

Umatilla County

Board of County Commissioners



Commissioners

September 14, 2000

Bill Hansell
541-278-6201

TO: Board of Commissioners, Umatilla County, Oregon

Emile Holeman
541-278-6203

FROM: Home Rule Charter Review Committee

Dennis Doherty
541-278-6202

SUBJECT: Report and Recommendations

Office Manager
Marcia Wells
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As directed by the Board of Commissioners, the Home Rule Charter Review Committee has met "to review the Home Rule Charter and its operation," as provided in Article VII, Section 1(5) of the Charter.

County Counsel
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The Committee held meetings in December, 1999, and January, 2000. At its meetings, the Committee received comments from the Commissioners, county Department Heads, county employees and members of the public. The Committee has considered this input in its deliberations, and in formulating the following remarks and recommendations.

Budget Officer
Bruce Peet
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Director of
Human Resources
James R. Barrow
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1. TRANSITION TO HOME RULE

This committee met in 1994 and rendered a report containing a series of recommendations. Most all of these recommendations have been addressed and incorporated into the County's operations under home rule organization. Re-organization of county government under home rule was fully implemented in 1995. Re-organization consisted of replacing the elected offices of County Clerk, Treasurer, Assessor and Surveyor with qualified, appointed officials who now serve under the authority of the Board of Commissioners. Simultaneously, the organizational relationship of county departments was re-defined and consolidated, from twenty-three departments down to nine.

Based on remarks from the Commissioners, Department Heads and Staff who have worked under this new system since 1995, the transition to home rule operation has been smooth, effective and efficient in most respects. From these comments, the Committee has concluded that:

- Transition to home rule organization was cost-neutral when implemented.
- The re-organization produced a better delivery system for county services and internal operations.
- The transition achieved the conceptual goals of home rule, with better functionality, oversight and accountability within the organization.

- Implementing home rule re-organization changed the dynamics in the relationship between the Commissioners and departments, allowing the collective wisdom, energy and focus of operations managers to surface as factors having a positive influence on performance.
- Home rule organization has provided a climate for improved communications within the organization, wherein, needed information flows through six department heads to the County Commissioners. This procedure distances somewhat individual employees from the Commissioners, but does provide a more orderly flow of information and corresponds more closely to procedures followed in commercial business.
- Almost all of the Committee's 1994 recommendations were addressed and incorporated into the county's operations under home rule re-organization.

2. COMPENSATION FOR COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS

The Committee was requested to review Article V, Section 4 of the Home Rule Charter, which states that "the salaries of the Commissioners shall be fixed by the public members of the budget committee."

In deliberating this matter, the Committee received information concerning rates of compensation for public employees generally, wages rates specific to Umatilla County, and considered the scope and responsibilities of Commissioners and other employees of the county.

As part of the Home Rule Charter's mandate of review, the Committee:

- recognizes that Umatilla is widely and accurately perceived throughout the State as a large, prosperous, dynamic and well-run Eastern Oregon county; and
- further recognizes that the extraordinary complexities of effectively managing a large, diverse work force of well over 400 hundred employees and a budget of over 40 million dollars to ensure effective service to the public in the new Century have not diminished; and
- further recognizes the high value this Committee of citizen-advisors places on the role and responsibilities of those leaders elected to and responsible for the overall management of this robust county and its present state of social and economic well-being.

The Committee has found the following:

- That, on examination, the present compensation for elected officials, including the County Sheriff, and many of its employees, is indefensibly inadequate and an impediment to the proper governance of the county.
- That the current method described in Article 4, Section 4, of the Charter for establishing compensation, especially for elected officials, has not ensured that such compensation remains equitable or adequate.

- That an amendment to the Charter is not necessary at this time in that the Board of Commissioners has adequate authority to effect the changes which this Committee may recommend.

Therefore, the Charter Review Committee recommends that:

- Subject to available resources, the Board of Commissioners should immediately authorize an increase in the compensation of the Sheriff and the supplement of the District Attorney to be effective on July 1, 2000. At a minimum, this should begin a commitment of making salaries comparable to like counties in the state.
- Additionally, the Board should recommend to the Budget Committee a similar increase in compensation paid to the Commissioners, for their consideration as part of the July 1, 2000, budget process.
- The Board of Commissioners should immediately appoint a five person Citizen Compensation Review Commission with staggered three year terms. Representatives from public sector, small business, citizens, general industry, and agriculture would be appointed, with regard for geographic, county-wide diversity. The Compensation Commission would have the annual responsibility of rendering an advisory report to the County Commissioners and the Budget Committee regarding the annual compensation for elected officials in order to ensure achievement and maintenance of fair and comparable compensation. The first such advisory report would be due no later than March 1, 2001, and annually thereafter. The Commission's Report and any departure from the Commission's recommendation would be documented and made a part of the public record in the budget.
- Additionally, the Compensation Review Commission should periodically assist in evaluating the general adequacy of compensation of other county managers and employees and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for their consideration and action.