

Morrow County Budget Committee Meeting
Wednesday, January 29, 2020
Bartholomew Building Upper Conference Room
Heppner, Oregon

Present

Commissioner Melissa Lindsay
Commissioner Don Russell
Commissioner Jim Doherty
Linda LaRue, Budget Committee
Kim Cutsforth, Budget Committee

Darrell Green, County Administrator
Kate Knop, Finance Director
Deanne Irving, Staff Accountant
Roberta Lutcher, Executive Assistant

Jeff Wenholtz, Budget Committee, Absent

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: 9:00a.m.

Opening Comments

Commissioner Melissa Lindsay

Commissioner Lindsay recapped the reason for the meeting stating that the Budget Committee met in December, requested new information, then planned to reconvene prior to the meeting of the Compensation Board.

Commissioner Russell discussed the history of the tax collection duties of the County. Tax Collection duties at one point had been completed by the Sheriff's Office. After a dispute, the County Court appointed as Tax Collector, Marilyn Childers, and served as her supervisor. Upon her retirement on February 1, 2001, the tax collection duties were moved to the Assessor's Office. Ms. Gayle Gutierrez was elected to the Office of Treasurer and started her term in 1997. The question is now whether the Treasurer's position is compensated fairly compared to other Treasurers around the State.

Commissioner Lindsay referred to the ORS regarding changes made to compensation of Elected Officers, and that ultimately the Budget Committee makes that decision and why they have been called now, to expedite the decision for the current election cycle, and to clarify what that position will look like. The County has a history of looking at these positions at the election cycle.

Commissioner Lindsay reviewed the Treasurer's ORS and the related duties. She also referred to the Oregon Association of Counties Elected Officials Salary Survey available in the packet.

Public Comment

Gayle Gutierrez, Morrow County Treasurer

When elected Treasurer in 1996, Ms. Gutierrez thought that all Treasurer duties were the same across the State. Each county is very different and that is why the compensation committee has a difficult time comparing Elected Officials. Some have additional duties, such as tax collections

and generally have additional help. Last year over \$94 million went through Morrow County's Treasurer's Office. The Treasurer reported all the responsibility for these funds fell on her. The Board of Commissioners has not contacted her directly to understand what her duties are and how much time is required. Ms. Gutierrez listed the daily duties of the Treasurer and the interaction with county employees seeking information, as well as annual responsibilities that fall to the Treasurer; all reasons why she believed the job should be considered full-time. Ms. Gutierrez felt it had been implied to the Board of Commissioners that the Treasurer's Office had not been transparent. It was her wish to make sure the public knows that she has never withheld any information the Board may have wanted to see. Citing several reasons, Ms. Gutierrez stated that she would be withdrawing from the Treasurer's race this week.

Additional questions were asked about the process of transferring Special District funds.

Commissioner Lindsay asked for additional public comment. None

Change in compensation of elective officers per "2017 ORS 204.126"

Kate Knop, Finance Director

Ms. Knop iterated ORS 204.126 as to the authority of the Budget Committee to change the compensation of Elected Officers. Included for the committee's review was the Treasurer's elected duties as defined by ORS Chapter 208, as well as the current Treasurer's appointed duties as described by ORS 294 for County financial administration.

Linda LaRue, Budget Committee member

Ms. LaRue asked for clarification from Commissioner Russell on the timing of this request to adjust the Treasurer's salary and why it is being considered.

Commissioner Russell responded that the timing is due to the election cycle, to give clarity to the potential candidates what the position will look like.

Discussion continued detailing the history of the change in the duties of the Treasurer's Office, the move of the Tax Collector position to the Assessor's Office and the past County Court decisions regarding staffing levels for tax collecting.

Commissioner Doherty moved not to make an adjustment to the Treasurer's salary, defer to the Compensation Board for them to bring a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners in April. Commissioner Russell seconded.

Commissioner Lindsay called for discussion.

Kim Cutsforth, Budget Committee Member, asked for the recommendation to be moved up prior to March 13th, the filing deadline to allow clarity to those who may run for the office.

Bobbi Childers, County Clerk, clarified that the Treasurer is a Constitutional Office and is elected in November. If there are not any candidates filed for the position by March 13th, the position will open again, and filings will still be accepted up until August 25th. There will not be an election in May unless there are three people running, and the office is still elected in November.

