

**MINUTES**  
**UMATILLA COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**  
Meeting of September 19, 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 (arrived at 5:57); Genna Banica; Dan Dorran; Jennifer McClure Spurgeon

**Absent:** Mark Gomolski; Darla Huxel

**County Counsel:** Doug Olsen

**Guests Present:** Dan Lonai; Amy Ashton-Williams; Dale Primmer

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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 Ms. McClure Spurgeon. Carried 6-0.
3. Additions to Agenda - None
4. Public Input. Other than the presenters, there were not any public members to make comment.
5. Business Items:
  - A. Discussion with Dan Lonai. Dan Lonai is the director of Umatilla County Administrative Services. The department includes functions for internal services (such as maintenance, communications, GIS, information technology) and county clerk duties (elections, recordings, marriages, passports). He has been with the county overall 27 years, and ten years as a director.

Mr. Lonai had reviewed the Umatilla County Charter and had a number of items that may need changing. First was Article III, section 3, the election of commissioners. Under ORS 249.088, unless candidate for nonpartisan office receives a majority of the votes casts, the two highest votes are nominated, and if receives a majority, then is elected. The statute is subject to a home rule charter provisions. In the Charter, it specifies that one commissioner is elected at each presidential election, and the other two are elected at the general November election. So even if a candidate receives a majority, then still has to be on the ballot in November. He thought the language from another county charter was better - chosen in the same years as presidential election, and other two in the alternate biannual election.

He thought the language in Article IV, section 2(4), was awkward and unclear. Elected officials shall devote full time to the office.

Article V, section 3(1)(a), can create more cost to the county. Normally is a county matter is on the ballot, there is no additional cost for primary or general elections. The charter provision allows for special elections to fill commissioner vacancies in March, June and September. Since there are not normally county wide issues or even any ballots for these elections, the county would have to pay the full cost for the election, roughly \$1 per voter, a total of approximately \$40,000. The provision should be changed to only allow for elections at times there would a ballot - primary or general. There was concern raised by committee members that this may result in substantial delays in filling the position if the vacancy occurs in an off election year.

Mr. Lonai also suggested an update to Article VII, section 5, the time requirements for charter review. He thought every four years was too often.

Mr. Lonai agreed to provide the committee with proposed language to address his concerns. He was asked about his opinion on the county structure. Mr. Lonai has had experience in Walla Walla County as well as in Umatilla County prior to the charter adoption. The previous structure created for fighting between departments over the budget, and there was no control over departments. He much prefers the current structure with the more limited departments under commissioner oversight. His current liaison commissioner is Commissioner Murdock.

With new commissioners, it always takes time to be brought up to speed, and the quality of a commissioner can be different. Having a manager may allow for continuity, but there can be difficulties depending on the experience and the abilities of the manager. A manager may prevent some ideas from reaching the Board. At the present time, he does not believe that the county has run better.

- B. Discussion with Amy Ashton-Williams. Amy Ashton-Williams has been with the county as the Human Services Director since June 2016. Prior to that time, she was in private practice providing mental health and addiction services, and had worked as a therapist. The Human Services Department includes outpatient treatment services, veterans' services, and school based mental health prevention. The Board is the county mental health authority and oversees the providing of mental health services in the county.

Ms. Ashton-Williams was asked about her interaction with the Board of Commissioners. Her liaison commissioner is Commissioner Murdock. She has discussed with all commissioners problems facing her department. She meets with Commissioner Murdock at least once a month to discuss the department and any needs or concerns, and he helps her in prioritizing matters for the department. If a problem develops, she will also contact the commissioner. She guided the development of strategic plan for her department, with input from Commissioner Murdock. She also is involved with advocacy for her department, including through state organizations, and also with her liaison commissioner.

- C. Discussion with Dale Primmer. Dale Primmer is the director for Umatilla County Community Justice. He had prepared a summary of his thoughts related to the county structure and county operations, which he circulated to those present. He had three topics he wanted to cover: efficiencies, liaisons, and professional growth. Mr. Primmer has been employed by Umatilla County for 21 years.

Mr. Primmer began his county employment as a work crew supervisor in 1997, then moved to parole officer, assistant director, and finally to the director. He has been in a management role for 13 years. During his tenure, he has not seen a more efficient use of county resources, than the current leadership. Staffing has been reduced and restructured and the Board of Commissioners has assumed more duties. His current liaison for Community Justice is Commissioner Elfering. He has a set monthly meeting with the Commissioner, but also frequently communicates with him by phone or text, and can stop by his office.

In his role on the city council, Mr. Primmer is familiar with a manager structure and how it functions. He believes both structures work well, and he does not have a bias. It depends on who is in the position. If a manager would restrict access, it can create problems.

When questioned regarding strategic planning, Mr. Primmer responded that he sets the plan and then presents to the Board for review and approval. The plan is required by the state funding of the program. The juvenile department also has a strategic plan. He thought for the county as a whole, a plan would be difficult with the multiple systems.

Mr. Primmer believed that the liaison structured performed an important role in the running of the county. It allows access to the Commissioners, and can create a stronger relationship.

Using his own experience as an example, Mr. Primmer believed that the county encourages growth of its employees and opportunities for professional development -- to grow leaders from within. It does not always work to bring in from outside. The current Board has worked to enhance the professional growth of its managers and staff.

- D. Limiting Time. Mr. Miller had requested this matter be put on the agenda. He does not believe it is an issue and that it can be removed from discussion.
- E. Future Presentations. One potential source might be to talk to some of the area mayors. No direction was given.
- F. Next Meeting. The next meeting will be in Pendleton to continue the discussion with the department heads. The date for the next meeting is set for October 11, 2018, at 5:30 p.m., at the Umatilla County Courthouse.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas R. Olsen

Umatilla County Counsel