

**Minutes of the
Santa Fe County
Independent Salary Commission
Special Meeting
March 4, 2026
Santa Fe, New Mexico**

This meeting of the Santa Fe County Independent Salary Commission was called to order at approximately 1:47 p.m. MST by Chair Clifford M. Rees on the above-cited date at the Santa Fe County Administration Building, Old Santa Fe Trail conference room, 240 Grant Avenue, Santa Fe, NM.

This meeting was conducted as hybrid with people attending in person and online.

A quorum was achieved with the following members present:

Members Present:

Anna Hamilton
Chris Graeser
Cliff Rees
Laura Liswood (virtually)
Gus Martinez

Staff Present:

Valerie Aghaei Park
Sara Smith
Walker Boyd

C. Approval of Agenda.

The proposed agenda was adopted by unanimous vote following a motion by Commissioner Hamilton, seconded by Commissioner Graeser.

D. Approval of November 21, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve minutes by Commissioner Hamilton, second by Commissioner Graeser. Unanimously adopted.

2. Discussion Items

A. Review and Discussion of the December 15, 2025, Santa Fe County Independent Salary Commission (ISC) Presentation to the Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners. (Chair Clifford Rees)

Chair Rees thanked Commissioner Hamilton and Vice Chair Graeser for being physically present at the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meeting on December 15, 2025. He

acknowledged that he made two mistakes – he called Commissioner Laura Liswood, “Lisa”, and apologized for doing so, and reported that the ISC members serve two years terms when they in fact serve four-year terms with a two-term maximum.

Chair Rees reported that the County Commissioners asked good questions and ultimately unanimously approved the ISC’s recommendations which went into effect on January 1, 2026. Chair Rees opened the floor for discussion on the presentation.

Commissioner Graeser said the Chair did a great job with the heavy lifting and that he appreciates Chair Rees’ time and approach to the issue.

Commissioner Hamilton agreed and said the County Commissioners’ concerns were well addressed due to the discussions the ISC had in its previous meetings. Chair Rees answered questions substantively and the articles from the press focused on one mistake that she believes was adequately reported to the BCC during the December, 15, 2025, presentation and the County Commissioners did not consider the San Juan County (WA) Commission salaries as they understood it to be an outlier when they made their decision.

Commissioner Graeser asked for clarification as to what the San Juan County Commissioners’ salary is.

Director Aghaei Park confirmed that the San Juan (WA) County Commissioners earn \$39,106 - \$55,348 depending on their term.

Chair Rees said there are four San Juan counties in the US – the Washington State’s San Juan County is the specific county that was referenced in the report – it is an affluent community in the San Juan islands.

Commissioner Hamilton asked if anyone has received feedback from elected officials since the increases were approved.

Commissioner Graeser commented that the individuals who will benefit from the increases do not hold office yet – they will be implemented upon election.

Chair Rees said that the number of individuals who decide to run in the upcoming election may be telling.

[Walker Boyd arrived at 1:58 p.m.]

Chair Rees researched how other Class A Counties implemented the original Constitutional Amendment that allowed time at the end of 2024 to assign raises that were implemented in 2025. That was done strictly between staff and county commissioners and many decided to establish an independent salary commission moving forward. He acknowledged that

the SFC ISC had only a couple weeks to convene and do their work. He thanked everyone for their hard work.

Chair Rees asked when the BCC would like to hear from the ISC next, suggesting late 2026.

Commissioner Graeser said Fall of 2027.

Commissioner Liswood requested that newspaper articles and letters to the editor related to the ISC's work should be shared with the full Commission.

Director Aghaei Park emailed the articles that she is aware of to the ISC members during this meeting.

3. Miscellaneous Action Items

A. Discussion and Potential Approval of a 2026 Independent Salary Commission Work Plan

Chair Rees said he is accustomed, through his work at the state Legislature, to having the first Interim Committee meeting after the NM Legislative Session focus on the creation of a work plan for the remainder of the calendar year. He opened the floor for discussion about what the 2026 ISC work plan should address.

There was discussion of including the five items listed in the ISC Report and Recommendation to the BCC dated December 1, 2025.

Further discussion regarding whether elected officials' salaries should receive a built-in cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). Attorney Boyd confirmed that this is not lawful – the NM Constitution prohibits increases or decreases to an elected official's salary during their term of office.

Commissioner Hamilton suggested that the salary increases and mechanism by which elected officials receive increases or COLAs should be added to the work plan.

[Commissioner Liswood left the meeting at 2:15 p.m.]

Chair Rees discussed whether COLAs should be tied to performance evaluations.

Commissioner Hamilton, if the next report to the Board is 2027, qualifications and accountability should be at the top of the work plan with COLAs.

