

**Finance & Personnel Committee Subcommittee
of the City of Onalaska**

Thursday, September 3, 2015

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1 The Meeting of the Finance & Personnel Committee Subcommittee of the City of Onalaska was
2 called to order at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 3, 2015. It was noted that the meeting had
3 been announced and a notice posted at City Hall.

4
5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Bob Muth, Ald. Harvey Bertrand,
6 Ron Johnson, Lori Olson

7
8 Also Present: Ald. Jim Binash, Human Resource Director Hope Burchell
9

10 **Item 2 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

11

12 Ald. Muth called for anyone wishing to provide public input.

13

14 **Dan Ferries**

15 **402 9th Avenue North**

16 **Onalaska**

17

18 “I’ve already spoken before Finance and Personnel, and also the Council as a whole about hiring
19 a full-time [city] administrator or city manager. I’m not against the proposal, but I think with
20 conversations with residents that this big of a change in city government, where basically an
21 employee of the city is making decisions and spending taxpayers’ money, would not sit well with
22 some people if they don’t agree with their decisions. And it’s not [as simple as] vote them out of
23 office. I’m afraid that without a referendum for this issue it might turn into another garbage can
24 conundrum, and we all remember that. We need a referendum on this. Studying these
25 attachments pertaining to this, it looks like Middleton is probably the best comparison to the City
26 of Onalaska population-wise, and it’s also right next door to a major city [Madison]. From what
27 I see, Hortonville may be the only one without a mayor that has an administrator. You’re going
28 to spend \$100,000, anyway. I know county administrators and city administrators are quite
29 different. We searched long nationwide, and we couldn’t find an assistant. We scaled the
30 requirements down to find a deputy assistant with fewer requirements and fewer responsibilities.
31 But we had a major search and couldn’t find someone suitable. You’re talking about someone
32 who usually has a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in finance, human resource, and in city
33 development or county development. Would that mean reduction of our city staff now so that’s
34 not just an additional expense? What I’m trying to convey is, this is a major change in our city
35 government, and I think it should go to a referendum. Thank you for your service.”

36

37 Ald. Muth called three times for anyone else wishing to provide public input and closed that
38 portion of the meeting.

39

40 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

41

42 **Item 3 – Review and consideration of hiring a full-time City Administrator or City**

Reviewed 9/8/15 by Hope Burchell

**Finance & Personnel Committee Subcommittee
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2

43 **Manager and review of options for Mayor position**

44

45 Hope said she had collected data from communities with populations either similar to or greater
46 than the City of Onalaska. Hope said she also had requested salary information, job descriptions
47 and employment agreements. Hope referred to the attachments distributed to committee
48 members and noted they include which municipalities have part-time mayors or full-time
49 mayors. The attachments also show that some of the municipalities have a minimum and a
50 maximum pay grade, and they also list a current salary. Hope noted that some of the
51 municipalities did not list pay grades, but rather the current salary. Two municipalities (Eau
52 Claire and Fond du Lac) employ city managers. Hope referred to the “Current City
53 Administrator/Manager Salaries” handout and noted that the pink bar represents the population
54 of the listed municipalities. Current salaries also have been included. Two attachments show
55 minimum and maximum salaries, and one shows each municipality’s population. Hope noted
56 that approximately half of the communities she had contacted requesting information had
57 provided it. Hope referred to the job responsibility comparison handout and said she had
58 attempted to indicate the municipality, whether it has either a city administrator or city manager,
59 and whether it had a full- or part-time mayor. Hope referred to the job descriptions she had been
60 given and said she had included in the handout the education requirement for the positions, years
61 of experience required, and other types of experience. Hope noted she had included seven
62 condensed factors for job functions as well as if an employment contract is utilized and if so, its
63 term. Hope noted that she had focused on the primary job duties and had not included
64 information such as a city administrator/manager performs the day-to-day operations, works
65 closely with the Council and advises Council decisions because this information had been
66 included in nearly all the job descriptions. Hope offered to follow up with the communities,
67 saying they have been helpful in responding to additional questions she has had.

