

COUNTY MANAGER

Chapter 6. ADMINISTRATION

6.30 County Administrator

The County Administrator shall be responsible to the County Chair for the administration of the affairs of County government. The County Administrator's duties and responsibilities shall be more specifically set forth in an ordinance adopted by the Board. The County Administrator shall be appointed in the same manner as all other department heads.

Advantages:

Defines the County Administrator's job in the Charter, assuring its continuation. Requires Board approval of the job description and role, as well as confirmation of the person appointed. Charter should provide high level guidance of the role, not specific job definition, so the board can adapt as needed to changing conditions. Chair retains appointment and sole responsibility for county operations, limiting disruption of important county operations, maintaining Commissioner's ability to advocate for constituents, and retaining a sole point of clear authority and accountability.

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. 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.
- e. The current hybrid structure lacks some of the elements of an appointed county manager found in other counties.
- f. The current hybrid structure could be reversed by the actions of a future board.

- g. 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.'
- h. The current structure creates a broad portfolio of responsibilities for the Chief Operating Officer which are not specified in the Charter.
- i. Two current commissioners support a Charter amendment to establish a county manager who would be appointed and managed by the Board.
- j. The current chair and two commissioners oppose amending 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.

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.
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 County'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.