



Grays Harbor County

Assessment and Review of Potential Duties and Roles for a Proposed New Position of County Administrator

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I. INTRODUCTION

Grays Harbor County Board of Commissioners contracted with GMP Consultants, a public sector consulting group, to assess the potential of a new County Administrator position including duties and roles. The consultant's scope of work is to provide the Commissioners with recommendations for:

- Roles, responsibilities and authority to delegate to a new position of County Administrator, to provide supervision for certain County functions and operations currently overseen by Commission members.
- A job description for a new County Administrator position identifying work responsibilities, delegated authority, areas of supervision, education and experience needed as well as compensation.
- A resolution adopting the County Administrator position.

In preparation of this report, interviews were conducted with the Commissioners, other County elected officials, department directors and key operations staff. Relevant County documents were reviewed as were job descriptions of county administrators or managers of other counties in Washington State.

BACKGROUND

Grays Harbor County, population 76,488, operates under the commission form of government. The County governing body consists of a partisan three-member board of commissioners, who serve as the County's legislative body and perform executive functions. To help with the increasing complexity of County activities and the range of responsibilities the Commission is considering establishing a County Administrator position. The Commission recognizes the new County Administrator position potentially represents a significant change to the County's daily operation. As a part of creating the new position, the Commission intends to identify the duties and responsibilities including any departments supervision as well as what delegated authority the Commission provides to the position.



WORK EFFORT

INTRODUCTORY MEETINGS

Kick-off meeting with the Commissioners & Human Resource Director

- Establish project timelines
- Review project scope of work and goals of the assessment

TASKS

- Review all documents as provided to GMP
- Interview all Commissioners individually
- Interview Department Directors
- Interview Elected Officials
- Summarize interviews
- Meet with Commissioners to review initial findings to discuss potential roles and responsibilities
- Develop preliminary summary of County Administrator roles and responsibilities and a draft job description
- Meet with the Commissioner to review the draft job description and update as needed
- Work with Prosecuting Attorney to put into resolution format
- Present final document to the Commission

II. METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW DISCUSSION

When considering establishing a new county administrator position that would have a significant impact on the organization it is often useful to review how other counties have utilized professional management. There are several counties in Washington of comparable size and complexity as Grays Harbor County that have either a county administrator or county manager. Some counties (Clallam, 1977, San Juan, 2006, and Clark, 2015) have gone through a County Charter process to add appointed administrative positions.

Not surprisingly each county uses a somewhat unique approach. San Juan and Clark Counties changed their form of government by charter, creating a county manager position who is by law the County's chief administrative officer. By charter, Clallam County has had an administrator, combined with commissioners since 1977. Lewis County also has a "county manager" position; however, the County still utilizes the commission form of government and delegates all administrative authority to its County Manager by resolution. Island County has recently hired its first County Administrator. They have established the position by adopting a job description and have delegated supervisory responsibilities to specific departments and have retained hiring and firing authority and supervision of other County departments.

There is not one "Best Practice" model that could provide guidance for the Commission to follow. In the end the Commission will need to create a County Administrator position that best fits the unique needs of Grays Harbor County.

The Grays Harbor County assessment occurred in July and August including interviews with the



Board of Commissioners, all appointed department directors, all elected directors of the County and several key management staff. The nature of an assessment of this type is to identify challenges with the current organization's structure and report relationships that impede the Commissioners from achieving optimal effectiveness vis-à-vis their governance priorities and obligations.

Discussions and interviews with Commission members, appointed directors and other elected county officials revealed several themes including:

- Increased opportunities for the Commissioners to represent Grays Harbor County and engage with elected and appointed individuals at the local, regional, state and federal levels and organizations, agencies, and institutions internal and external to the County.
- More time for the Commissioners to focus on strategic planning, policy development and oversight planning, implementation commitment and execution.
- Modification of the County's organizational structure to allow the Commissioners to focus on developing and guiding the County's mission and to untangle them from day-to-day operational implementation, personnel matters and other department-level activities.
- Establishment of a structure to enable the Commissioners to intentionally and strategically improve the quality, quantity and frequency of communications between its body, citizens, residents, the greater community and independently elected officials.
- Professional leadership to systematically improve operational processes to gain efficiencies, increase departmental and organizational effectiveness, and identify and eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy – with appropriate delegated responsibilities, authority and span of control.
- It was noted that many felt the County Administrator should not be a gatekeeper but rather could function as a facilitator and collaborator who would keep the best interests of the County in mind, not just an individual department or a particular constituency. Many felt that regular department head meetings with the County Administrator will also reinforce the "team" nature of the County's departments, something that was noted as lacking during several interviews.
- Reduction in the number of direct reports to the Commissioners.
- Some felt there may not be funding for the position, others thought it was money well spent.
- Some of those interviewed were concerned about not having continued direct access to the Board.



III. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

Continuous Improvement - Throughout this assessment, and particularly in our interviews with County elected and appointed leaders. GMP noted a strong commitment to continuous improvement as evidenced by the comments of those interviewed. Many said the County Administrator position will need to have the resources and authority necessary to effectively serve as the County's chief operating officer. GMP found the team of department heads to be capable and committed to improving Grays Harbor operations.

Organization and Culture - GMP's baseline review of County operations found instances of blurred lines between governance and operations responsibilities. In some cases, Commissioner's oversight was at the managerial level consistent with a commission form of governance and several directors saw their respective Commissioner liaison as their manager. Shifting away from the Commissioner liaison as an administrative organizing principle will help the County evolve to a more efficient structure where Commissioners govern, adopt policies and provide strategic oversight; and a County Administrator oversees the daily operations and acts as primary conduit between operations and elected officials.

Process Efficiency - It was clear from the interviews that by taking steps to empower and resource a County Administrator, while at the same time clarifying and adhering to reporting lines, would also yield important process efficiencies. In general, and on a day-to-day basis, Commissioners contact with departments would be through a County Administrator. Several observed that a commissioner is often newly elected or only a short time in their term making it difficult for them to have the expertise and organizational experience to oversee the day-to-day operations of programs and projects.

Improved Coordination - Many of those interviewed thought the new position would improve coordination across departments and deepen the collective planning capacity of the County's leadership team. GMP noted Commissioners as a Board might not be currently getting all the information available needed to make an informed decision and that this could improve by a County Administrator charged with keeping all Commissioners equally informed. Rather than individual department heads presenting independently to a commissioner liaison a County Administrator would review departmental reports to ensure a consistent format and not only will a concise message but also alternatives leading to perhaps better policy direction.

Implementation Considerations – Introducing or adding a County Administrator position will be of benefit to the County, however, it will require continuous effort from the Commissioners and department directors and the other elected officials to be successful and function at an optimal level. The committee system, which has evolved in the absence of centralized leadership, has resulted in Commissioners serving in an administrative role that goes beyond policy governance and oversight. Establishing a clear line between governance and operations would empower a County Administrator to serve more effectively as the leader of the County's operations – from a planning, management, information and accountability standpoint. A County Administrator and the Commissioners can partner in the County's best interests most effectively when each serves its own respective role.



IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

GMP views these recommendations as opportunities to create positive impacts in the areas of organization, culture and process efficiencies.

- **We recommend** that the County create a County Administrator position. A County Administrator would be a significant step forward and would provide the County with an excellent opportunity to improve its functionality. A County Administrator, empowered to serve as Chief Operating Officer, will provide the Commission with a primary point of contact. This will serve not only to streamline the flow of information from County departments to the Commissioners, but also will contribute to greater administrative coherence across departments. The new County Administrator will have only specific authority the Commissioners choose to delegate to the position. The Commissioners have a number of considerations and opportunities when contemplating what departments and divisions should report to this new position and the degree of authority delegated to the new position.
- **We recommend** that the County consider using an interim County Administrator prior to hiring a permanent candidate. The creation of this position will represent a major administrative change to the daily operation of the County and may require some mid-course corrections and updates before reaching a fully functional County Administrator role. Its often useful for an interim to help with these updates prior to recruiting a permanent County Administrator.
- **We recommend** the County Commissioners consider one of the following three options when creating the County Administrator position.
 - A. **Chief Operating Officer** - A County Administrator empowered to serve as chief operating officer with supervision and hiring and firing authority of all appointed directors and functions currently reporting to the Commission. This will serve not only to streamline the flow of information from County departments to the Commissioners, but also will contribute to greater administrative coherence across departments and accountability of the departments. While representing the potential for the greatest efficiency it also represents the biggest organizational adjustment for the County and will require a significant change to current organizational process and procedures.
 - B. **County Administrator with Certain Department and Function Management** – This option includes the daily supervision of all appointed directors and corresponding departments and functions but shares hiring and firing authority with the Commission. Over time the commissioners could plan for and implement a transition whereby it would delegate to the position full day-to-day responsibility and authority including supervision and hiring and firing authority of all appointed directors and the



employees in those departments. While still representing a significant change to the current organization it will have the benefit of having centralized management yet provides the Commissioners with some administrative authority. This alternative could have the unintended consequences of sending the message that it is still acceptable to contact Commissioners directly by passing the County Administrator as the Commission has retained some administrative authority.