68

69 Ald. Muth asked Hope to contact municipalities that are similar in size to the City of Onalaska
70 and had not supplied information.

71

72 Ald. Binash asked Hope to ask the municipalities why they had converted to a city administrator.

73

74 Ald. Bertrand asked Hope to ask the communities if they had gone to a referendum.

75

76 Ald. Muth noted city staff had informed him that the city had gone from having a mayor to a city
77 administrator and then back to a full-time mayor. Ald. Muth said, “Neither time was a
78 referendum. It was decided by the Finance and Personnel Committee and then the Common
79 Council. There was no referendum.”

80

81 Ron asked when the changes had occurred.

82

83 Ald. Muth said one city administrator served from 1985 to 1988, and another served from 1988
84 to 2000, when the city returned to having a full-time mayor. Ald. Muth noted the second city

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3

85 administrator's salary at the time was \$48,040.72 and said that salary in 2015 would equate to
86 \$81,118.

87
88 Ron noted that the City of La Crosse has in the past contemplated converting to a city
89 administrator and said the City of Menomonie also has "gone back and forth." Ron said he is
90 confused about the difference between the role of a city manager and that of a city administrator.

91
92 Ald. Muth explained that a city manager wields more power and any decisions he/she makes
93 would need a 60-percent vote from the Council in order to be overridden. Ald. Muth also
94 explained that a city administrator must adhere to decisions made by the Council. Ald. Muth
95 said he believes the subcommittee has been tasked with comparing a city administrator to a city
96 manager as well as deciding if the city employs a part-time mayor if a city administrator is hired,
97 and what his/her duties will be. Ald. Muth also noted that Ald. Jim Bialecki had discussed the
98 fiscal ramifications to the city for converting from a full-time mayor to city administrator.

99
100 Ald. Muth said, "There is good and bad for both of them. I ran for Mayor. I lost by a few votes,
101 and after I lost I wondered a few months afterwards did I really lose? As a mayor, the things that
102 you have to know [such as] financial, planning, personnel, I really felt that I wasn't qualified in
103 my own mind. I wanted to do a good job, but in my own mind ... We have some excellent
104 department heads here that we can rely on. But it would be nice to have someone in that position
105 that has the knowledge of personnel and finance and some backgrounds and some education. An
106 administrator/manager went to school, [has] education [and] experience. That is his or her field.
107 That's what they love to do. That's what they're involved in, and I think that's a big asset over
108 somebody like me that got elected because I won the popular vote."

109
110 Ron said he agrees with Ald. Muth, but he also stated, "I also don't believe that an education
111 alone qualifies you for a job." Ron said he had attended college and earned an education degree.
112 Ron noted that he had taught 35 years in the Onalaska School District and told the subcommittee
113 his first year was a struggle. Ron said, "What I'm saying is I don't think that my schooling
114 really prepared me to be a teacher."

115
116 Ald. Bertrand said he believes there is "a minimum bar one has to cross," stating that while he
117 does not believe a candidate needs to have earned a master's degree, he does believe an
118 individual who has earned a bachelor's degree has shown that he/she wants to gain an education.

119
120 Ron said he believes work experience after one earns a degree is critical.

121
122 Ald. Bertrand said he believes a city administrator needs to have earned a degree either in
123 business or public administration. Ald. Bertrand noted that City of La Crosse Mayor Tim Kabat
124 has a background in planning and he believes Mayor Kabat is "part City Administrator." Ald.
125 Bertrand said he believes an administrator needs to have "progressive experience" and perhaps
126 two years of serving as an assistant administrator.

