

## Holyoke mayor, councilor agree on nixing proposed pay raises — but spar anyway

- Sep. 15, 2025, Aprell May Munford
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HOLYOKE — Two Holyoke leaders are sparring publicly over a proposal to raise salaries for elected officials, namely a 40% bump for the mayor and 30% for city councilors, even though they both agree that now isn't the time for the pay hikes.

The ordinance committee's proposal will be reviewed by the full City Council on Wednesday. The goal is to offer better pay, so the city can attract and keep good public servants.

Not everyone agrees with the idea. City Councilor Kevin Jourdain said the raises are "inappropriate," especially while many residents are struggling financially.

On social media, Mayor Joshua Garcia pushed back against the pay boost and against Jourdain, saying he didn't ask for a raise — the City Council did — and he plans to veto the order if it reaches his desk. Garcia believes now isn't the right time.

Still, Garcia said Holyoke's elected officials are underpaid, compared to nearby cities and towns. A review of the numbers by The Republican showed some higher and others lower, in cities of comparable size.

The city needs strong leadership to modernize how it runs and to save taxpayer money, Garcia said in his online statement. He described Jourdain as "long-winded" and a user of "smoke and mirrors" with no real solutions, he said.

Councilor Israel Rivera, who chairs the ordinance committee, said the proposal is part of a larger conversation about fair pay and leadership. According to online reports,

the conversation started [more than a decade](#) ago.

## Councilor: 'No way'

In an email to The Republican, Jourdain raised questions about the timing of the pay raise proposal.

It came after the deadline to sign up to run for office, and many seats now have no challengers. He said people might have decided to run if they knew about the possible salary increase.

Some city leaders believe now is a good time to give the mayor and city council a "big" raise, he said. "I disagree — this is simply wrong."

Jourdain said he respects the people who would get the raises and knows they work hard. But he thinks giving them a big pay bump now is not smart for the city.

"The same individuals keep raising taxes a lot, because they claim the budget is so tight. ... (They) should be working hard to help our residents thrive, not to take care of themselves," Jourdain said in a retort on Garcia's Facebook post.

## Veto planned

Garcia said he is not asking for a 30% raise.

"To set the record straight ... I never asked for this, the City Council did," Garcia [said in the social media post](#).

The council previously had asked the city Personnel Office to study pay for elected officials and suggest new salaries. Garcia said staff followed those instructions, and he made it clear that he didn't want to be involved in the study.

"Quite honestly, if it was voted on and on my desk for a signature to approve, I would VETO it," Garcia said in the post. "Now is not the time for elected officials to get raises."

Jourdain said now, with no challengers for several seats, the raises would mostly benefit current officeholders, he said.

“Pay raises for elected officials is supposed to be about the position and not benefitting certain individuals,” Jourdain said in his reply to Garcia.

Garcia said that no matter how he feels about the raises, the data shows Holyoke officials are some of the lowest paid in the area and have a strong need for better pay.

He shared a presentation from the Personnel Office with The Republican that outlines the proposed salary changes for elected officials.

## **How Holyoke salaries compare**

The presentation accompanying the raise proposal compares Holyoke’s current and proposed salaries for elected officials with those in nearby cities and towns.

Right now, Holyoke’s mayor earns \$100,000 to serve about 38,000 residents — similar to Westfield’s mayor, who earns the same and serves about 40,000 people.

The proposed raise would increase Holyoke’s mayoral salary to \$130,000, slightly more than Chicopee’s mayor, who earns \$122,000 and serves about 55,000 residents.

The presentation notes that Chicopee’s mayor earned \$122,714 in fiscal 2023, but the salary dropped slightly to \$122,000 in 2024. West Springfield’s mayor also earns \$130,000, serving a smaller population of about 28,600.

