

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

Thursday, September 10, 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 10, 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: Mayor Joe Chilsen, Ald. Jim Bialecki, Ald. Jim Binash, Human Resource Director
9 Hope Burchell

10

11 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

12

13 Motion by Ald. Bertrand, second by Ron, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as
14 printed and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

15

16 On voice vote, motion carried.

17

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

19

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

22

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

24

25 **Item 4 – Review and consideration of hiring a full-time City Administrator or City
26 Manager and review of options for Mayor position**

27

28 Hope said she had sent some of the State of Wisconsin Statutes from Karl Green’s presentation
29 at Tuesday evening’s Common Council meeting. Hope also noted she had obtained ordinance
30 information from a selection of municipalities, including Eau Claire, Middleton, Tomah and
31 Holmen. Hope said she had not been able to obtain a significant amount of data related to a city
32 administrator; however, she had found information related to a town administrator. Hope said
33 she believes most of the municipalities she has contacted had some form of a city ordinance.
34 Hope said she also had asked the municipalities why they had converted to a city administrator
35 or city manager, and if there had been a referendum. While not every municipality has
36 responded, some have been very forthcoming with information. Hope said she hopes to gather
37 more information and asked for additional time to contact municipalities by telephone so the
38 subcommittee will have more time to analyze the data at its next meeting.

39

40 Ald. Bertrand asked Hope if she is allowed to share her general impressions from what she has
41 learned.

42

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43 Hope told Ald. Bertrand she is hesitant to share her impressions at this time because she still has
44 not obtained sufficient data.

45

46 Ald. Bertrand said he likes the fact some of the municipalities that have responded have made
47 positive comments regarding the city administrator or city manager position.

48

49 Hope said the City of Eau Claire is the only municipality from which she has obtained
50 information so far that has done a referendum.

51

52 Ald. Bertrand asked if it is reasonable to assume that Hope will be able to obtain the data she has
53 requested but not yet received.

54

55 Ald. Muth asked if this information is public record.

56

57 Hope said the documents are public record, but noted that municipalities might not have concrete
58 data regarding a city administrator or city manager. Hope said she wants to follow up with the
59 municipalities that had not answered specific questions.

60

61 Ron noted the municipalities had been asked about the positive experiences of their particular
62 form of city government and asked if municipalities generally will speak positively about their
63 form of government.

64

65 Ald. Muth asked if the municipalities should be asked if they have had either a positive or
66 negative experience with their form of government.

67

68 Ald. Bertrand suggested asking municipalities what their experience has been with that form of
69 government. This will allow them to share whether their experience has been positive or
70 negative.

71

72 Ron referred to Karl Green's presentation during Tuesday night's Common Council meeting and
73 said it is his understanding there is no mention of the word 'administrator' in State of Wisconsin
74 Statutes.

75

76 Hope noted she had examined the statutes (60.0) and said the reference she had found referred to
77 "the town area."

78

79 Ron reiterated it is his understanding that there is no mention of a city administrator in state
80 statutes. Ron also said City Attorney Sean O'Flaherty had pointed out there is a reference to a
81 city administrator in State Statute 62.09.

82

83 Lori said this statute references the delegation of some duties that did not require a charter.

84

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85 Ald. Muth said he had asked Karl to define what a city administrator is and what a city manager
86 is.

87

88 Ald. Bialecki said city administrators and city managers are covered under two different sections
89 of state statutes. Ald. Bialecki said a city manager typically will be “more empowered” than a
90 city administrator. Ald. Bialecki also noted that neither Eau Claire nor Fond du Lac have a
91 mayor. A city manager leads both cities, and the common councils in both municipalities elect a
92 vice president who oversees meetings. Ald. Bialecki said any decisions made by the city
93 manager that the council wants to overturn require a two-thirds vote. However, Ald. Bialecki
94 also pointed out that the city manager position is not “all-powerful” and said it is essential to
95 have a contract that specifically states what either a full-time city manager or city administrator
96 can and cannot do.

97

98 Hope said several of the ordinances she has read list the duties of a city administrator or city
99 manager. Hope also noted several municipalities also have contracts that state the specific duties
100 and job descriptions of a city administrator or city manager.

101

102 Ald. Muth and Ald. Bertrand both said their primary concern is the fiscal impact a city
103 administrator would have on the city. Ald. Muth said he wants the Common Council to have this
104 information.

105

106 Hope said it is the subcommittee’s duty to determine if the city should consider hiring a city
107 administrator or city manager and if so, what his/her duties should be. Hope said the
108 subcommittee also is charged with determining if the city should employ a part-time mayor.
109 Hope said the subcommittee must decide which avenue it believes the city should pursue, but she
110 also said the city will not take any action if it is not financially feasible.

111

112 Ald. Binash noted he had had a telephone conversation with a constituent who asked him if it
113 was necessary to have a city administrator.

114

115 Ald. Bialecki said, “I think this group was tasked as a subcommittee to make a recommendation
116 back to [the Council]. Should we have a full-time administrator, a manager, or remain with the
117 mayor? If in fact you choose other than the mayor, then it goes back to the Finance and
118 Personnel Committee to justify it fiscally and find the money.”