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Thursday, September 3, 2015

4

127
128 Ron referred to the survey Hope had conducted and noted that the City of Onalaska would be
129 one of the smallest cities on the list. Ron said that while he does not oppose hiring a city
130 administrator, he also stated, “We might have a hard time attracting someone because I think city
131 managers are going to want to move up to a bigger city, a better paying job and maybe a better
132 climate – I don’t know. I don’t know what the attractions might be, but I’m afraid we are going
133 to be on the small end of a city trying to attract a good candidate. But I agree. I think having
134 experience and doing all those things instead of electing a mayor and then all of a sudden they go
135 from whatever they were doing to [needing to have] expertise in all those areas. That’s
136 overwhelming.”

137
138 Ald. Muth pointed out that a new mayor could be elected every four years, thus starting the
139 process all over again.

140
141 Ald. Bertrand said he believes a city administrator provides continuity and also has the training
142 and stated, “Those two items are key. But what you’re saying is you don’t want to compromise.”

143
144 Lori referred to an individual who worked in the Town of Campbell and said she believes he had
145 earned a master’s degree in public administration. This individual had earned a bachelor’s
146 degree in public administration and previously worked in other municipalities.

147
148 Ald. Bertrand said he believes a city administrator must have positive working relationships with
149 the public, the Common Council and city staff. Ald. Bertrand also said he believes a city
150 administrator should operate as a CEO.

151
152 Lori inquired about the duties of the part-time mayors in the municipalities that had responded to
153 Hope.

154
155 Hope said some of the part-time mayors have the right to appoint, serve as the chairperson of the
156 Common Council and cast the tiebreaking vote. Hope noted that Karl Green from UW-La
157 Crosse will describe the differences between a city administrator, a city manager and a mayor in
158 a presentation at the September 8 Common Council meeting.

159
160 Ron asked if the seven job functions listed on the attachments are prioritized.

161
162 Hope said no, noting she simply wanted to contain the information to one piece of paper.

163
164 Ald. Bertrand inquired about the timeline.

165
166 Ald. Muth told Ald. Bertrand he is “open on everything” and said he is doing his own research.

167
168 Hope said the next mayoral election is scheduled for April 2016 and noted that candidates
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**Finance & Personnel Committee Subcommittee
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Thursday, September 3, 2015

5

169 wishing to run for mayor must take out papers by the end of 2015.

170

171 Ald. Muth said he believes the subcommittee must move rapidly and meet when everyone's
172 schedule allows.

173

174 Ald. Bertrand asked if a decision must be made by a specific date.

175

176 Ald. Muth said no and stated, "All we're going to do is make a recommendation to Finance and
177 Personnel and the Council, and they'll make the decision."

178

179 Hope said the Finance and Personnel Committee will make a recommendation and then refer it
180 to the Common Council. Hope said the Common Council could vote to send the matter back to
181 Finance and Personnel.

182

183 Ald. Bertrand asked if it would be possible to make a recommendation prior to the October 13
184 Common Council meeting.

185

186 Ald. Muth said he believes that is a difficult question to answer, stating he first wants to hear
187 Karl Green's presentation and then discuss which avenue to pursue (city administrator, retain
188 current system). Ald. Muth said if the subcommittee wants to pursue hiring a city administrator
189 it must discuss whether or not the city should have a part-time mayor. Ald. Muth also said there
190 must be discussion related to salary.

191

192 Ald. Binash asked if any positions were eliminated or non-existent the last time the city had an
193 administrator. Ald. Binash suggested finding out if a current department head was not serving in
194 that role when a city administrator was present. Ald. Binash also suggested finding out if a city
195 administrator would take over a particular department.

196

197 Ron asked if a city administrator is in a sense a director of public works.

198

199 Hope noted that in her research she discovered that some city administrators perform the finance
200 director's duties, some perform planning duties, and some perform human resource duties. Hope
201 said, "It just depends on what that municipality wants them to do and where they want to focus.
202 And I think that's something that this committee can look at and say, 'We think the focus either
203 needs to be here or here.' But ultimately the decision of 'is this going to take a position?' or
204 'how are we going to come up with the money?' [is] really [the decision of the] Finance and
205 Personnel [Committee]. We need to determine if we want to move to a city administrator or a
206 city manager or do we want to keep a full-time mayor or do we want to do one of those other
207 options and explore what we think that should look like."

