

**MINUTES**  
**UMATILLA COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**  
Meeting of July 12, 2018  
5:30 p.m., Room 114, Umatilla County Courthouse  
Pendleton, Oregon

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- Committee Members Present:** Chair Michele Grable; Vice-Chair Don Miller; Sally Anderson Hansell; Jerry Baker (left at 6:35); Dan Dorran; Mark Gomolski
- Absent:** Genna Banica; Darla Huzel; Jennifer McClure Spurgeon
- County Counsel:** Doug Olsen
- Guests Present:** Clinton Reeder; Glenn Youngman; Suni Danforth; Charles E. Danforth

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**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. Dorran moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Baker. Mr. Dorran noted there was a comment made by Mr. Barrow regarding voter turnout that should be included as part of the conversation with Mr. Danforth. The following should be added to the minutes: “Mr. Danforth felt that the low voter turnout indicated voter satisfaction and that it is working. Mr. Barrow, disagreed; based on his long term employment in government, he felt that the low voter turnout was a result of cynicism, not satisfaction.” Mr. Dorran moved to amend the minutes; seconded by Mr. Miller. The amendment carried 6-0. The minutes as amended were approved 6-0.
  
3. Additions to Agenda - None
  
4. Business Items:
  - A. Discussion with Clinton Reeder. Mr. Reeder was present to follow up and discuss his letter of March 5, 2018 to the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, regarding the Umatilla County Charter Review. Mr. Reeder is a farmer. The family farm of 140 years has been past to the next generation. He was a professor for 13 years, and has obtained a doctorate in economic and business. He has participated in the formation of the Smoke Management program, and also wind energy development regulation, and planning commission. He has also participated in more than one charter review.

Before the adoption of the charter, each elected official was a department head. It was an interesting structure. Each elected official has own support group in county. This lead to dramatic politics and divisions, especially when budget was tight. Each official sought to have its support group lobby for funding. When the idea of consolidation of positions and elimination of elected

positions was raised, it meet with strong resistance, especially the sheriff. Ultimately it was decided to only have the commissioners and the sheriff elected at the county level. The public did not want to give up the election of the sheriff.

With the change in the county structure, the need for turf protection was eliminated. There was direct supervision by the Board of Commissioners and budget process was very different. It smoothed out the money side of the county government, and easier to shift funds among departments and keep up on the budget. It functioned relatively well.

When went to executive assistant [in 2003], the plan was to improve the communication process between the commissioner and the department heads. It started out well, but when the assistant began to prioritize matters, some concerns began with the department heads if the flow of information was still getting to the commissioners. Even though that position ended, it does provide some guidance on how a county manager might work. That position will change communication dynamic and power structure. Transition from each commissioner actively involved as liaison to department, to more of a policy director, similar to a business board of directors. It is possible to accomplish, but are changing the power structure in the county. You will need to have the right job descriptions and policies set. It will be a big job to make that transition.

Mr. Baker asked if the system is broken, and if needing to be fixed. If change one commissioner, will not make much of a change to the dynamic. If more than one, might be greater impact. Not aware of any great dilemma facing the county at the present time. There is some current discussion regarding the strategic investment program and its impact.

Mr. Dorran asked how prioritize commissioner duties. Commissioners are a super board - both manager and policy maker. They can alter depending on how often meet with department heads. If more actively involved, will be more dynamic function.

Mr. Miller pointed out that in his paper, Mr. Reeder seemed to have the presumption that if had county manager, then a commissioner would not need to be full time. Mr. Reeder said that in all discussions on this subject, the goal seemed to save money and improve efficiency. It will not save money, since adding a fourth person, unless find another source of money.

If advocacy is participating in state and federal level, Mr. Miller wanted to know if that is a functional duty of commissioner. Mr. Reeder felt that you may only have access to some grants if present and participating. There is a significant benefit being involved outside if directly related to county. If not related to county, it is more of a personal benefit to the individual, rather than the county. Is the cost of participation bring any money back to the county. If the national role will generate enough benefit to pay for the additional cost. There might be more of a personal enhancement to the individual, rather than any institutional benefit.

Mr. Dorran raised the comparison with a corporate board. Would it be better if had a fourth board member acting as the chair, with a manager being the business leader. If that type of structure would work? Mr. Reeder emphasized that you cannot ignore that the county is political. It is also a business. You cannot ignore either aspect. It is also an economic entity, and has to pay or cover costs from taxes and grant money. Advocacy is needed to gain economic growth in county. No matter how structure, you will have to manage the people. How do you think the communication system will be most productive, if do or do not make a change? Suggest make a model and as a

group make a decision. Ask those currently involved how would change the system. If want to concentrate power, and have more of a continuity. If have a county manager, you concentrate power and trust to communicate with others. If too removed, the commissioner may not know what is going on. Have to hire the right individual to be manager.

Mr. Dorran asked if have a manager and a chair or mayor, will this have multiple layer of checks and balances. In some organizations, the finance manager is a crucial person. If there is a money tracker and have right the format, the organization will not have many problems with money. The check is in the system, and trustworthy. If have a policy manual, and county level rules and guidelines incorporating state law, and adherence to them, then this is another safeguard.

