

MINUTES
UMATILLA COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Meeting of November 28, 2018
5:30 p.m., Dennis Doherty Conference Room, Stafford Hansell Government Center
Hermiston, Oregon

Committee Members Present: Chair Michele Grable; Vice-Chair Don Miller; Sally Anderson Hansell (arrived 5:42); Jerry Baker; Genna Banica; Dan Dorran (via telephone); Mark Gomolski

Absent: Jennifer McClure Spurgeon

County Counsel: Doug Olsen

Guests Present: Mayor David Drotzmann; Byron Smith; Commissioner William J. Elfering

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting began at 5:30 p.m.

1. Call to Order - The chair called the meeting to order at 5:30, and reminded everyone that this is a public meeting.
2. Minutes of Previous Minutes - The minutes had been emailed to the committee members. Mr. Miller moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Gomolski, Carried 6-0.
3. Additions to Agenda - None
4. Public Input. There was not any public comment.
5. Business Items:
 - A. Discussion with David Drotzmann. David Drotzmann is the Mayor of the City of Hermiston. He has had a great relationship with the Commissioners, particularly over the last several years, and they regularly attend meetings.

Mayor Drotzmann historically is in support of a change in structure. He does not believe that the current structure is the best for the long term or for the benefit of the region. He likes the idea of an executive director or administrator, with board oversight, similar to a city or school. A person should have experience in civic management. He encourages the committee to look at that format closer. It is hard to get elected officials that have the experience to run a large organization. It concerns him that people are elected that do not have any experience. Currently the county does have in Commissioner Murdock the experience and expertise of running a large organization, but that will not always be the case.

When asked about the cost for an administrator, it will impact the compensation and maybe the number of commissioners. Can three really representative the county fairly? A larger number

might be better. Compensation restructuring would be necessary if the commissioners are not doing administrative work. The City does not pay its council members that much.

What is the reason for better communication between the two entities? There was a binding relationship in EOTEC that provided the opportunity to work together and know one another. It has been better now for the last six years and there is a good collaborative relationship that is mutual.

He has contact with all three commissioners, and talks with different commissioners depending on the subject. One commissioner currently is carrying the bulk of the work. There is a concern that the burden is on one person, who is carrying more of the work load. There is also the concern that can get around one individual, and just need two to support. An administrator could make a final decision, and could not be avoided. There is also the issue that a commissioner may not be able to represent all areas of the county at all times, and currently some areas of the county are not represented. It may need more commissioners to represent smaller cities or rural areas, and this may be better accomplished if elected by zone.

Should the commissioners have minimum qualifications? The concern is the number of available candidates with the qualifications. If have administrator, though, the oversight role would not require the level of experience or education at the commissioner level. There should be available candidates for an administrator position with the needed qualifications. The City recruited nationally and the four finalists were from out of state. Mr. Smith added there are professional managers that specialize in county management. Key will be that pay is commensurate with the responsibilities. You could recruit someone to come to the county.

An administrator structure would result in a significant reduction in the commissioner compensation package. It may not necessary encourage individuals to serve. Mr. Smith added that there may be advantages if go to part time position. Someone with another job brings a different perspective, which has value. The Mayor continued that having members in the community brings a broader perspective and opportunity to obtain input from more citizens and from all areas of the county. There are challenges, though, getting people to volunteer in governmental organizations.

- B. Discussion with Byron Smith. Byron Smith is the manager for the City of Hermiston, and has been for four years. He will be giving a very biased opinion. He has been a professional manager for ten years. His education is in that area and he has been a professional manager in four different states. It is a good way to go. Most higher rated organizations for financing have a professional manager, so there are tangible results having a manager with expertise.

If he works with the County, his contact will differ depending on this situation. He will make it work, but if had one person to go to, it would be better. The Charter has already removed most of the elected officials, which is good. Multiple elected officials create a lot of challenges, and less desirable for a professional manager. Every time an elected official changes, it takes time to bring the person up to speed and have the knowledge and involvement necessary to function. It slows down the process.

Current commissioners work well. EOTEC was a foundation to establishing a good relationship, and to have further joint projects. He goes to whichever commissioner he thinks will get something done. It depends on the situation. He does whatever is necessary to get something accomplished. There could be some improvements however. More commissioners would be helpful, particularly to avoid open meeting laws violations. He would recommend five part-time members, if more than

that is a challenge and breaking the county into too small of represented areas. He is also supportive of election by districts or wards. If have a professional manager, full time commissioners would not be needed. Compensation could be reduced as well, though, but still be retained at \$30,000 for example.

