

Morrow County Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes
July 28, 2017
Bartholomew Building Upper Conference Room
Heppner, Oregon

Present

Chair Melissa Lindsay
Commissioner Don Russell
Commissioner Jim Doherty
Jerry Sorte, Administrative Officer
Karen Wolff, Human Resources Director
Kate Knop, Finance Director
Richard Tovey, County Counsel
Roberta Lutchter, Executive Assistant

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: 9:04 a.m.

Public Comments

- Robin Jones, Accounting Clerk, Finance Department, compared the Administrative Officer/Board of Commissioners relationship to that of a Superintendent and School Board as in her previous job. That hierarchy that has employees reporting to the Administrative Officer and the Administrative Officer reporting to the BOC should be maintained, she said. Commissioners should continue to move the County forward and let the administrator run the day-to-day activities, she said.
- Sheryll Bates, Executive Director, Heppner Chamber of Commerce, said the main goal of the Commissioners is to be out in the communities and working with the cities on the things needing to be done within the County. She said she supported keeping the Administrative Officer position in some form.
- Former Commissioner Leann Rea said she was part of the County Court that changed the structure from three part-time Commissioners and a full-time Judge to the current structure that eliminated the Judge and added the Administrative Officer. She urged the Board to keep the administrator position and change the job description if necessary. Commissioners set policy and should not oversee employees; that is to be done by an administrator, she said. Hiring Mr. Sorte was probably one of the smartest things we've ever done, concluded Commissioner Rea.
- Anita Pranger, Coordinator, The Loop, said Morrow County is a progressive thinking County and the Commissioners can grow the County and the Administrative Officer can see to the day-to-day duties.
- Karen Wolff, Human Resources Director, read written comment from Burke O'Brien, Public Works Director. Among his comments was the statement to designate Chair Lindsay as the acting administrator until the position is filled.

- Ms. Wolff said she saw great value in having the Administrative Officer position in the County, but she respected the fact it's the Commissioners' decision as to what happens next.
- Carla McLane, Planning Director, said as someone who has an office outside the County seat she sometimes feels disconnected, but the ability to connect with the Administrative Officer has been a benefit.
- Former Judge Terry Tallman said he wasn't necessarily in favor of changing the form of government to resemble Umatilla County's but the decision is ultimately the Board's and he would support it.
- Kate Knop, Finance Director, encouraged the Board to consider an interim public administrator to act as a liaison between Department Heads and the Board, so the Board can then focus on policy and growth of the County.
- When asked for his comments, Jerry Sorte, Administrative Officer said the person the Board chooses will need the full support of the Board, and having a full-time person dedicated to administration is a good thing. A single point of accountability can be beneficial to the Board to ensure there is follow-through on projects. He said the County can recruit for the skill set it requires but if Commissioners take on administrative duties, someone should be hired to work on projects. He said he and other staff were very busy working at a high level on projects which meant other tasks had to be prioritized. This County is moving forward at a strong clip so make sure there is adequate personnel power to accomplish the Board's policies, he said.
- Commissioner Russell explained that the Special Districts Association of Oregon helps fire districts, for example, find interim chiefs, so perhaps something similar exists for interim Public Administrators. He added the County is at least four months from hiring, longer before the person is actually on-board.

Public Comment Portion Closed

The following were discussion points of the Commissioners:

- Commissioner Russell said he favored hiring an interim administrator but if such a person can't be found, there should be a back-up plan. He said he would like to review job descriptions from around the State, and see if changes are needed to the current Administrative Officer job description that might better fit the County.
- Commissioner Doherty said if the recruitment for a permanent administrator could take up to six months, he'd prefer hiring someone on an interim basis. Ms. Wolff then outlined the potential recruitment process timeline and said it could be November before an offer is made to a candidate, which means December before that person is on the job.
- Chair Lindsay said the Board should look at what that person is – a true administrator, chief of staff or project manager. She continued by saying chief of staff may be a title to look at more closely, especially when marketing the position and determining the salary range.

- Commissioner Russell said when someone new is hired, the County needs to reevaluate the job description on an annual basis to make sure it still reflects what the Board wants it to be.
- Chair Lindsay said there are three Commissioners who would be able to take on the administrative role on a temporary basis in order to save turmoil and the cost of hiring an interim administrator. All three Commissioners expressed a willingness to consider being an interim administrator but put off that decision until the following week.

The Board then discussed forming an Administrative Officer Recruitment Committee that will first be tasked with forwarding a draft job description to them so recruitment can begin. The committee so far consists of Ms. Wolff, Commissioner Doherty, and Mr. Sorte as a consultant. Ms. Wolff said she will present additional committee member appointment options (Department Head and community member) to the Board next week. Commissioner Doherty requested the draft job description be ready for review at the August 9th Board meeting.

Adjourned: 10:45 a.m.