Commissioner Lindsay discussed the desire to have the wage determined prior to candidates filing for the position and before raising and spending campaign funds for the position that may later be determined to be less than full-time. The Compensation Board is only given the ORS, and the top three and lesser three counties as comparables. They are not provided with details as to how much resources the Budget Committee wants to put toward supporting certain ORS'.

Commissioner Doherty agreed that the Compensation Board will make the recommendation. However, the final decision rests with the three Commissioners, and they may disagree with the Compensation Board's recommendation before it moves back to the Budget Committee. Before the Budget is adopted on July 1, an Elected Official does not know what their wage is going to be.

Commissioner Russell stated that historically the Compensation Board has used population for comparing the salaries of Elected Officials regardless of location or economies of size. About five years ago, like economies have become part of the equation. If the Compensation Board requests additional information, it would be provided. They are knowledgeable about wages and can make comparisons in both the public and private sector and he has confidence in them to make those decisions.

Ms. Knop clarified the role of the Budget Committee during the Budget Hearings. The Compensation Board's role is to review the compensation of Elected Officials, and make a recommendation to the Board. The Board votes on it, and the budget is built based on that approval. In April, the Budget Committee's role during Budget Hearings is not to go to the level of detail of compensation of personnel, of any kind. That decision has been set and is part of the entire package.

Public Comment

Craig Gutierrez asked for clarification on when this discussion of reducing the Treasurer's salary started, and why this process was selected to review it.

Commissioner Doherty stated that the discussion was brought to the County Administrator asking if this can be reviewed. We are outside of the process and the Compensation Board needs to review it, followed by the Board of Commissioners, then forwarded on to the Budget Committee. He is hopeful it can be brought back into that chain of events.

Ms. LaRue asked for additional clarification as to why only the Treasurer's position is being reviewed.

Commissioner Lindsay indicated that the knowledge was out there that the current Treasurer was considering retiring.

Ms. LaRue specified that the position is considered overpaid, not the person.

Commissioner Lindsay agreed, stating that a potential retirement was the understanding when the discussion started. Then, it is back to the ORS' to determine what is the resource we need for this position.

Ms. LaRue understood that if a retirement was being considered, then planning for the next person, you would not start them out at the same wage because they won't be that experienced.

Bobbi Childers, County Clerk

Ms. Childers stated that on compensation alone there is nothing in our policy covering longevity. The only requirement of my job is that I am eighteen and live in Morrow County. Same with other Elected Officials. Longevity is not a factor in compensation. In looking at the ORS', there may have been a way to incorporate the Treasurer's Office in with the Accounting department to mesh them together.

Commissioner Russell stated that he did research other County Treasurer positions across the state, and this position is the most varied across all counties.

Harvey Childers asked for further clarification of the process for reviewing the Elected Official's compensation.

Commissioner Russell responded, stating the intent is to make a recommendation to the Compensation Board. Siting similarities to the change in structure from the County Court to a Board of Commissioners occurring at a natural retirement of the sitting Judge, that this was the correct time to analyze the Treasurer's position.

Mr. Childers asked if the Commissioners will make a recommendation to the Compensation Board.

Commissioner Russell stated that the recommendation being sought is to determine whether this position is a full-time or part-time equivalent.

Commissioner Lindsay asked for additional input. None was given.

Action Item(s)

Motion was reread. Commissioner Lindsay called for additional discussion.

Ms. Cutsforth asked if some additional direction could be given to the Compensation Board to further review the Treasurer's position.

Commissioner Doherty stated that they will review all the elected positions.

Commissioner Lindsay noted that they will not evaluate the FTE scenario unless directed.

Commissioner Doherty clarified that his motion would have the necessary function of going to the Compensation Board, then back to the Board of Commissioners prior to the Budget Hearings in April. He was not suggesting a special convening of the Compensation Board. It should follow the normal course of action.

Commissioner Russell stated that our action would be no action, no changes.

Commissioner Lindsay clarified that no recommendation goes to the Compensation Board. The process will happen in the Compensation Board as normal. And it comes back to the Board of Commissioners. No recommendation, no decision.

Commissioner Russell stated Gayle would have until August to make a decision about running.

Ms. Gutierrez stated that she will be withdrawing this week, for many reasons.

Commissioner Lindsay called for discussion. None.

Vote: Commissioner Russell, Commissioner Doherty, Ms. LaRue, Aye; Commissioner Lindsay, Ms. Cutsforth, Nay. Motion carried.

Adjourned: 10:37 a.m.