- C. Administrative Services Director** - A County Administrator position by title assuming the duties of an administrative services director which would be provided substantially less delegated responsibilities and authority from the Commissioners. This role would also assume the supervision of the Budget Director position and the Clerk of the Board. This would provide for and allow the Commissioner to maintain greater oversight, authority and control over the County's day-to-day operations including hiring and firing authority. The position would serve more in the role of a facilitator and collaborator and would provide for more coordination and interaction between departments.
- **We Recommend** the Commissioners consider the following compendium of potential job duties assembled from GMP's observations of the Grays Harbor County organization and of several peer positions of other counties in the region when considering which option is best for the County depending on which of the three County Administrator options is chosen.
 - Works with and assists the Commission in developing and implementing their goals, vision and strategic public policy direction (such as budget and finance, communications, land use, natural resources, economic development, transportation, and social services.)
 - Serves as adviser and supports the Commissioners by keeping them informed on key matters, facilitate discussion on critical issues and support their deliberations with information on future trends and appropriate alternatives.
 - Directs and coordinates the overall administrative functions of County government per BOCC policies, procedures, goals and objectives.
 - Serves as liaison between Commissioners and County department directors, and other governmental entities at the local, state, federal level, and the public.
 - Develops a County wide legislative agenda to facilitate infrastructure improvement and implements a plan for community and economic development.
 - Provides recommendations on a variety of policy, administrative and managerial matters. Research issues and problems, develop recommendations and report results to the Commissioners.
 - Leads the tactical and strategic operational and capital planning activities of the County.
 - Directs appointed departments and performs the full range of managerial oversight functions: reviews and recommends as to changes in organizational structure, budget, staffing levels, financial management, planning, policy development, program



- oversight, performance management and accountability, and the prioritization of fiscal, human and capital resources.
- Oversees the County's human resources system, including personnel policies, employee relations and labor negotiations.
 - Develops, recommends and implements administrative policies and procedures that foster effective and efficient operation of County government, as adopted by the Board. Implement projects and plans developed by the Commissioners.
 - Acts as intermediary between Board of County Commissioners and appointed department heads, and managers.
 - Establishes and maintains continuing liaison and positive relationships with citizens' interest groups, committees and boards, other local governments and the general public.
 - Functions as public information officer for the Board of County Commissioners' Office, maintaining a good working relationship with media sources and public interest groups.
 - Facilitates appointments, and then supervises and evaluates the duties and performance required of appointed department heads and managers of county departments, offices and functional areas delegated to this position by the Board of County Commissioners. Serves a central point for approval of vacation, sick leave and travel. When necessary, recommend to the Board of County Commissioners the sanction or removal of appointed department heads and managers.
 - Coordinates and facilitates the activities of county departments, offices and functional areas delegated by the Board of County Commissioners. Carry out the strategic plans, uphold core values, and implement policies and programs of the Board of County Commissioners.
 - Organizes briefings between departments, elected officials and other governmental entities at the local, state, federal level, and the public.
 - Conducts research and special studies as requested; prepares reports with recommendations for appropriate action.
 - Prepares or delegates the preparation of a variety of documents, including resolutions, ordinances, contracts, correspondence, memoranda, reports, media releases, speeches, official documents and similar materials on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners' Office.
 - Develops, implements and monitors budgets for departments and functions delegated by the Board of County Commissioners. Coordinates multiple funding sources necessary to finance different County operations in accordance with applicable federal and state laws; develops and identifies alternate revenue sources as necessary.
 - Supervises the budget process from initial preparation through adoption; monitors the budget status. Provides financial analysis and recommendations on all issues affecting the operations and fiscal integrity of the County.
 - Approves budget changes in compliance with County policy.
 - Serves as the advisor to the Board of Commissioners on overall county budget requirements and long-range finance. The Commission has final budget authority.



- Provides the Board of County Commissioners with recommendations concerning department staffing, structure, and strategic allocation of County resources.
- Coordinates with other County Elected officials to ensure their operations are supported as required and develops consensus with these Offices in developing County-wide policies, procedures, etc. that may impact their operations. In addition, direct the enforcement of human resource policies and practices through a central human resources department.
- Provides selected centralized management functions for technology, capital facilities planning, human resources, labor relations and labor negotiating efforts, public contracting, purchasing, risk management and other support functions.
- Ensures compliance with state and federal laws, ordinances, service contracts and all orders, policies, rules, procedures and regulations adopted by the Board of County Commissioners.
- Serves on various committees and acts as a representative of the County to outside agencies; serves as a primary liaison to other government entities regarding departmental projects and issues.
- Prepares and maintains a variety of departmental records, reports, and documentation
- Continuously monitors and evaluates the efficiency, service quality and cost effectiveness of the County's governance and service delivery to the citizens of the County. Recommends and implements actions to maintain and improve services.
- Develops and manages the County's communications strategy. Oversee the process by which citizen communications and community relations are addressed by county departments. Serves as lead communicator to the public on county activities.
- Analyzes the impact of legislation on County government operations as required and desired
- Acts within the scope of his or her responsibilities, working as a public employee and municipal officer with courtesy and professionalism, and adhering to the highest standard of ethics in accordance with RCW 42.52.
- Other related duties and special projects as assigned by the County Board of Commissioners.

V. NEXT STEPS

Once the Commissioners have reviewed all recommended options and have provided guidance on which alternatives best suits the needs of the County, GMP will:

- Develop a job description incorporating the Commissioner's direction on job duties and authority
- Draft an implementing resolution establishing the County Administrator position for legal review.