



NEWS RELEASE

Dec. 10, 2013

Contact:
Jackie Broach, public information officer
Phone: (843) 545-3164
E-mail: jbroach@gtcounty.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

County takes steps to close pay gaps

GEORGETOWN COUNTY — Georgetown County Council members agreed on Tuesday to take action that would bring starting salaries paid to county employees more in line with those offered by competing jurisdictions. Adjustments will be made in phases, but existing employees will begin seeing an increase in wages beginning with their second paycheck in January.

Council's action was based on the results of a wage and salary review conducted earlier this year by a committee of county directors. The review was initiated this summer after members of the public expressed concerns about wages paid to public safety workers, high turnover rates in those departments and elevated training costs associated with those turnover rates.

"What we heard the most about were salaries in public safety jobs, but we know high turnover is an issue across the board and has caused difficulty in hiring and keeping qualified people with the starting salaries we currently offer," said County Administrator Sel Hemingway.

As a result, the county selected a range of "problem positions" to study within three categories: Emergency services, law enforcement and general services. Wages offered for each position were compared with those offered by what the review committee identified as competing jurisdictions. Those jurisdictions varied for each category.

The review showed that beginning wages for emergency services employees were on average 13.58 percent below those offered by competing jurisdictions. Starting salaries for law enforcement and general services were 10.43 percent below average. Using a weighted average of 11.13 percent for a total of 586 employees and factoring in benefits, it would cost the county \$2.9 million to bring wages up to the survey averages. To accommodate that adjustment will require a millage increase, and caps on how much millage can be raised in a single year necessitate proceeding with the salary adjustments in phases over a three-and-a-half-year period ending in fiscal year 2018.

"This problem was not created overnight and, unfortunately, it can't be corrected overnight," Hemingway said. "But we do recognize the need to rectify this issue and we're taking steps to do so beginning almost immediately."

Under current calculations, the average annual countywide millage increase required through 2018 to pay for the adjustments in the Midway Fire District would be the equivalent of

\$5.10 on a home valued at \$100,000 if the home is listed as a primary residence. In the unincorporated western portion of the county, the annual average would be \$6.30 on a \$100,000 home. The remainder of the county, including incorporated areas, would see an annual average increase of \$4 on a \$100,000 home.

“However, lower millage increases could be realized if the economy grows at a greater rate than currently forecast,” Hemingway pointed out.

Other issues, such as changes to state regulations, might also require modification of the plan in the future, “ but action is being taken to address this very important issue that affects the quality and retention of our workforce, as well as costs associated with training new employees,” Hemingway said.

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