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MONEY FOR THE MANAGER

Eugene's City Manager receives a five-figure raise

Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz got a salary raise of \$15,421 at the July 23 City Council meeting. Approval for the raise came after Ruiz's annual performance review at a July 16 council work session.

The council approved a 7 percent raise — a 5 percent merit-based raise of about \$11,000 and, additionally, the standard 2 percent raise for cost of living increase. This brings Ruiz's base salary to \$235,955.20 a year, according to Laura Hammond, the city's community relations director.

"This is the first merit raise the manager has taken since 2015," Hammond says. "Last year he took vacation in lieu of a merit increase."

The motion to grant the raise was passed by a vote of 7-1, with Councilor Betty Taylor opposed.

"I want to point out that we're giving a raise of \$11,021, which brings the salary to \$235,955," Taylor said at the meeting. "I didn't realize that before. I know we have a formula, but I really think that is too much."

Others agree that Ruiz, a controversial figure who's garnered significant criticism over the years, should not have received such a large raise.

Lynn Porter is a member of the local Homeless Action Coalition. He's also helping to organize the new Eugene Renters Union. He urges that the city needs to be doing more on homelessness and thinks that the money from Ruiz's raise could have gone to more important causes.

"I would like to see the money spent on something else like creating more legal rest stop camps," Porter says.

For Eugene's size, and given Ruiz's tenure as city manager — since 2008 — his salary is comparable to other city managers in Oregon. Salem's city manager makes slightly more than Ruiz, \$239,100 a year, according to the city's adopted budget for the current financial year.

Last year, Bend's city manager was making about \$176,453, according to reporting by *The Bend Bulletin*.

During the July 16 performance review, councilors discussed Ruiz's performance throughout the year and gave him feedback. Many councilors had words of praise for his work as city manager.

"I've been involved with five city managers, and I think you're one of the best we've ever had in the past several decades," Councilor Alan Zelenka said during the review.

Zelenka noted aspects of Ruiz's annual performance that stood out to him, including: a solid financial year, passing of the parks bond levy, hiring the new police chief and attempting to make downtown safer.

Councilor Chris Pryor echoed those points and also said that as city manager, Ruiz often gets blamed for things not actually in his control.

In Eugene's council-manager form of government, Ruiz oversees city operations, including the city budget, and carries out whatever legislation and policies the City Council directs. This form of government has been criticized as giving the appointed manager more power than the elected councilors.

"I think those things over which you are accountable, where you have that authority and you have those resources, I think you do an excellent job, and that's how I rated you," Pryor said.

Not all discussions during the performance review were as shining.

Councilor Emily Semple pointed out that although Ruiz has had many successes this year, there is still a ton of work to be done, specifically around downtown improvements, homelessness and climate recovery.

Taylor also had critiques for downtown. "I do not think that downtown is better than it was. If you walk around you'll see a lot of empty storefronts," Taylor said. "I know there are efforts being made and that's good."

Homeless advocate Porter says overall he disagrees with a lot of the city's decision-making around homelessness and affordable housing.

"I think they [the mayor, city council and city manager] represent business, homeowners and upper middle-class professionals," he says. "None of them represent the interests of Eugene working-class residents."

Porter adds: "No one is speaking for us." ■

ACTIVIST ALERT

• As Donald Trump makes us more and more worried about the racism and anger he engenders locally, nationally and internationally, let's not forget the past. A **Hiroshima-Nagasaki Commemoration** is 7-9:30 pm Sunday, Aug. 5, at Alton Baker Park's small shelter, near the duck pond and park entrance. There will be speakers, a call to take action to abolish nuclear weapons, drumming by Eugene Taiko, traditional Japanese Obon dancing and music by the Yujin Gakuen Children's Peace Choir. The event closes at dusk with the floating of candle lanterns on the duck pond while the Eugene Peace Choir performs. The ceremony honors those who died when the U.S. dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Contact: Michael Carrigan, CALC, 541-485-1755 for more info, calcpeace@gmail.com.