

DougCo commissioners taken to task over county salaries



L-R: Douglas County Commissioners George Teal, Lora Thomas, Abe Laydon. | [Douglas County](#)



By Mike McKibbin/NewsBreak Denver | May 25, 2022

[DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLO.] Salaries for Douglas County employees need to take inflation into account or the county risks seeing a continued exodus of workers that will affect services to the public.

Several county elected officials stressed the need for higher salaries to the commissioners during a Monday work session.

Clerk and Recorder Merlin Klotz said his office lost 14 people this year and could have a 32% attrition rate by the end of the year.

“I’d say 10 of those people moved out of state because they couldn’t afford to live here anymore,” he added. “A \$40,000 a year employee couldn’t pay an extra \$400 rent increase. Several others applied for food stamps last month. Our compensation is just out of line.”

“The cost of retention is a hell of a lot cheaper than the cost of recruitment and training,” Klotz continued. “A semi-skilled worker like some in our office cost 100% to 150% of their salary to replace.”

“We’re not the sort of county we were 20 years ago, and we can’t think of ourselves that way,” said Assessor Lisa Frizell.

‘Hyperinflation’ leads to higher cost of living

Klotz explained he thinks much of the increase in the county’s cost of living is due to President Joe Biden’s economic policies. He said those policies are similar to those of President Jimmy Carter in the 1970s, which he stated led to a 55% hyperinflation rate over Carter’s four years in office.

Investopedia describes hyperinflation as occurring when prices rise more than 50% per month over some time and can approach 5% to 10% a day. Normal inflation is measured in terms of monthly price increases.

“We need the county to establish a dynamic policy that addresses how our salaries will address hyperinflation that we’re going to be staring down the barrel of,” Klotz said. “Our employees are our most important asset and you’re effectively blowing them off. It’s absolutely unforgivable and insane.”

10% adjustment urged

Klotz and others told the commissioners they need to approve a 10% adjustment in all salaries. He noted the county adjusted salary ranges at the end of last year but did not apply it to current employees.

“That’s absolutely absurd and a real slap in the face of our employees,” he said. “You effectively cut their wages by 5% on Jan. 1.”

The officials also warned low pay could spur workers to begin collective bargaining talks with the county and form a union.

“One solid, articulate person could bring this up in collective bargaining and then you’ll have a real image problem, which is significant already,” said Coroner Jill Roman.

The state legislature this year approved a bill allowing most counties to collectively bargain with their employers. The commissioners opposed the measure.

Commissioners doubtful

“No matter what we do, I don’t think we’ll ever be able to pay an entry-level salary at the median income level in this county,” Commissioner Abe Laydon said. “This is still a very upwardly mobile place to live, but it’s also a tough place if you have a single income of \$60,000 a year.”

Commissioner Lora Thomas recalled an April presentation where county human resources officials recommended a 3% midyear adjustment she supported.

She also stated the county offers health insurance for employees and their families for \$80 a month “and I think most places don’t have that capability and availability. I think it makes sense to remind employees it’s not just about pay.”

Commissioner George Teal said he needed to see “substantial evidence” the county’s cost of living increases were not enough.

“The people who talk to me are taxpayers and there’s no talk about them getting a midyear adjustment,” he added. “I’m not saying it’s not needed but we work for our taxpayers and that is who we are accountable to. Show me evidence and I’m on board.”

The commissioners agreed to consider the midyear adjustment and salary issue next week.