Minutes of the

Santa Fe County

Independent Salary Commission

Special Meeting

September 2, 2026

Santa Fe, New Mexico

This meeting of the Santa Fe County Independent Salary Commission was called to order at approximately 1:32 p.m. MDT 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 in a hybrid format, with attendees participating in person and virtually.

A quorum was achieved with the following members present:

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

Staff Present:
Valerie Aghaei Park
Peter Valencia (virtually)
Sara Smith
Walker Boyd, County Attorney (arrived at approximately 2:18 p.m.)

C. Approval of Agenda.

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

D. Approval of June 3, 2026, Commission Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve minutes by Commissioner Hamilton, seconded by Commissioner Liswood. Unanimously adopted.

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

No members of the public were present in person or virtually to address the Commission.

3. Miscellaneous Action Items

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

The Commission reviewed five topics remaining for potential inclusion in its revised Work Plan: (1) Future study to justify the recommended salaries for each Non-Commissioner; (2) Should the Commission Chair receive an extra compensation/stipend of $2,000 annually while serving as Chair?; (3) Consider the issue of the "revolving door" or Department Deputies supervised by the Elected Non-Commissioners trading positions with Elected Non-Commissioners upon expiration of their term in office; (4) Identifying roles and responsibilities for each Elected Official to be publicly posted by the County Human Resources Department with the goal of creating transparency and to educate the public on each Elected Officials' role; and (5) Mechanisms for ongoing salary increases (COLA's) in accordance with applicable New Mexico law (e.g. Article IV, Section 27 of the NM Constitution, which states that no extra compensation, either increase or decrease, shall be given to any public officer during his or her term in office).

The Commission first considered the proposed work plan item regarding additional compensation for the BCC Chair. Commissioner Graeser proposed removing the specified $2,000 amount so that the Commission could evaluate whether additional compensation is appropriate and, if so, in what amount. Commissioner Hamilton supported the change.

Commissioner Graeser moved to revise the item to remove the proposed $2,000 amount. Commissioner Hamilton seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

The Commission briefly discussed the BCC Chair's one-year term and the additional responsibilities associated with serving as Chair. Commissioner Hamilton explained that the Chair presides over meetings, participates in setting the agenda with the County Manager, and represents the Board in circumstances requiring an official spokesperson. Members discussed whether these additional responsibilities warrant additional compensation and agreed that the issue could be studied further as part of the Work Plan.

The Commission then discussed the remaining proposed work plan items and the scope of its authority under Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners Resolution No. 2025-054. Commissioner Hamilton expressed concern that the proposed item addressing the movement between deputy and elected positions was not a salary matter and therefore fell outside the Commission's charge. Members also discussed the at-will nature of deputy appointments and the distinction between compensation for deputies, which is administered through the County's employee salary structure, and compensation for elected officials, which is evaluated by the Commission and ultimately approved by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC).

County Attorney Walker Boyd joined the meeting at approximately 2:18 p.m.

Staff and County Attorney Boyd concurred that the proposed item was outside the Commission's assigned scope.

Commissioner Liswood moved to remove the proposed work plan item addressing the movement between deputy and elected positions. Commissioner Hamilton seconded.

Motion passed by a roll call vote:
Commissioner Graeser: Yea
Commissioner Hamilton: Yea
Commissioner Liswood: Yea
Commissioner Martinez: Yea
Chair Rees: Yea

The Commission next considered the proposed items addressing future salary studies and identification of the roles and responsibilities of elected officials. Members agreed that information regarding each elected office's duties, responsibilities, and managerial scope is relevant and useful when evaluating appropriate compensation. Members also agreed that development of that information should be undertaken by County staff rather than by the Independent Salary Commission itself.

The Commission discussed information previously developed for its December 2025 salary recommendations, including comparative compensation information and information regarding staffing and managerial responsibilities within elected offices. Members agreed that additional information regarding the roles and responsibilities of elected officials would further support future salary evaluations and could also improve public understanding of the offices.

Commissioner Liswood moved to remove the separate work plan item concerning identification and public posting of elected officials' roles and responsibilities and to revise the first work plan item to read: "Future study to justify recommended salaries for County elected officials, including, among other things, requesting the County Human Resources Division to identify roles and responsibilities for each elected official and managerial scope, including comparative analysis of Class A statewide counties and other comparable relevant information."