Things are working well with the county. There may be some problems, but there will always be. It could be improved by a manager, though, by having one connection and insuring that communicated. The first manager will have some challenges transitioning from when people are used to going to commissioner and doing business in a new way. Morrow County changed its structure and hired a professional manager in the recent years. After that person left after a year, a local individual was employed that has more of a business background. It appears to be working well.

Should recommendation for a county manager be placed in the charter? The Mayor believed it should be in the charter. From a fiscal standpoint, it will be easier to gain support from citizens if change structure as well. Without changing the structure of the board, will not have the means to hire a manager. Mr. Smith was in agreement, that without a board change, a professional manager would not be able to take charge and be effective. If the county wants a real professional manager, then have to change the structure.

Is it necessary to have the chair directly elected by the citizens, or appointed by the board members? Mr. Smith explained that historically, cities operated fine without a mayor, and the mayor role has been added more recently. The chair or the mayor usually leads meetings or makes public appearance. Mayor Drotzmann has functioned in both capacities. He prefers that the five representatives elect a chair. The chair leads the meetings, but also has more responsibilities, which not all people can fulfill. Appointment is better.

Mr. Smith was asked if there are any publications or research conducted on what is the best structure. He said there is some research and data regarding size and professional managers. He will provide information on the studies. Also, can one manager replace three full time commissioners for administration? The person will need to rely on and hold department heads accountable and make a leadership team. You may need an assistant county manager if get to a certain size.

- C. Discussion with Commissioner William Elfering. Commissioner Elfering was first elected a Umatilla County Commissioner in 2012, and his current term will expire in 2020. There have been many good changes made in the last 5 years. The county is leaner, communication is better, resources are spent better, and the county has established professional training for its managers, and the morale at the county is higher. When the county had an executive assistant, it functioned like a county manager. It did create obstacles to those wanting to meet with a commissioner.

Commissioner Elfering handed out two documents - charter change recommendations, and the 2018 Commissioner Liaison Assignments. He has two recommendations. First is that the election of the commissioner should follow the statute, rather than require the official to be elected at the general election. It is a waste of resources and time. Second is that the county should have a weak county manager, with responsibility over the budget, legal, human resources, and coordinate the Board, and manage the day to day operations. The Commissioners would still maintain responsibility over departments, so that there is a direct link to a commissioner.

There is a need for three full time commissioners. Currently they are stretched thin, in attending meetings and dealing with not just the county, but also 11 cities, state and federal. The commissioners address policy both at the federal and state levels, and interact with other county commissioners to help establish policy and promote at the legislature. It cannot really be compared to a city council role. There is a lot of interaction with outside organizations, to make sure the county has a role in local and regional matters. A county manager could not accomplish all that a commissioner does.

Each county is different and has a different structure. He likes that the chair is rotated, so that each commissioner has the opportunity to lead. Power should not be vested in just one person. The current Board of Commissioners operates well, and can work together as a singular mind.

You cannot set qualifications for a commissioner, and you just have to trust the voters. Candidates have to work hard to educate the voter, through all of the means available. Meetings are open to the public, though few attend. A commissioner, though, is always reachable by phone.

A commissioner must maintain communication with department heads and employees. There must be a free flow of information, so that there can be a dialogue. Problems arise if there is a gate keeper. If the county does have a manager, it should be established through a change in the charter, and have the approval of the voters.

The position should be kept at full time. There is plenty of work to do. If have five part time commissions, the work may not get done. The role of a commissioner includes department work, with communication with the department head. It also includes advocacy, for example, water and economic matters; it is important to represent the county interests.

Turnover in commissioners does impact continuity. Department heads, though, can help fill gap, and if have a weak manager, can as also maintain momentum. There really is not a good way to memorialize and keep continuity. Commissioners have the opportunity to observe and attend meetings prior to assuming office. There is also the orientation through the AOC County College, which is a year-long course. There is a big learning curve for a commissioner. The process of learning never ends.

- D. 2019 Schedule. The committee would like to meet in longer sessions, with possible day meetings, to review the data gathered and to begin process of drafting recommendations.
- E. Next Meeting. The next meeting will be in Pendleton, December 18, 2018, at 5:30 p.m. The Committee would like to talk with Linn County Administrative Officer Ralph Wyatt, and continue the discussion with current commissioners.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas R. Olsen

Umatilla County Counsel