

MINUTES
UMATILLA COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE
WORKSHOP

Meeting of May 29, 2019
5:30 p.m., Room 130, Umatilla County Courthouse
Pendleton, Oregon

Committee Members Present: Chair Michele Grable; Vice-Chair Don Miller; Sally Anderson Hansell; Jerry Baker; Genna Banica; Dan Dorrان; Mark Gomolski

Absent: Jennifer McClure Spurgeon

County Counsel: Doug Olsen

Guests Present: Commissioner George Murdock; Commissioner John Shafer, Commissioner William Elfering; Eva Martin; Marlene McClintock; Rick Pullen; Rex Morehouse, Jay Martin; Larry Nye; Glen Youngman; Kathy Youngman; Adolf Klein; Lorraine Klein; Steve Otzenberger; Phil Wright, East Oregonian; Fred Wyatt; Bernie Klein; Sherrie Widmer, Valley Herald; Alan Bailey, Valley Herald; Charles Danforth; Jan Craig; Rob Lovett; Bud Rupe, Wes Koklich; Orrin Lyon; Eli Stephens; David Drotzmann.

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 provided a summary of the purpose of the workshop, and introduced the six other members of the committee present. She expressed her appreciation for the work of the committee members. The committee had recommended changes to the charter that the committee believed were in the best interest of Umatilla County and its citizens.

The ground rules for the workshop session were provided. This is not a formal meeting, and there will not be any decision or action to be taken. Public commentary will be allowed at the end of the session, and will be limited to two minutes per person.

The committee will present its report and proposed ballot measures to the Board of Commissioners and will take any questions or comments from the Commissioners.

2. Proposed Report - The proposed report from the committee had been provided earlier to the Commissioners, and was available as a handout for those present. The Commissioners did not have any questions about the report.
3. Proposed Ballot Measure – Sheriff provisions These proposed changes revolved around the change of the name of the Law Enforcement Department to Sheriff’s Office, and clarifying that the Sheriff had the functions as provided by Oregon law. It was primarily housekeeping changes. The Commissions did not have any questions about these proposed changes.

4. Proposed Ballot Measure – Election provisions The method of election of Commissioners was proposed to be changed. Unless there were more than two candidates, the Commissioner would be elected at the November general election. If more than two candidates filed, a primary election would be held, with the two highest votes going to the November election. This would help reduce the length of time an incumbent would remain in office after being defeated, and lessen the number of elections needed. Mr. Dorran added that it would increase voter involvement in selecting a Commissioner, due to higher turnout in November elections. Commissioner Shafer indicated that he would prefer if the charter just follows the Oregon state law process for elections; if a candidate receives a majority of the vote in the primary, the candidate is elected to the position without the need of a general election. Commissioner Murdock thought that maybe just having one November election may address the issues. The Chair concluded that maybe the Committee may want to revisit this provision.

5. Proposed Ballot Measure – County Structure Under this portion of the recommendation, the structure of the Board of Commissioners would change to five part time Commissioners, with a county manager to be appointed by the Board of Commissioners. Two Commissioners would be elected at large, and three by districts. The intent was that a county manager would handle to day to day administrative functions of the county, and free up Commissioners to concentrate on policy issues, advocacy and strategic planning. Since 1990 the population of Umatilla County has increased dramatically and the budget of the county has also grown proportionally, a professional manager would better be able to address the needs of the county. A manager would also provide a more consistent style of management, and a continuity lacking with turnover in Commissioners and rotation of duties.

Mr. Dorran added that with five Commissioners other areas of the county beside the two largest cities would have representation. Since 55% of the population resides outside these two areas, this portion of the citizens might have more representation and attention to their issues.

Mr. Baker said that the recommendation of the Committee was based on a lot of testimony. The Committee had heard from many people, and the recommendations are based on the testimony.

Ms. Anderson-Hansell emphasized that Commissioners are elected to represent the citizens and not to be administrators. If a Commissioner is focused only on day to day administrative matters, this is not a good use of their time. There are people that have the background and the education to manage the administrative matters, and allow the Commissioner to focus on what they were elected to do. The system will also establish some checks and balances to a county manager, through the oversight of the Board and a Board appointed county counsel.

Mr. Gomolski stated that the Committee had heard from many people, and had spent time discussing and debating the issues. The Committee was able to receive consensus on all of the proposals. The goal of the proposal is to set up a system that can address what may happen in the future.

Ms. Banica reiterated that the proposal addresses the need for continuity in the future, after the present Commissioners no longer are serving. She emphasized that the proposal is not the creation of the Committee but is what it heard from citizens and others providing testimony.

Mr. Dorran added that these are large changes, but are needed to empower Commissioners to address the future needs of the County.

The Commissioners were provided the opportunity to raise questions of the proposed structure change.

Commissioner Shafer read a letter regarding Douglas County and its proposed adoption of a home rule charter. The letter was signed by former Commissioner Larry Givens. The letter noted the importance of full-time commissioners and the weaknesses of a non-elected manager. He also noted the additional cost of having a county manager.

