

CAMPAIGN 2006

Montgomery County Council a full-time job?

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TODAY'S TOP STORY

County Council a full-time job?

Body considers whether to put the issue — which would include a pay increase — on the November ballot

By Dena Levitz
Examiner Staff Writer

Voters might get a chance to decide in November whether Montgomery County Council members should be considered full-time employees and, hence, paid higher salaries.

Council members at Tuesday's meeting debated a proposed charter amendment that formally calls their elected positions full-time jobs "for the purpose of determining salary,"

yet does not prohibit them from having another paid job — as is the case for the county executive.

The thrust for the designation is to increase council members' pay, which will hopefully lead to more and better qualified county council candidates, Council Vice President Marilyn Praisner said.

Currently, the average salary for county council members is \$79,721, a sum deemed too low by a special committee in November.

"It is all about money," Praisner noted. "This doesn't change the amount of time someone will choose to put in or not put in. ... It gives direction about how much county council members should be paid."

On one side of the fence was Council Member Michael Subin, who did not dispute that the elected position is a full-time commitment but said the charter was not a proper place to

COMPENSATION COMPARISON

Average salary for ...
Council members: \$79,721
Council president: \$87,694
County executive: \$150,747
Sheriff: \$112,069
State's attorney: \$142,110

Source: Report of the Committee to Study Compensation, December 2005

emphasize the time demands.

"It simply makes a statement that being on the council is something that takes a minimum of 40 hours [a week] to do," he said. "A founding document of government is not there to make that kind of statement about government, though."

George Leventhal, on the other hand, said he'd love for voters to be able to weigh in on whether council participation be as time-consuming as he has found it to be.

"I'd be grateful to have voters' views on this," Leventhal said.

One of the few council members with a second employment position, Tom Perez, said his worry would be that prospective council candidates would be dissuaded from running if being on council was classified as a full-time job.

"You're left having to define and explain yourself," he said, adding that he feels his outside employment has only complemented his public service.

The council will decide at its July 25 meeting whether to include the amendment on the November ballot.

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