

# Park board raises wages for lowest-paid employees

By JOHN WAYNE FERGUSON The Daily News | Posted: Wednesday, June 15, 2016 10:45 pm

The Galveston Park Board of Trustees voted Tuesday to begin paying the organization's lowest-paid hourly employees more.

In a 5-2 vote, the park board adjusted its salary schedule for its two lowest category employees, called N4 and N5 employees in the park board's documents. The categories include beach cleaning operators, maintenance workers, visitor center supervisors, gate attendants at Seawolf Park and call-center operators.

Under the new pay ranges, the employees who were in the lowest pay grade will now make at least \$10.55 per hour, a 17.55 percent increase from the previous \$9 minimum wage.

The next-highest pay grade will make at least \$11.60 an hour, a 13.2 percent increase.

The change means raises for eight current employees and will also apply to future hires in those positions, officials said.

There was no change to the amount the board pays seasonal employees such as summer lifeguards, who earn between \$8.25 and \$11.25 per hour.

Park Board Executive Director Kelly de Schaun said the raise would cost the board an extra \$17,440 in its annual budget.

"We need to start putting the emphasis on these employees that they deserve," Trustee Craig Brown said. Brown is also a city councilman.

At the same meeting, the board voted to increase the pay range for five salaried employees, because of new federal laws requiring employers to pay overtime to people who earn less than \$47,476 a year. The raises for those employees cost another \$14,618.

The decision was lauded by local activists — organized together as the Galveston Living Wage Group — who have lobbied the park board and other public entities to increase how much they pay their lowest-earning workers.

"There's a basic wage that people need to survive on and the federal minimum wage is just not enough," said Steve McIntyre, of Gulf Coast Interfaith.

The park board was paying its employees more than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25. The wage group says the living wage in Galveston is almost \$15 an hour. Living wage is the amount a person needs to earn to meet basic needs.

Despite the park board's raises, low-level employees at the park board are still paid less than other public agencies. The city of Galveston's lowest paid full-time employees start at \$10.71 per hour, according to city spokeswoman Kala McCain

Trustees Joyce Calver-McLean, Miguel Aleman, Craig Brown, Clyde Steddum and Kerry Tillmon voted for the raises. Trustees John Zendt and Thayer Evans voted against them.

Zendt, the chairman of the park board's finance committee and president and CEO of Moody Gardens, said he was against the pay raises because the board had set a goal of passing a balanced budget this year.

"To say you're going to give increases and I'm trying to balance the budget, the timing's not right on it," Zendt said Wednesday. "They deserve more pay, but I'm trying to get a balanced budget."

Trustee Buzz Elton was absent and the board has one vacant seat because of the resignation of former chairman Steve Kalbaugh.