Commissioner Elfering noted a number of items. The Board of Commissioners does have the authority now to hire a county manager, but the cost has always been a major deterrent. A manager is not elected and is not as responsive to the citizens as is a Commissioner. He was also concerned about the pool of candidates for part time positions, and would limit those that could run for office. Another concern was that Commissioners elected from certain districts may concentrate only on those areas and not be representative of the entire county. Decisions should not be based on where you are from.

Commissioner Elfering offered that of the 36 counties, 7 are of the older court system. Of the remaining 29 counties, five have part time commissioners. If you talk to these commissioners, it is not as good as it sounds and are not happy. Morrow County just changed to full time commissioner. There were 10 counties that do not have managers. He is concerned what information that a county manager would give to part time commissioners. The current system is working well. A defeated incumbent should take the responsibility to mentor the successor, and this provides for desired consistency and continuity.

The Commissioner said that the County did have a strategic plan. Mr. Dorran asked for the top county priority. Commissioner Shafer said that his was public safety. Commissioner Elfering added that the economic stability of the county was another. The county was busy with day to day matters and did not really have formal priorities. Mr. Dorran also noted that the potential pool of candidates should be greater, allowing for retirees, homemakers, and self-employed individuals to apply.

Commissioner Murdock was hesitant to provide any feedback. He wants to respect the process of the charter review system. He is not comfortable with the Commissioners determining how the county should be structured.

6. Future Meeting The Chair asked if the Committee would want to meet again to discuss the feedback from the Commissioners. The consensus was to have a Committee meeting, without any Commissioners, on June 4, 2019, at 5:30.
7. Public Comment The Chair asked those guests present if any wanted to provide any comment.
 - A. Jay Martin, Milton-Freewater. If spend time on infrastructure issues, you could appoint someone to do those tasks and free up time. That person could report on monthly basis on basis to the Commissioners, and allow the Commissioners to devote full time to other matters. You could also hire two more people, and that would allow Commissioners to travel elsewhere. He was curious on how the County would be divided into districts, particularly Hermiston and Pendleton. He is in favor of a November election and wondered if party affiliation is considered.
 - B. Marlene McClintock, Milton-Freewater. Her concern is the opportunity of citizens to get to Commissioners if only part time. You get what you pay for too. She is afraid of losing voicing in a growing government. She also wanted to know the process on how would hire a county manager, and if would be local or national basis.
 - C. Fred Wyatt, Pilot Rock. He knows the current Commissioners and voted for these individuals because he felt they could run the county. Why tweak something that has been working. He believes that the

Commissioners are capable of running the county by themselves. If do not feel that they can run the county, they should not run for office. he Committee reviewed the subjects of potential changes and discussed which ones warranted drafting changes. Categories included county manager, number and time of commissioners, and method of election.

- D. David Drotzmann, Hermiston. Dr Drotzmann thanked the committee for its work. He is supportive of the recommendation. He currently works in that environment. He believes people would be willing to serve as part time Commissioner. His one concern would be how the district boundaries would look and how make sure get fair and equal representation across the county.
- E. Rex Morehouse, Pendleton. He believes that if the system is not broken, don't fix it. He has never had any problem in getting to a county commissioner, and they know what is going on. The proposed system would be like the City of Pendleton, where the part time councilors do not know anything. He would just leave the structure alone.
- F. Adolf Klein, Umapine. There is nothing wrong with the current system. A manager would run the county and the part time commissioners would not be strong enough to fight the manager in running the county.
- G. Rob Lovett, Hermiston. He has come to see a Commissioner a number of times, and is always able to walk in and talk to a Commissioner and get feedback. He likes the current system for its direct access by a citizen to a Commissioner. If put another layer in, it will not be as good. If have long term manager with shorter termed Commissioners, the manager would set the course of the county, not the Commissioners. He wants the direct access to a Commissioner.
- H. Charles Danforth, Milton-Freewater. Most of his concerns have been address and he concurs with all of them. He does have a concern about the proposal regarding the Sheriff, and he is not supportive if it results in the Sheriff giving up any of his authority or responsibility. Rotation of commissioner is good and protects the citizens and is a strong point. He is happy with what have.
- I. Larry Nye, Athena. He has been involved as activist in Umatilla County and has never had any problem with access to a Commissioner. If a Commissioner is an administrator, the Commissioner knows what is going on in that area and owns the problem. If take away knowledge of the Commissioner of what is going on, it is a detriment. He supports what others have said. He also has a concern if any authority is being taking away from the Sheriff.
- J. Wes Koklich, Milton-Freewater. He would not like to see a Commissioner that only works part time, it is a full-time job, and must be aware of all problems in the County. Cost should be part of the consideration for the proposals.
- K. Bud Rupe, Milton-Freewater. He appreciates the current Commissioners and they way in which they work together. Mentoring is important. Working together, this County can do anything and solve anything.
- L. Phil Wright, Pendleton. What is there now in the County Charter that guarantees that any incoming Commissioner gets any mentorship whatsoever?
- M. Eli Stephens, Reith. Usually housekeeping changes are not good, there is usually a hidden agenda. If it isn't broken, don't fix it. If there is something that goes wrong, can fix it in five years.

N. Orrin Lyons, Milton-Freewater. In his experience with managers, if have good manager, that is good deal, but if not good, that is not a good deal. Good ones are hard to fine. He is happy with the current system, it isn't broken don't fix it.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas R. Olsen

Umatilla County Counsel