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# Newsday

Newsday (New York)

February 2, 2018 Friday  
NASSAU EDITION

## **North Hempstead town attorneys receive thousands in raises; The salary increases are the result of promotions following the resignation of the chief deputy in the office, according to the town's top attorney.**

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**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 24

**LENGTH:** 434 words

Five employees in the North Hempstead Town attorney's office have received raises in recent weeks that range from \$4,000 to more than \$19,000, raising concerns for one council member about the budget implications of the pay increases.

The town's top attorney, Elizabeth Botwin, said Tuesday that the most recent set of raises stems from a series of promotions, which began after former Chief Deputy Town Attorney Mitch Pitnick left last month to join the Town of Hempstead as counsel to Supervisor Laura Gillen.

"When one person leaves, if you can promote from within, it's always a good thing," Botwin said, referring to Pitnick's departure. "We have a lot of really good people."

On Tuesday, town council members approved raises for three employees. Senior Deputy Town Attorney Michael Kelly was promoted to chief deputy town attorney and given an extra \$10,000, boosting his annual pay to \$119,012. Kelly will fill Pitnick's vacated spot.

Deputy Town Attorney Lorienton Palmer replaces Kelly as senior deputy town attorney and earns an extra \$8,000, increasing his annual pay to \$118,260. Donelle Benjamin, a secretary for the attorney's office, received a \$4,000 raise, boosting her annual salary to \$56,910.

In December, Deputy Town Attorney Amanda Abata received a \$6,087 raise after the town added environmental compliance officer to her job. She now is paid \$80,000 annually. Another deputy town attorney, Moira LaBarbara, is paid \$69,458 annually after she got a \$19,845 raise and the added duties of procurement director.

Each of the five employees were also given a 1.75 percent increase in January as part of non-unionized employee pay hikes. Palmer, Kelly and Abata were also given raises in January 2016. Kelly and Palmer received an extra \$10,000 a year while Abata's salary rose \$15,000 a year.

Councilwoman Dina De Giorgio voted against the attorney staff raises that were granted Tuesday. De Giorgio said she opposed the increases because she was told during budget talks that no individual employee would get salary hikes for 2018-19 outside of union and nonunion negotiated increases.

Town officials harped on keeping a tight budget but have added raises that increase spending, De Giorgio said.

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"Those types of raises have budget implications going forward," she said. "It's not just \$5,000 once, it's \$5,000 added to your salary, which means more contributions to the pension fund and it means your salary is even more next year."

De Giorgio said her concern is with the town signaling one priority and then doing something different.

"We're either tightening our belts or we're not," she said.

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper

**SUBJECT:** WAGES & SALARIES (91%); RESIGNATIONS (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); REGIONAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (89%); CITY GOVERNMENT (89%); LABOR UNIONS (78%); EMPLOYEE PROMOTIONS (78%); CITIES (78%); TALKS & MEETINGS (77%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (50%)

**LOAD-DATE:** February 2, 2018

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