Commissioner Martinez said it would be helpful to the public (and County staff) if each elected official's roles and responsibilities were clearly identified and posted. This would help create transparency and educate the public on each official's role.

Commissioner Hamilton agreed and said this will be a good starting point. Developing roles and responsibilities will help with accountability.

Director Aghaei Park suggested creation of a job description for each elected official which lays out the general responsibilities and body of work that each elected position oversees and is responsible for.

Chair Rees said that job descriptions for state elected officials may speak to age, residency and citizenship. He suggested that the ISC prioritize the offices that are up for re-election or termed out this year and next year as they are most immediate to the election cycle.

Commissioner Hamilton said that this development of job descriptions, roles and responsibilities is tremendously valuable to complete for all elected official positions. This document could include legislative-type qualifications (residency, age, etc.) and go further to identify the number of staff elected officials supervise and the size of their operation.

Commissioner Martinez agreed and said that this information would be useful to members of the public who are considering running for those offices.

Chair Rees asked Attorney Boyd if there are any state laws or prior County resolutions that address qualifications for County elected officials. He suggested it would be useful to have research on whether there are statutory, constitutional, county ordinance qualifications or length of residency laws that currently exist?

Director Aghaei Park asked how this would be enforced and asserted that the County administration is not authorized to enforce this.

Commissioner Martinez asked if the County advertises open elected official positions.

Commissioner Hamilton said that the County Clerk's Office announces upcoming elections and open seats for election purposes and this type of announcement is not within the County administration's purview.

Commissioner Hamilton said publishing information on what each elected office does and how they work is of benefit to the public and everyone. This general role and responsibility document could also include the general Secretary of State requirements for each elected official position.

Commissioner Greaser suggested revisiting both Director Aghaei Park's suggestions of whether we are trying to lead salaries or maintain them and then also revisit the data sources now that the ISC and County staff has more time.

Pertaining to the "revolving door" item on the future recommendations for consideration list, Director Aghaei Park said that with positions appointed by elected officials, as long as they meet the qualifications listed on the job description, the Human Resources Division cannot bar their employment.

Attorney Boyd said that the County's Code of Conduct would come into play here and safeguard against potential issues.

Commissioner Hamilton said that the revolving door item does not pertain to the ISC's work in recommending salaries.

Commissioner Graeser said there is no better qualified deputy than the previous elected who ran the office.

The Commission agreed that the five bullet points in the memo should remain in the 2026 work plan and 2 additional tasks discussed earlier: (1) identifying roles and responsibilities, and (2) mechanisms for ongoing increases will be the main priorities of the 2026 work plan.

B. Discussion and Potential Appointment of Two Additional Members Pursuant to County Resolution No. 2025-054. (Potential Action Item)

Commissioner Graeser suggested that if additional members are considered then a public search should commence.

Chair Rees asked how the five members came to be recommended. Director Aghaei Park said that current members are the only ones who applied and then we "hunted down" the rest.

Chair Rees asked if members want to do another public notice for additional members.

Commissioner Hamilton noted that she values a reasoned diversity of knowledge and opinions and going forward some of the items on the work plan, especially the qualifications and accountability and concept of review, add different areas of expertise that might be valuable. The statistical probability of getting that experience could be tricky. Commissioner Hamilton believes in inclusive, open government and having members for their experience as a citizen can be incredibly valuable. If we are required to get two more people, we should look to diversify expertise.

Chair Rees asked if there is an objection to issuing a public notice to solicit additional members.

Chair Rees moved to direct the Santa Fe County Human Resources Division to publish a recruitment announcement for the two (2) open positions on the Independent Salary Commission as soon as feasible.

Commissioner Hamilton seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

C. Schedule the Next Independent Salary Commission Special Meeting. (Action Item)

The Commission decided to hold quarterly meetings during 2026 and agreed upon the following schedule: March 3, June 3, September 2, December 2 at 1:30 p.m. in the Old Santa Fe Trail conference room, 240 Grant Avenue, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

4. Matters from the Public *(Subject to Five (5) Minutes or Other Time Limit Imposed by the Chair)*

No members of the public were present.

Chair Rees asked staff to allocate three (3) minutes for public comment on future agendas and the Commission agreed, citing that the Chair has discretion to waive or shorten the limit. Three minutes is the length of time currently allowed for public comment at BCC meetings.

5. Closing Business

Adjournment. (Action Item)

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Graeser. Chair Rees seconded. Motion carries 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 3:10 p.m.

Approved by:



Clifford M. Rees, Chair, Santa Fe County Independent Salary Commission

Date: June 3, 2021

Respectfully submitted by:

Sara Smith, CMO Operations Manager