Ms. Grable pointed out that if a commissioner manager versus professional manger, there are two different objectives. If have professional manager, you have experience, education and continuity, but have concentration of power. A bad manger can create a disaster. You do not have accountability to citizens. There are no qualifications for commissioner. Do we have to pick one or the other? How do you get accountability and continuity and professional management, melded into one functioning system of government? There are no standards for commissioner. Mr. Reeder said a county association could establish standard for a commissioner. Schools do have criteria for school board members. The county is big business, and a commissioner should have some experience with handling money. One thought is to look at what kind of people has been most productive for county in the last 50 years while acting as a commissioner. There should be public service experience, personable to community, manage people, problem solving, and encourage to work cooperatively. The election process is to get an idea on what type of person. But you have to be very careful in establishing standards so as to avoid being too limiting. Production as commissioner is the goal, and to do job under well-defined role. Ms. Grable noted, though, you do not have continuity.

Mr. Reeder stated that the committee will need to determine what problem if any, exists with the current structure and how to solve it. Is continuity the problem? Mr. Miller responded that the issue is determining what is the job of a commissioner. What is commissioner and what role should play is the critical factor to address. His impression at this point is that tasks are assigned, but nothing defines the role or expectations to guide commissioner. The commissioner has to set the role. In observing commissioners, Mr. Reeder believes that stability comes with continuity. Continuity can come with some not being productive. There is no way to assess performance, no formal evaluation. We need to get in one in place. Not a charter review committee, but a commissioner review committee. At least once or twice a year, those not functioning, can be reviewed. You need to create a job description to do so.

Ms. Grable asked if we should define duties in the charter. Mr. Reeder responded that it is possible for you to do that.

Mr. Dorran asked what if the commissioner was an advocate and policy maker, and a chair was the manager, would that help in creating the job description. Mr. Reeder did not believe so, since the commissioner is ultimately responsible for management. It can be delegated, but still ultimately responsible. If hire a manager, the department head would report to the manager and the manger would be responsible for each department. The commissioner would still have to be involved with the manager to know what is going on and to make sure implementation of the policy is being done.

Ms. Grable wants to know commissioners how function now and supervise department head? Primarily decide which department and bring information back to other commissioners. No guidelines are in place. Each commissioner decides how to do it. There are not any set expectations. The commissioners stay in touch with the department head and are informed about department. Commissioners share information on an as needed basis.

Ms. Anderson-Hansell asked for more detailed approach, for a specific department, such as the planning department. Why is the commissioner interacting with the department head on a regular basis? It is to discuss financial and personnel issues. What is not working and why. Fix those problems the department head cannot solve alone, such as involving another department or outside agency. There may be a problem involving more than one commissioners and open meetings. A manager might be able to work behind the scenes without running into this problem. A consultant could also fill this role.

Ms. Grable pointed out that there are no goals or policies set by the commissioners and act on ad hoc way, without any specific goal. Should the commissioner be goal setting? Mr. Reeder provided example that need guidance to look at the problem from the same prospective, and goal setting fulfills this direction and focus.

Glenn Youngman was asked if he had any questions of Mr. Clinton. Mr. Youngman related his experience after being elected commissioners. There were two inexperienced commissioners along with one longer termed. It takes a long time, up to 2 years, to get up to speed. Within the county, there were insufficient funds to operate, and could not get a budget passed, until come together and united. Once they got a budget put together, they then appointed charter committee. The elimination of elected positions, and making those remaining non-partisan eliminated political faction. More rules and regulations were established over monies being disbursed. They sought an increase in discretionary funding though increase in development. Money tends to be the focus if not a mission statement. If the job focuses on just trying to maintain funding for the year, you cannot look at the overall scope to influence the community.

Mr. Reeder added that if you only look year to year, you have no long term perspective. You get trapped, unless you collectively look at what is around you. If do have a manger, can allow for commissioners more time to look at bigger picture.

His recommendation was for the committee to take the time to develop a mission statement for each department of the county. Then ask what must a commissioner know or become familiar with, to get up to speed, to accomplish the mission. There should be a process for the new commissioner to get up to speed, to accelerate the effectiveness of the commissioner. If hire a manager, the same must be done. The person must have clear expectations, guidelines and policy. If don't have, don't hire one. If do, the manager could become a key player, and make things better.

#### B. Public Comments.

Suni Danforth would like to comment. She was appreciative of the attendance of Mr. Reeder and his comments. Being a city resident, she has seen problem with city manager in the past, and not doing what best for the city. The city council hires the manager, so if council not willing to work together to rectify the problem, you are stuck. She would not like the county to be stuck in the same situation. Do need to have some descriptions for department heads and guidelines for commissioner. It is county commissioner's job to look ahead, to see where county should be in the

10 to 20 years. Cities do have long term planning, and the county should do the same. She also wants power spread out too, so at least requires two to make a decision.

Charles Danforth added that if not broken, do not fix it. If things not going right, the voters can change it. You do not want a manager getting too much power, and whoever in command should be elected. Voters can make correction and fix if not.

- E. Future presentations or interviews. Possible future meetings will include discussions with Sherriff and Connie Caplinger. Meetings in September and October will include other department heads. The presentations should be time limited.
- F. Next Meeting. The consensus was to schedule the next meeting in Hermiston. The date for the next meeting is set for August 23, 2018, at 5:30 p.m., at the Stafford Hansell Government Center in Hermiston.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 7:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas R. Olsen

Umatilla County Counsel