



Snohomish County

Office of Hearings Administration

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MEMORANDUM

From: Peter Camp, Hearing Examiner and Administrator

To: County Council and County Executive

CC: Finance Director Nathan Kennedy, Executive Director Tom Teigen, Council Chief of Staff Heidi Beazizo, and Legislative Analyst Cynthia Foley

Date: March 11, 2026

Re: Board of Equalization Compensation

SUMMARY

The Office of Hearings Administration proposes increasing the stipend for Board of Equalization members by \$50, from \$100/half day and \$150/full day to \$150/half day and \$200/full day. The stipend has not changed since the 1990s. In 2026, the Board of Equalization case load will average 185 cases per member. Board members are dissatisfied with the 1990s-era stipend. Recruiting board members, who must possess specialized knowledge and skills, has already proved challenging, and retention of members will become difficult. Ten years ago, property valuation appeals had a two- to three-year backlog: that backlog was eliminated due to the hard work of the board members and clerks. County property owners can now expect disposition of their appeals within a year. If retention and recruitment of board members become difficult due to low compensation, the backlog will likely reappear to the disadvantage of county residents. If the proposed stipend is approved, program 424 would not need any additional budget allocation for 2026 and would only need a budget increase of \$7,500 for 2027.

BACKGROUND

The current stipend of \$100/half day and \$150/full day was apparently set sometime in the 1990s.¹ The stipend is paid only for scheduled sessions of hearings (half day of hearings or full day of hearings) and is not paid for time spent in preparation, study, or review outside of the hearing session.

¹ Materials supporting Ord. 16-075 (November 2, 2016) (amending SCC 2.76.030). We were unable to find any documentation prior to 2016 regarding the stipend.

Prior to 2016, county code provided, "The members shall receive such pay and allowances as are provided by chapter 84.48 RCW and chapter 458-14 WAC." SCC 2.76.030 (Amend. Ord. 03-042, adopted May 21, 2003). However, neither the cited statute nor regulation established compensation for board members.

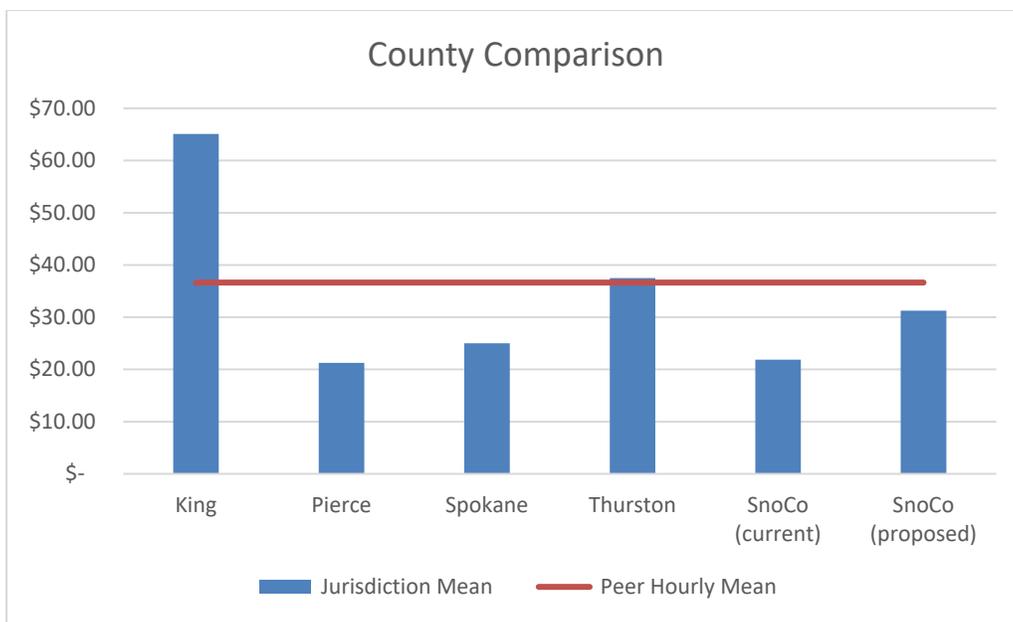
The county legislative authority may provide an adequate annual budget and funds for operation and needs of the board of equalization, including, but not limited to the costs and expenses of the board, such as the meeting place, the necessary equipment and facilities, materials, the salaries of the clerk of the board and the clerk's assistants, the expenses of the members of the board during the sessions, travel, in-service training, and payment of salaries of all such employees hired by the board, to facilitate its work.