119

120 Ald. Bertrand said, “So what you’re saying is we’re kind of blind at this point to the dollars for
121 saying the concept sounds good or is good based on this information – yes, we’d like to see this
122 or no, we would not like to see this. Is that what you’re saying?”

123

124 Ald. Bialecki said yes.

125

126 Mayor Chilsen told the subcommittee it is examining the concept and said the Finance and
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127 Personnel Committee will be tasked with the financial aspect.

128

129 Ron said that while he sees the advantages of having a city administrator, he also said, "I really
130 would favor us having a mayor who represents the city, who speaks for the city, and who is
131 elected by the city. Jim, you mentioned that Eau Claire is one of the few cities that does not have
132 a mayor. But they elect at large a council president. They have 10 council members and one at-
133 large who is a council president."

134

135 Ald. Bialecki pointed out that the council president only presides over the meetings.

136

137 Ron reiterated he believes it is beneficial for a city to be represented by a mayor who will
138 advocate for Onalaska.

139

140 Ald. Bertrand said it seems to him that a city administrator "is here to run a business" and does
141 not have the time or the charge to perform the same duties as a mayor. Ald. Bertrand said, "It
142 seems to me as though I don't think we can do without the mayor. ... Money aside, we're going
143 to find somebody that is qualified [to be a city administrator], has experience in the job of being
144 CEO of a government entity, and is hopefully going to be here over the long term. Yes, there are
145 negatives. But it seems to me the positives [to having a city administrator] are so compelling,
146 and it is so compelling to have a mayor along with that."

147

148 Ron said he agrees with Ald. Bertrand, but he also said he believes the city will have difficulty
149 attracting and retaining a quality city administrator.

150

151 Lori asked Hope if any of the municipalities had told her if staffing had been impacted by hiring
152 a city administrator.

153

154 Hope noted that a personnel director had resigned in one municipality, while another
155 municipality reduced the mayor's position from full time to part time. Hope said it will be
156 difficult to obtain such information from other municipalities if there is no one on staff who has
157 institutional knowledge. Hope said it will then become necessary for her to make a specific
158 records request.

159

160 Lori inquired about the city's previous conversion to a city administrator.

161

162 Hope said she does not believe any staffing changes had been made.

163

164 Ron asked if one of the negatives to having a city administrator is that he/she would not be an
165 elected official.

166

167 Ald. Muth and Ald. Bertrand both said they view that as a positive. Ald. Muth said, "I see it as a
168 ladder. The citizens control the Common Council. The Common Council has the obligation to

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169 control the manager or city administrator. They're running it like a business, so if we're not
170 doing our job the citizens [vote us out of office]. If we have an administrator or manager that is
171 not doing his or her job the same thing goes. We have something in the contract to part ways."

172
173 Ron asked if the citizens would believe that this is excessive bureaucracy.

174
175 Ald. Muth said, "I think we're looking at the difference between a mayor and an administrator,
176 and I think we discussed this at the last meeting. A mayor is elected by popular vote no matter
177 what his or her qualifications are, their abilities or anything like that. That's the mayor's
178 position. Hopefully voters would look at their qualifications and why they voted for that person.
179 But the bottom line is some mayors are not ... I ran for mayor –and I said it last time – the more
180 I think about it and the more I concentrate on it I would have been uncomfortable had I been
181 elected because basically I am relying on staff to run the city. An administrator or a manager has
182 the education, the training and the experience to hopefully work with the staff. ... We've had
183 good mayors. We have a good mayor. But can the city do better going the other way? I think
184 that's what we're looking at."

185
186 Ald. Bertrand said continuity is important, noting the city administrator position will not change
187 with an election.

188
189 Lori said citizens will want to know how a city administrator will help make the city government
190 function more efficiently.

191
192 Ald. Bertrand said this is something both he and the rest of the subcommittee must examine.

193
194 Ron noted that Ald. Bialecki has served as both a mayor (City of Onalaska) and a city
195 administrator (City of Tomah) and said he would like him to share what he believes are the
196 positives and negatives.

197
198 Ald. Bialecki said he does not believe Onalaska will have a city manager and stated, "However,
199 a qualified administrator will understand all aspects of every department as if they were in that
200 department alone." Ald. Bialecki noted that it would take at least six months to fill a position
201 such as Human Resource Director, Land Use and Development Director or Financial Services
202 Director/Treasurer if there were a vacancy. Ald. Bialecki said, "At least you have someone [in a
203 city administrator] who knows how to handle that, and more importantly, understands the
204 program and understands the fiscal aspect too. I just think, in my opinion, at this time that
205 perhaps the best route for us is to go in that direction [hiring a city administrator]. They're very
206 versed in everything."