208

209 Ald. Bertrand asked if the subcommittee will be determining a timeline today or at a future date.

210

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Thursday, September 3, 2015

6

211 Ald. Muth said he believes more will be known after Karl makes his presentation. Ald. Muth
212 said, "Somebody at one of the meetings said this is a rush. It's not a rush, but it's not something
213 that we're just going to sit back and take months and months [to discuss] and then it's involved
214 with the mayor's election. ... If we're going to look at it, that's why we formed this committee.
215 Let's find out what the options are and present them to Finance and Personnel and the full
216 Council and make the decision. What we're doing is basically giving the options – this is what
217 we can look at, this is what it is going to cost, this is what we think is best for the City of
218 Onalaska and [we will] make a recommendation."
219

220 Hope said she will attempt to find out why municipalities converted from having a mayor to a
221 city administrator as well as how the changeover was determined. Hope noted that another
222 question the subcommittee has raised is how difficult it is to recruit city administrators. Hope
223 said she also can examine State of Wisconsin Statutes pertaining to city administrators and share
224 this information with the subcommittee. Hope also said she can examine the previous City of
225 Onalaska administrators' personnel files –if they are still present – to determine their fields of
226 expertise.
227

228 Ald. Bertrand said there would be an overlap of certain job duties, such as the city administrator
229 and the mayor. Ald. Bertrand said, "I know it's a very subjective question, but do you have
230 anything from somebody who is actually involved on a day-to-day basis somewhere?"
231

232 Hope said most of the information she has obtained thus far from the municipalities has shown
233 that the city administrators all have job descriptions, while that is not necessarily the case with
234 the mayors. Hope said she believes the subcommittee will benefit from both Karl's presentation
235 and the information obtained from state statutes.
236

237 Ron noted that the subcommittee has utilized the word "administrator" more than the word
238 "manager" during its discussion and asked if these words are being utilized interchangeably
239 today. Ron also asked, "When we use the word 'administrator' are we saying 'administrator'
240 and not meaning manager?"
241

242 Ald. Muth said, "I think we're meaning both right now. I think maybe after we hear what Karl
243 has to say we'll say, 'No, for us this is what we want. We want one over the other.' "
244

245 Hope noted that the Finance and Personnel Committee meets the first Wednesday before the
246 second Tuesday every month. The Finance and Personnel Committee will meet again on
247 Wednesday, October 7.
248

249 Ald. Bertrand said he has been using the word "administrator" purposely because he has learned
250 that seems to be the more frequently chosen option.
251

252 Ald. Muth reiterated that a city manager has more authority than a city administrator and said, "If
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**Finance & Personnel Committee Subcommittee
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Thursday, September 3, 2015

7

253 I lean toward an administrator, I feel as a Council member that I answer to the citizens. They're
254 my boss. Then we go right down the ladder to administrator. The Council is his or her boss. ...
255 As long as the citizens are the top bosses, they're the ones who decide. If they're not happy with
256 Council members, they have the power to [vote us out] and get somebody to replace us. That's
257 the way it should work. I lean toward an administrator simply because I want the citizens to
258 have the authority."

259

260 Lori said she believes Ald. Binash had raised a valid question in asking if there had been other
261 personal changes associated with having a city administrator.

262

263 Ald. Muth said the Finance and Personnel Committee and the Common Council could decide to
264 eliminate a position if a city administrator is knowledgeable in a certain field.

265

266 Ron asked if it would be worth examining why the city changed back to a mayor from a city
267 administrator in 2000.

268

269 Ald. Muth said he wants to focus on the present.

270

271 Ald. Bertrand said he believes a city administrator should have a two- to three-year probationary
272 period. Ald. Bertrand said, "It would make it easy to kind of mutually agree things are not
273 working or they are working. But then there's an indefinite period after that."