Garcia said the City Council already approved a raise for the city clerk. Holyoke’s clerk currently earns \$85,000, and the new salary will be \$90,000. That’s more than West Springfield’s clerk, who earns \$83,751, but less than Chicopee’s (\$87,935) and Westfield’s (\$95,850).

Holyoke city councilors earn \$10,000. The proposed raise would increase that to

\$14,000 — matching Westfield, and topping Chicopee and West Springfield, which pay \$10,000.

The council president’s salary would rise from \$11,000 to \$15,000, equal to Chicopee, higher than West Springfield’s \$12,500 and just above Westfield’s \$14,500.

In Chicopee, councilors earned \$12,000 in 2023 and \$14,000 in 2024. The council president earned \$13,000 both years.

Springfield, with 154,000 residents, pays its mayor \$175,000. Councilors earn \$28,000, and the president earns \$28,500.

Jourdain plans to vote against the pay raise proposal and will ask other councilors to do the same. He noted that several councilors have publicly supported the raises in recent meetings and said they “should not object” to taking a vote.

Calling himself Holyoke’s “fiscal watchdog,” Jourdain said he’s doing what voters expect of him, even if it isn’t easy.

“You only take flack when you’re flying over the target,” he said.

For his part, Garcia said his goals as mayor are “vastly different” from what he called Jourdain’s “selfish objectives.” His focus, he said, is on strengthening internal controls and improving how the city manages its resources to reduce risk and protect taxpayer dollars.

Garcia accused Jourdain of also blocking progress on the Municipal Finance Modernization Act, a proposal currently before the City Council. He said the act would improve oversight, streamline budgeting and support long-term financial health.

At the heart of the plan is creating a chief administrative and financial officer position — a role the state has recommended for nearly 20 years, the same amount of time

Jourdain has served on the council, Garcia noted.

Garcia said the act is designed to make Holyoke's financial management more professional and to fix inefficiencies that have hurt the city for too long.

"Yet here we are in 2025, waiting and dealing with injected, unnecessary revisions, objections, and procedural roadblocks led by this same councilor whether in budget votes, contract negotiations, or ordinance reviews that prioritize personal or partisan posturing over the practical needs of our community, even if it means confusing the public," Garcia said in his statement.

### **Rivera: It's about fairness**

At-Large Councilor and ordinance committee Chair Israel Rivera said the timing of the pay raises depends entirely on when the City Council finishes negotiations.

Rivera said the process started with an [order filed in March 2021](#), after years of discussing the salaries of workers in City Hall, both elected and hired. The proposal was based on a study by HRS Consulting, dating back to 2015, when Alex Morse was mayor.

The latest ordinance has been delayed because some councilors are blocking it and questioning research, which slows down the process, Rivera said.

"Normally, it shouldn't take this long, but it's been harder to get it on the agenda," Rivera said.

As committee chair, Rivera said his goal is to move things forward.

"If people want it, they can vote for it. If not, they don't have to," he said.

Rivera said he doesn't fully agree with the proposed numbers for raises but believes it's important to have a conversation about

whether now is the right time — and if not, when would be and how does it look.

He also questioned whether \$100,000 is enough to attract strong candidates to lead a city like Holyoke.

The ordinance needs nine of 13 councilors' votes to pass.

While the proposed raises aren't part of the Municipal Finance Modernization Act, Rivera said the timing overlaps, making the issues feel connected.

Rivera accused Jourdain of stirring opposition for political reasons against progressive officials.

He said Jourdain's claim that the ordinance is being pushed because the mayor is running unopposed is misleading.

"It would still be happening either way," Rivera said.

Rivera also accused Jourdain of trying to rally certain voters to block changes, similar to [his recent ICE ordinance push](#).

He noted that Holyoke's elected officials haven't received a raise in nearly 20 years.

"If you look at neighboring communities, they've all gotten raises," Rivera said. "This is just even bringing (pay schedules) up to their level."

Rivera said the focus should be on having a real conversation — not throwing around accusations.

"That's not democracy," he said.