



**Commissioner Judy Shiprack**  
**MULTNOMAH COUNTY OREGON**

District 3

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Multnomah County Charter Review Committee

Dear Members of the Committee,

This committee is a unique opportunity for appointed citizens to review the structure of our county and propose improvements to the voters. I thank you for your service and commitment to the effort. Thank you for providing time to highlight some issues I see facing Multnomah County.

Multnomah County has been on the cutting edge of public safety reform, early childhood education, and library services. When meeting with colleagues from other counties across the country, I often hear of Multnomah County's reputation as an innovator and leader in many areas. The following issues are ones I believe can take our work even further.

**Board Appointed County Administrator.** Multnomah County is a diverse and growing place, and the demand for safety net services has increased in proportion with the population. The Multnomah County government has an annual budget of \$1.7 billion and a workforce of over 5,000 employees. The complexity and depth of issues we face on any given day are enormous. In this environment it is critical we retain a stable senior level administrative presence.

By charter, the Multnomah County Chair is the chief administrative officer for the county. Since I was first elected in 2008, I have served with five different county chairs. The administrative instability that results from such constant turn over can make effective governing difficult. Most governments our size have a board appointed manager that oversees the day-to-day operations of the organization. Multnomah County is unique in that we lack such a position. If that position were established in the charter, I believe our county would operate more efficiently and effectively.

In our existing structure, the Multnomah County Chair serves in both an executive and political capacity. Previous chairs have established positions such as the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Administrative Officer with the responsibility for overseeing daily county operations. However this arrangement is problematic for several reasons. The individual is a political appointee under no requirement to remain once a new chair comes to office. Their duties and responsibilities shift from administration to administration. As an appointee of the chair, they respond directly to them and not the board as a whole. And, most importantly, this structure injects a political component into the routine matters of governance.



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A board appointed county administrator would improve this setup. It would ensure increased stability as the composition of the Board changes. It would guarantee high level management by a professional trained in public administration. The position would insulate regular administrative decisions from politicization. In this scenario, the Chair would remain the county's chief executive officer. The County Manager would be appointed by the Board and serve at their pleasure, while overseeing the daily functions of Multnomah County.

I strongly believe this change has the potential to significantly improve the way we do business at Multnomah County. I hope the Charter Review Committee will consider taking an in depth examination of this issue.

**Jail Administration.** Professional public management should be the standard in other parts of the Multnomah County government. Another area to consider changes is the office of Sheriff. As the amount of unincorporated county land has decreased in recent decades, the Sheriff's Office has transitioned from a patrol centric force to one focused on operating the county jails. While some Sheriff Deputies continue limited patrol and field functions, most serve as correction officers at either the Multnomah County Detention Center or Inverness Jail. The days of the Sheriff being the "top cop" in the region have long passed.

Since most of the Sheriff's duties focus on jail operations, we should consider if the best way to select that individual is through a popular election. More than 40,000 individuals cycle through the Multnomah County jail system each year. A lack of alternative community based treatment programs means our jail has become the de facto place to house individuals suffering from mental illness. We are not unique in this regard and Multnomah County is making progress in diverting low level offenders with mental health issues from jail; several programs are already in place to treat individuals in the community. But more can be done.

The level of sophistication and complexity in our modern corrections system requires flexible and innovative solutions. Our jails are not isolated institutions existing in a vacuum. They are part of a larger, dynamic public safety system. The individual in charge must see this larger picture. Unfortunately the Sheriff election is rarely competitive and often only sought after by law enforcement officials. A board appointed sheriff would allow the county commissioners, themselves tasked with seeing a broad picture of county policy, to select a candidate based on their professional merits and not political characteristics. Insulating the Sheriff position from popular vote would allow the individual to focus on jail administration. They would ensure the facility is utilized for its intended purpose: holding individuals accountable and keeping them detained for a period of time.



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Significant criminal justice reforms are taking place across this country. Multnomah County is already a part of some of those initiatives. Amending our charter to establish an appointed Sheriff would aid in the efforts already underway.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide information to the committee. My staff has conducted research into these issues and are happy to provide more details if needed. I look forward to further discussions on these and other important matters you may wish to take up in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Judy Shiprack  
Multnomah County Commissioner  
District 3