274

275 Ald. Muth said contracts may be written to state that the Council may give a city administrator
276 notice if it wants to make a change, and an administrator may give notice if he or she finds
277 another position.

278

279 Ron said he is concerned that the City of Onalaska will be a steppingstone for a city
280 administrator who wants to advance to a job with a larger salary in a larger city.

281

282 Ald. Muth noted that some of the administrators from the cities Hope surveyed have been in that
283 position for several years.

284

285 Ald. Bertrand said he believes one of the benefits of this area is that individuals who move here
286 tend to want to stay.

287

288 Ald. Muth said candidates can be asked during the interview process if they view the City of
289 Onalaska as a steppingstone.

290

291 Ron said he hopes that a contract with a city administrator would require that he or she must give
292 more than 90 days notice if he or she intends to resign.

293

294 Hope noted that many of the contracts between the municipalities surveyed and their city

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Thursday, September 3, 2015

8

295 administrators have clauses of mutual agreement. Hope said, "If we're going to spend time and
296 money on this, we want to make sure we get the best candidate."

297

298 Ron said, "I see a lot of value in a city administrator. I also think what we have isn't broken. ...
299 I'm torn because I feel that way about what we have, and yet I see advantages to an
300 administrator."

301

302 Ald. Bertrand asked Ron what he believes the city would gain by having an administrator.

303

304 Ron said reiterated Ald. Muth's point that a new mayor could be elected every four years and
305 would have to learn what he or she needs to know to serve effectively. Ron said, "That could be
306 overwhelming. On the other hand, I also think a mayor becomes the point person for the
307 community. I think it's important to have somebody like that who can be respected and speak
308 for the community at different functions and be a true leader for the city and advocate for the city
309 to the state legislature and to the Governor and to the county. I don't know that an administrator
310 is going to be ... Maybe they'll be as good at that, but those are my concerns."

311

312 Ald. Bertrand noted it seems that several of the municipalities have both a city administrator and
313 a mayor and said he believes a municipality must have a mayor. Ald. Bertrand said, "I think that
314 people in our city and in a lot of cities are familiar with the mayor. I like the mayor. I want to
315 have the opportunity to elect somebody. It's fine to have the administrator. He or she is
316 functioning at a capacity just like the department heads are. But I want to have somebody to
317 elect besides the Council."

318

319 Ald. Binash said he believes the subcommittee has "excellent starting points" in that its members
320 favor a city administrator, as does he. Ald. Binash also said the subcommittee has stated it
321 believes a city administrator should run the city, while the mayor should serve as an advocate for
322 the city. Ald. Binash said, "You already have a separate distinction between what you want the
323 city administrator for and what you want the mayor for. If you want to build on that description,
324 I think that would help your committee as to the direction you want to go with the personnel that
325 you think you want to go."

326

327 Ron raised a concern over a city administrator potentially being involved in a conflict with the
328 police chief that results in the city administrator dismissing the police chief.

329

330 Hope noted that neither a police chief nor a fire chief may be terminated by a city administrator
331 as there must be a hearing process and the mayor and the Police and Fire Commission must be
332 involved. Hope said, "Conflicts do happen whether you have a mayor or whether you have an
333 administrator. It's just a matter of working through those conflicts and sometimes just agreeing
334 to disagree."

335

336 Ald. Bertrand said a city administrator will have to have strong interpersonal skills and work to

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Thursday, September 3, 2015

9

337 earn the respect of the staff so that the situation Ron described can be avoided.

338

339 Hope said decisions regarding finances still will be made by the Council and noted she has seen
340 in the job descriptions for city administrators that they work within whatever the
341 recommendations of the policy decisions made by the mayor and the Council.

342

343 The subcommittee agreed to meet again at 4 p.m. on Thursday, September 10.

344

345 **Adjournment**

346

347 Motion by Ald. Muth, second by Ald. Bertrand, to adjourn.

348

349 On voice vote, motion carried.

350

351

352 Recorded by:

353

354 Kirk Bey