RCW 84.48.036 (1994). The original 1970 law was similar and did not establish compensation for board members. 1970 Laws chap. 55 §9. Neither did implementing regulations appear to establish compensation amounts. WAC chap. 458-14.

Once aware of the gap between county code and state law, the Office of Hearings Administration sponsored amendment of SCC 2.76.030. "Whereas, existing Snohomish County Code does not specify in what way the members of the Board are compensated . . ." Ord. 16-075 (November 2, 2016). SCC 2.76.030 was amended to allow County Council to set board member compensation by motion. "The members of the Board shall receive such compensation as provided by county council by motion." The ordinance was accompanied by a motion maintaining the then-existing compensation. Motion 16-483 (December 14, 2016).

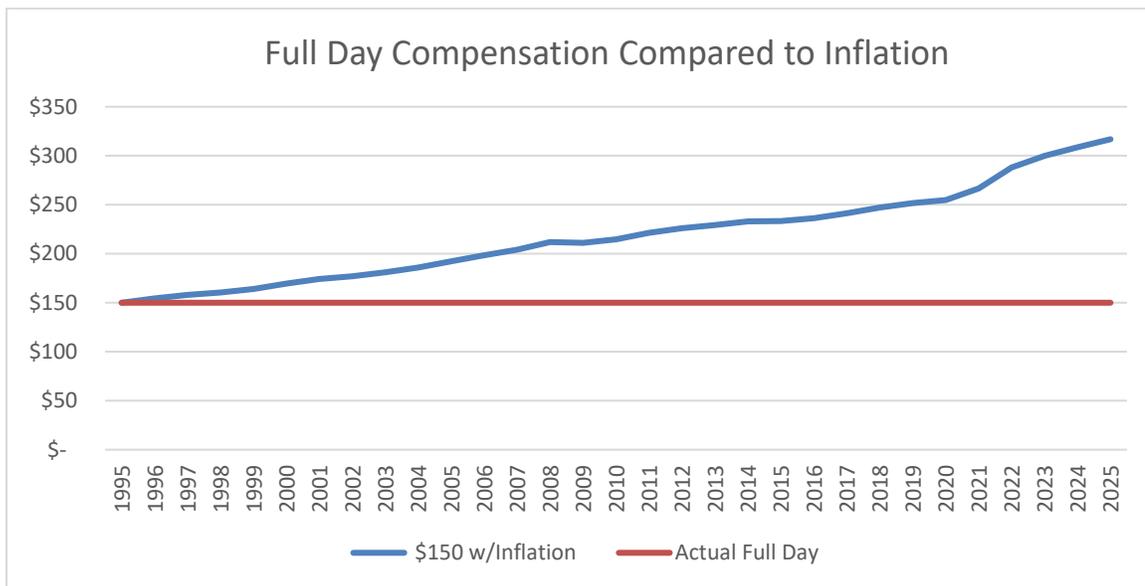
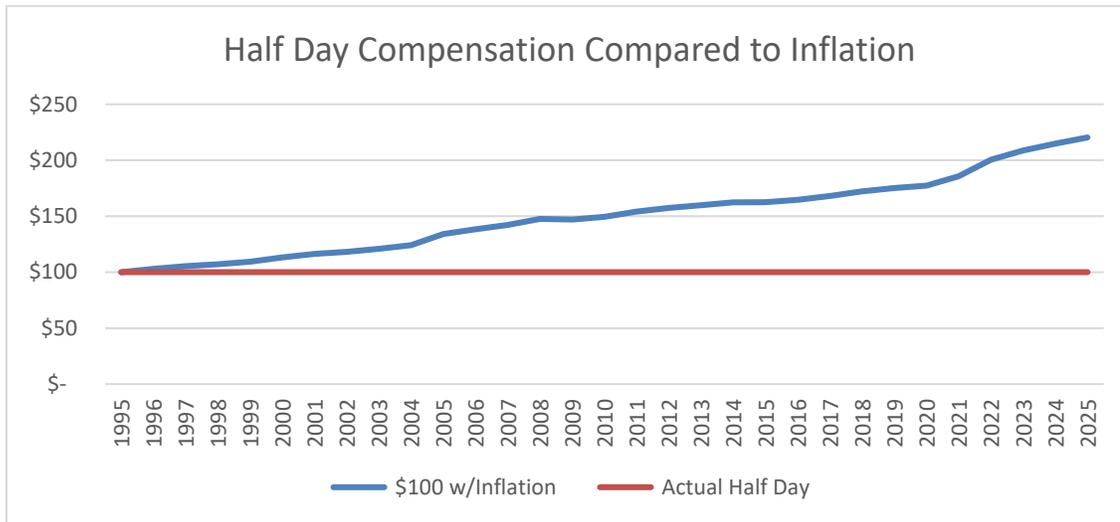
PEER COUNTIES