Chair Rees seconded.

Motion passed by a roll call vote:
Commissioner Graeser: Yea
Commissioner Hamilton: Yea
Commissioner Liswood: Yea
Commissioner Martinez: Yea
Chair Rees: Yea

The Commission then discussed the proposed work plan item regarding ongoing salary increases. Members reviewed the County's existing practice of periodically conducting compensation market studies and considering cost-of-living adjustments for employees. The Commission discussed the need to identify a lawful approach for keeping elected officials' compensation current while complying with New Mexico constitutional restrictions prohibiting increases or decreases in compensation during a term of office.

Members agreed that the Work Plan should focus on identifying mechanisms for ongoing salary increases that comply with applicable New Mexico law rather than suggesting that elected officials receive automatic cost-of-living adjustments during a term.

Commissioner Graeser moved to revise the item to read: "Recommendation for mechanisms for ongoing salary increases in accordance with applicable New Mexico law."

Chair Rees seconded.

Motion passed by a roll call vote:
Commissioner Graeser: Yea
Commissioner Hamilton: Yea
Commissioner Liswood: Yea
Commissioner Martinez: Yea
Chair Rees: Yea

Following these amendments, the revised Work Plan consisted of three primary areas for future consideration:

1. Future study to justify recommended salaries for County elected officials, including, among other things, requesting the County Human Resources Division to identify roles and responsibilities for each elected official and managerial scope, including comparative analysis of Class A statewide counties and other comparable relevant information.

2. Consideration of whether the BCC Chair should receive additional compensation while serving as Chair and, if so, in what amount; and
3. Recommendations for mechanisms for ongoing salary increases consistent with applicable New Mexico law.

B. Discussion and Potential Approval to Present to the Board of County Commissioners at a December, 2026 Regular Meeting Regarding the Independent Salary Commission's 2026 Accomplishments and Issues to be Addressed During Calendar Year 2027. (Potential Action Item)

The Commission discussed presenting its revised Work Plan and future priorities to the Board of County Commissioners. Members initially considered presenting the Commission's work at the December 15, 2026, BCC meeting.

Commissioner Liswood raised the broader issue of qualifications for elected offices, noting information encountered during the Commission's work regarding the absence of certain minimum qualifications for County elected offices. Members discussed whether the Commission should bring such issues to the Board's attention even though they fall outside the Commission's assigned responsibility to evaluate and recommend salaries.

Chair Rees referenced Resolution No. 2025-054 and noted that the Commission's formal authority is focused on evaluating and recommending compensation. Members discussed the possibility of identifying matters encountered through the Commission's work to the Board without incorporating them into the Commission's formal recommendations. No action was taken on this issue.

The Commission then discussed the timing of presenting the revised Work Plan to the BCC. Commissioner Hamilton suggested presenting the Work Plan sooner rather than waiting until December 2026 so that, following Board approval, the Commission could begin substantive work on its priorities at the December 2, 2026, meeting. Staff reviewed the remaining BCC meeting schedule and identified October 13, 2026, as an appropriate meeting for the presentation.

Commissioner Hamilton moved to present the revised Independent Salary Commission Work Plan to the Board of County Commissioners for approval at its October 13, 2026, regular meeting. Chair Rees seconded.

Motion passed by a roll call vote:

Commissioner Graeser: Yea
Commissioner Hamilton: Yea

Commissioner Liswood: Yea
Commissioner Martinez: Yea
Chair Rees: Yea

Staff was directed to initiate the agenda-item process for presentation of the revised Work Plan to the Board on October 13, 2026.

C. Discussion and Scheduling of the Next Independent Salary Commission Special Meeting. (Action Item)

The Commission confirmed its next special meeting for Wednesday, December 2, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. No objection was raised.

4. Closing Business

A. Adjournment. (Action Item)

Commissioner Graeser moved to adjourn. Chair Rees seconded. With no objection, the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:29 p.m.

Approved by:

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

Date: ____________________

Respectfully submitted by:
Sara Smith, CMO Executive Manager