

COUNTY MANAGER

Committee Findings

- a. Section 3.10 of the Multnomah County Charter establishes a board of five county commissioners as the governing body. The chair of the board is elected at large and the four commissioners are elected from districts.
- b. Charter Section 6.10 outlines the role of the chair of the board of county commissioners. It specifies that the chair shall be the chief executive officer and personnel officer of the county with the sole authority to appoint, order, direct and discharge administrative officers and employees of the county.
- c. The chair has a dual role, acting in a political and legislative capacity, and serving as the county's chief administrator.
- d. The role of the chair in the Multnomah County Charter contrasts with the governance model found in many urban and suburban counties in Oregon and nationally where administrative functions are vested in a professional county manager appointed by the governing body as a whole.
- e. According to a 2014 report by the Oregon Association of Counties, Multnomah County is the only [one of 9](#) home rule counties in Oregon where the chair serves as the administrator.
- f. Multnomah County has effectively created a hybrid county manager model through the adoption of ordinances and employee classification and compensation plans that establish the role of chief operating officer.
- g. The current hybrid structure lacks some of the essential elements of an appointed county manager found in other counties.
- h. The current hybrid structure could be reversed by the actions of a future board, [allowing the county to adapt to changing needs](#).
- i. The Chief Operating Officer currently performs two roles, one as the Director of the Department of County Management and another as a 'Department Director Principal' with the working title of 'Chief Operating Officer.'
- j. The current structure creates a broad portfolio of responsibilities for the Chief Operating Officer which are not ~~specified~~[grounded](#) in the Charter. [\[see next item\]](#)
- ~~k. The fact that the current structure is not grounded in the Charter introduces the opportunity for day-to-day practice that diverges from the roles defined by ordinance and the classification and compensation plan.~~

[\[I suggest deleting this Finding. As written, this Finding isn't accurate for two](#)

reasons. First, the current structure is grounded in the Charter in that the Chair's role and responsibilities are clearly defined in the Charter, and the Chair has authority to decide how to structure the organization. Secondly, if current practices don't comply with ordinances and the classification and compensation plan, adding language to the Charter seems unlikely to be more effective. The Charter is not an enforcement tool. A simpler solution would be to amend the ordinances and plans to reflect current practice.]

- k. Two current commissioners support a Charter amendment to establish a county manager.
- l. The current chair and two commissioners oppose the Charter amendment to establish a county manager appointed and managed by the Board. The county Auditor and District Attorney also support the current model.
- m. The creation of an appointed manager in the Charter would reduce the risk of political influence on administrative staff.
- n. Counties use a variety of models of governance and administration. According to a 2015 report by the National Association of Counties (NACo), 43% of counties in the US have an appointed administrator.
- o. Other counties use different models which are successful for them. For example, King County has an elected Chief Executive who has an Executive Leadership Team that includes three Deputy County Executives.
- p. Commissioner Bailey expressed concern that an appointed county manager will reduce an important part of his role, diminishing his ability to advocate and resolve constituent issues and help them navigate the system. Washington County Commissioner Malinowski provided testimony that he experiences this problem in a system very similar to what is being proposed.

Committee Conclusions

1. An elected legislative body with an appointed county manager is a common and successful model of local government in the United States and in Oregon.
2. This model of government has proven to be a valuable tool for good government and professional management in urban and suburban counties with diverse populations, broad programmatic responsibilities, large capital infrastructure portfolios and projects, and complex budgets. ~~Multnomah County would benefit by embracing it.~~ [Our chair and 2 commissioners do not agree.]
3. A successful county manager would allow the chair and board members to focus on articulating and advancing their policy visions for their community while the county manager oversees day-to-day administrative management.

4. Multnomah County has created a variation of a county manager model through ordinances and the classification and compensation plan. This hybrid model may have gaps and inconsistencies that weaken the benefits of strong, professional county management and create the opportunity for political influence in county administration.
5. Day-to-day administration and implementation of the Board's policy direction should be based on authority grounded in the Charter, not in transitory ordinances and personnel policies or the relationships between the Chair, Chief Operating Officer, Commissioners and department directors which will vary with elections, personnel changes and personalities.
6. It has been 26 years since voters turned down the appointed county manager measure in 1990. Since then the county has experienced a 30 percent increase in population, rising from 586,617 in 1990 to 766,135 in 2013. County voters may now be more attuned to the arguments in support of an appointed county manager.
7. Recommending the creation of an appointed county manager position is not a criticism of the performance of the current elected or appointed officials, but rather a desire to strengthen the integrity and effectiveness Multnomah County's governance structure now and in the future.
8. According to the Chair and two commissioners, this Charter amendment will put major county projects at risk, including the new Courthouse and programs for the homeless.
9. This Charter amendment would prohibit the chair and board of commissioners from adopting a new management structure which could be more effective in the future. For example, the County Manager job can't be divided in two, and the County cannot choose to hire a CFO (to manage contracts and budgets) at the same level as the County Manager.
10. Assigning budget preparation, in addition to the other roles described, to the County Manager will create an extremely powerful non-elected position.
11. This measure will ensure that there is no longer a single elected official accountable for county operations, and will reduce accountability to voters by creating a shared responsibility for county management among the Board as a whole and the non-elected County Manager.
12. This measure will significantly change how the county is administered, and will require a lot of time and effort to implement.
13. The committee voted on this recommendation without an estimate of the costs.