

Date: June 28, 2016

To: Multnomah County Charter Committee  
Kirsten Leonard, Chair

From: Jerry Grossnickle  
Interested Citizen

Re: Proposed Charter Changes to County's Administrative Authority

Greetings, Committee Members:

Having worked with Multnomah County on variety of issues over the years, mostly related to our neighborhood, I have developed a keen sense of appreciation for our county employees and for a management structure that allows for their efficient and responsive operations. Having read the May 24 "Green Subcommittee Recommendation", I would like to provide a word of caution.

While I think it reasonable to lessen the administrative workload of the County Chair by appointing a professional manager, I would recommend against one of the suggestions of the May 24 draft, which is to give authority to the Board of Commissioners to hire and fire the manager. Please consider giving the County Chair this authority solely.

Having a clear line of authority and to be very clearly answerable to the chair gives the manager an ability to focus on the county's business without the inevitable distractions that arise with a multi-headed elected board. A board's agenda and direction are fluid and very often depend political needs and calculations, and also on alliances that are struck between board members, and while the county commission must reflect our messy democracy, there is no reason that this (usually) controlled chaos should intrude into management practices.

Some of the dangers are

- 1) that the manager finds it in his/her interest to cultivate alliances on the board and thus pushes projects (or hires people) that please particular board members;
- 2) that board members feel empowered to push their own personal agendas with the manager and even with staff, since they have some power to fire the manager, they also have some power to influence the manager on staffing decisions; and
- 3) that if the board is the manager's boss, dysfunction on the board will more easily translate into dysfunction within the county government.

In my view the current chair has done a very good job of managing the county without a manager, so we can be very confident that if a manager is hired by this county chair, the county will continue to be well-governed. We can't be sure that if we change the structure to effectively give the board more authority over staff, we wouldn't be making a mistake. Along the lines of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it", we should let well enough alone.

Of course, we will eventually have a new chair. We should give that chair the advantage of our good experience and not saddle her/him with this part of the Green Subcommittee Recommendation.

Thank you.

Jerry Grossnickle