huge problem; when the Big One arrives, who will be here to help us 44,000 residents?

We have the most energetic, highly qualified, and dedicated municipal staff anywhere. And no one who already owns their \$3-million house in West Van should be complaining.

Nora Gambioli

Councillor, District of West Vancouver

What are your thoughts? Send us a letter via email by clicking [here](#) or post a comment below.