207
208 Ald. Bialecki noted there have been instances where cities have not checked the qualifications of
209 individuals and thus encountered difficulties. Ald. Bialecki said it is important to establish the
210 job duties and the qualifications for a city administrator and suggested that the focus be on public

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211 administration. Ald. Bialecki noted that when he was hired as City Administrator for the City of
212 Tomah he was given a book detailing what was expected of him and what his salary would be.
213 There also was an agreement that one party would give the other party 90 days notice if there
214 was to be a parting of ways. Ald. Bialecki said he believes in most instances a city administrator
215 will have his or her contract extended.

216
217 Mayor Chilsen said he believes a part-time mayor could take some actions from a public
218 relations standpoint and a development standpoint to help the city move forward. Mayor Chilsen
219 said he also believes a city needs someone who is well-versed in public administration.

220
221 Ald. Bertrand said it is likely the city will face an increased cost for the salaries of a city
222 administrator and a mayor and asked Ald. Bialecki, "Do you feel that we need to be compelled in
223 talking to the citizenry to justify the cost difference? Can you see that we're handling
224 government more efficiently so that we're making up that money? How do you respond to
225 that?"

226
227 Ald. Bialecki said, "I would go at that differently. I would focus more on the position or the
228 qualifications and the expectations of the city. And if in fact these goals are accomplished, then
229 we'll talk about economics. I'll be clear with that, too. There's no doubt in my mind that if
230 you're going to go to a city administrator you're not going to get one for \$60,000 a year. But
231 most communities that I have experience with have had very good luck with everybody in there.
232 It all kind of comes down to the agreements. The only thing that could come up from time to
233 time that might be a negative to a city administrator is that sometimes you might get a part-time
234 mayor in there and they don't get along with the city administrator. Sometimes mayors want to
235 do this, this and that. It needs to be clear that when you write this agreement with this city
236 administrator it will specify that you are responsible for city operations and not the mayor. If
237 there are problems there, that position reports to the Common Council. There are some checks
238 and balances there."

239
240 Mayor Chilsen said it is important to have a Common Council president who will work closely
241 with both the city administrator and the part-time mayor.

242
243 Ron asked who would break a tie in a Common Council vote.

244
245 Ald. Bialecki said the mayor would, noting that the city administrator does not have a vote. Ald.
246 Bialecki also said a city administrator's job description would be spelled out in his or her
247 contract. This includes the expectation that he or she would bring forward to the Council the
248 right recommendations to consider.

249
250 Ron reiterated he believes it might be difficult for the city to attract and retain a city
251 administrator and asked if there are individuals who have chosen city administration as a career.

252

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253 Ald. Bialecki asked Hope to go to icma.org, the website for the International City/County
254 Management Association. This site lists open positions in the country as well as job descriptions
255 and salaries.

256

257 Ron noted that a new mayor can be elected every four years and said it is possible the city could
258 have a new administrator every two years.

259

260 Ald. Bialecki said, "I think the city has a pretty good history of growth and a lot of other things
261 behind it. ... I think you're going to attract a lot of candidates. Now it's up to you to pick the
262 right one."

263

264 Mayor Chilsen said he believes Onalaska would be an attractive destination due to its growth and
265 agreed with Ald. Bialecki in that he also believes the pool of candidates would be exceptional.

266

267 Ron said he believes there are other areas in the state that are equally attractive as Onalaska and
268 would pay a higher salary.

269

270 Ald. Bertrand said that while there are risks with any decision, he believes hiring a city
271 administrator is a risk worth taking.

272

273 Ald. Muth asked if there are any questions Hope could ask the municipalities she will be
274 contacting.

275

276 Ron suggested asking if there are any negatives to the form of government they utilize.

277

278 Ald. Bertrand suggested that perhaps the subcommittee could by the completion of its next
279 meeting establish goals or criteria.

280

281 Ald. Bialecki noted that Mayor Chilsen's term expires in April 2016 and said the subcommittee
282 must be mindful of timeframes if the city pursues a city administrator. Ald. Bialecki also noted
283 that the city must establish a funding mechanism during the budget process if a city administrator
284 is to be hired.

285

286 Hope said she hopes to obtain more data from the municipalities so the subcommittee has
287 sufficient information. Hope also said she agrees with Ald. Bertrand that the subcommittee
288 should strive to establish goals and objectives by the end of its next meeting. Hope said the goal
289 would be to have a recommendation for the Finance and Personnel Committee by October.

290

291 Ald. Bialecki said he believes the fact there are only six members on the Common Council will
292 be attractive to city administrator candidates.

293

294 Ald. Muth asked the subcommittee to examine the two positions (mayor, city administrator) and

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295 determine the positives and the negatives of each. Ald. Muth said, "I think what we're supposed
296 to be doing is giving the Finance and Personnel Committee a recommendation of the good or bad
297 of going this way. I would like to be able to explain why we pick a position and why we went to
298 that position."

299

300 The subcommittee will meet again at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, September 22.

301

302 **Adjournment**

303

304 Motion by Ald. Muth, second by Ald. Bertrand, to adjourn at 4:57 p.m.

305

306 On voice vote, motion carried.

307

308

309 Recorded by:

310

311 Kirk Bey