The Office of Hearings Administration surveyed peer counties. Snohomish County's stipend ranks almost last on a per hour basis. The proposed stipend (effectively \$31.25/hour) would still be less than the average effective hourly rate of the other four counties and would be equal to the median hourly rate.



INFLATION

Board member compensation should be increased to account for inflation. Assuming the current compensation was set in 1995, inflation alone would increase the 1995 compensation by 220% to \$220/half day and \$317/full day.²



Neither board members nor the Office propose an increase of that much; however, the difference between the inflation adjusted compensation rate and the current compensation demonstrates the need to increase the current compensation.

² [Historical Inflation Rates: 1914-2026 USInflationCalculator.com](https://www.usinflationcalculator.com) last viewed 2/19/2026.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Office has two programs for budget purposes: program 424 (Board of Equalization) and 860 (Boundary Review Board and Hearing Examiner).³ Increasing board member compensation to \$150/half day and \$200/full day will not increase the amount needed for board member compensation in the 2026 budget because the Office will be able to stay within our authorized total budget for the two programs without any additional allocation for 2026.

We project that program 424 may exceed its 2026 budget by \$4,400 due to the 2026 salary and benefits increase, but this shortfall will be resolved by transferring money from program 860 which we project to underrun. Furthermore, the board compensation adjustment would only require an increase of \$7,500 for the 2027 budget or \$15,000 for the 2027-2028 biennial budget, an increase of 0.8% over the existing 2025-2026 biennial budget.

CONCLUSION

The Office of Hearings Administration therefore asks the County Council to increase board member compensation from the level set in the 1990s to \$150/half day and \$200/full day, a level consistent with peer counties in 2026. The increase would be approved by the accompanying motion.

³ When the Office was created in 2014, it only had one program (860). State law required a separate budget for the Board of Equalization, however, and program 424 was created.

APPENDIX A

County	Amount	Hearing Session Length	Effective Hourly Rate	Jurisdiction Hourly Mean	Peer Hourly Mean	Peer Hourly Median
King	\$250.00	< 3 hours	\$83.33 ⁴	\$65.10 ⁵	\$36.64 ⁶	\$31.25 ⁷
	\$375.00	> 3 hours	\$46.88 ⁸			
Pierce	\$50.00	< 2 hours	\$25.00	\$21.25 ⁹	\$36.64	\$31.25
	\$100.00	2 - 5 hours	\$20.00			
	\$150.00	> 5 hours	\$18.75 ¹⁰			
Spokane	\$100.00	Meeting (4 hours assumed)	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$36.64	\$31.25
Thurston	\$150.00	Meeting (4 hours assumed)	\$37.50 ¹¹	\$37.50	\$36.64	\$31.25
Snohomish (current)	\$100.00	Half day	\$25.00	\$21.88 ¹²	\$36.64	\$31.25
	\$150.00	Full Day	\$18.75 ¹³			
Snohomish (proposed)	\$150.00	Half day	\$37.50 ¹⁴	\$31.25 ¹⁵	\$36.64	\$31.25
	\$200.00	Full Day	\$25.00			

⁴ \$250 ÷ 3 hours.

⁵ (\$83.33 + \$46.88) ÷ 2.

⁶ (\$65.10 (King) + \$21.25 (Pierce) + \$25.00 (Spokane) + \$37.50 (Thurston)) ÷ 4.

⁷ Based on King, Pierce, Spokane, and Thurston counties' average hourly rate.

⁸ \$375 ÷ 8 hours.

⁹ (\$25.00 + \$20.00 + \$18.75) ÷ 3.

¹⁰ \$150 ÷ 8 hours.

¹¹ \$150 ÷ 4 hours.

¹² (\$25.00 + \$18.75) ÷ 2.

¹³ \$150 ÷ 4 hours.

¹⁴ \$150 ÷ 8 hours.

¹⁵ (\$37.50 + \$25.00) ÷ 2.