

County: Charter establishes commissioner seats as volunteer positions

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"It is made for us to rubber stamp," Thompson said. "I have a great concern about this. This is why I'm making noise."

Other commissioners have a completely opposite viewpoint.

"That just doesn't make sense to me. It never has," Lee said. "Why are we trying to fix something that's not broken?"

Oversight

The charter was adopted in 1989 in a home-rule style, meaning residents decide how the county's government is set up and operates. It establishes commissioner seats as volunteer positions that hire and oversee the county manager, who supervises a full-time staff of roughly 200 people.

The board is required to meet twice each month. Staff and the county manager keep a three-month calendar of items they want to have decided on at upcoming board meetings. The meeting agenda, which also can be amended at the start of each meeting, is then passed along to the board chairman for approval.

What items are placed on the agenda often varies with each new batch of commissioners, said County Manager Cameron Moore, who took over the position last year.

"When I got here in April (2016), it was a pretty experienced group," Moore said. "A lot more items were placed on the consent calendar. Routine issues for government are not necessarily routine things for citizens."

A meeting agenda in April,



Clatsop County Commissioners Sarah Nebeker, left, and Scott Lee, right, preside over a recent board meeting held Wednesday. More photos online at DailyAstorian.com

for example, contained nine items on the consent calendar, which is approved by commissioners all at once. No items were scheduled to be deliberated or decided on individually in what is known as the business agenda.

At the start of each meeting, commissioners can vote to add or recategorize agenda items. At the April meeting, four of the nine items were moved from the consent calendar to the business agenda.

"It's so easy to put something on the agenda," Lee said. "This is a nonissue to me."

But some commissioners spoke with the Moore about what types of items should be placed on the agenda. As a rule of thumb, any item with a fiscal impact of more than \$50,000 is included, Moore said.

Lee said commissioners, especially those without previous government experience, such as Sullivan, often have difficulty adjusting to what items should or should not be decided by the board. He distinguished between political activism and being part of a government.

"The system works great," Lee said. "There's nothing wrong with the way we do things. It comes down to people knowing how the system works."

Sullivan said she is still learning how the process works and understands the charter does dictate certain things. But she also would like to see changes to how the board makes decisions.

"If I believe in government and that citizens should have an input in government, then

I should walk the walk," she said. "I don't think that is a good way to govern."

Micromanage

County commissioners searched for executive stability when they hired Moore, a veteran government administrator, after going through nine county managers in 16 years.

County staff includes those hired specifically to carry out the business of departments such as public health and public works, as well as those who work in the county manager's office. Since commissioners are elected volunteers, many of whom have full-time jobs outside of their public roles, they should not micromanage skilled, specialized county staffers, Clement said.

"We are not involved in daily operations at all," Clem-

ent said. "We hire the county manager to put good people in place. We could technically spend time deliberating about whether or not to allow staff to buy a Xerox copy machine, but that would not be effective."

As representatives of county residents, commissioner business should, whenever possible, be conducted during open meetings instead of behind the scenes with staff, Nebeker said.

"We have to abide by certain guidelines," she said. "We deliberate in public in open meetings to avoid any appearance of lack of transparency. We're committed to that."

Thompson, on the other hand, does not view the volunteer title as relevant in terms of how much weight should be given to staff input versus commissioner deliberation and research.

"This is the governing body of Clatsop County," she said. "Staff gives us solutions, but we don't discuss them. They're in charge of us. It's antithetical to change influenced by anyone else. It's about control."

'Rushed'

Thompson recently drew criticism for the amount of travel expenses she has claimed since her election in 2014. She said at a recent meeting that expenses are an essential part of carrying out board business and that other commissioners did not seem to have an appetite to act upon long-term goals.

"We're accountable to the people of Clatsop County the same way as if we were

paid \$1 million a year," she said. "It wasn't intended that we be irrelevant. We have such a thin, rushed time frame."

Thompson and Lee have been particularly at odds with each other over how the board should function, with Thompson saying the chairman hands too much power to the county manager when he approves the agenda.

"No matter what, Scott backs the county manager," she said.

At the same time, Lee argues he only operates within the confines of the charter.

"She has spoken disparagingly of the charter since she came to office," Lee said. "It makes commissioners closer to the citizens. I don't know why Commissioner Thompson has such disrespect for the home-rule style."

Goal-setting sessions

One recent solution has been to schedule special goal-setting sessions between commissioners, staff and the county manager, although the sessions have had mixed reviews, as well. While commissioners such as Nebeker have found them to be productive, Thompson lamented the lack of concrete goals produced.

In the future, commissioners could benefit from clearly articulating their ideas in a productive manner, Nebeker said.

"I have full confidence that every commissioner has the best intentions," she said. "Whether that is well-communicated is what we need to be mindful of."

Kucera: Also served as the city's emergency manager

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in my mind, an aggressive agenda that needs to be pursued when it comes to affordable housing, how we're going to use our room tax money in the future and implementing the water and sewer master plans," he said.

Kucera's last day in Cannon Beach will be June 30. He starts in Sisters July 5, replacing Rick Allen, who has served as interim city manager since April 2016. Final approval is

contingent upon the ratification of an employment agreement between Kucera and the city.

In Cannon Beach, Kucera succeeded interim City Manager Jennie Messmer.

The previous city manager, Rich Mays, held the position for more than eight years before retiring.

Nationwide recruitment

A University of Idaho graduate with a master's degree

in public administration from Northern Michigan University, Kucera was chosen over three other candidates from a pool of 47 applicants. The nationwide recruitment effort was led by the League of Oregon Cities.

Over the past 13 years, Kucera has worked in municipal governments in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Idaho. He had previously managed Pennsylvania's Borough of Kennett Square before coming to the Oregon Coast.

At a 2014 meet-and-greet

at the Surfsand Resort with community members and local officials, Kucera said that he envisioned himself settling down on the Oregon Coast for quite some time.

During his time in Cannon Beach, Kucera helped the city adopt its first strategic plan, which he called "the founda-

tion we're going to need to move forward as a community." The plan was developed from a citizen survey that received a 40 percent response rate from the city's 1,700 residents.

He worked to prioritize and address housing, infrastructure and emergency services needs,

Kucera also served as the city's emergency manager.

"I had heard he was in the running, but I had not heard anything about any decision being made," City Councilor George Vetter said. "It's too bad, but I'm sure we'll get a good replacement."

Salmon: Only 14,700 pounds have been landed in April, May

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'Bad one'

The entire southern half of the Oregon Coast and a portion of Northern California is closed to commercial ocean salmon fishing to protect a record low run of salmon returning to the Klamath River. Farther north in Oregon, fishing is restricted and poor weather conditions have limited fishermen's chances to get out on the water.

Commercial ocean salmon fishermen in Oregon have landed only 14,700 pounds in April and May. Last year, with the entire coast open, they landed 75,000 pounds in April and 86,000 pounds in May.

Every year, fishery managers have to juggle a combination of forecasts and factors to set seasons on the ocean, said Chris Kern, a deputy administrator with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's fish division.

Some years are worse, some years are better.

"This is a particularly bad one," he said.

Kern serves as a department designee on the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the body that, among other things, manages salmon species off the Washington state, Oregon and California coasts. This year, they had to choose between short, infrequent fishing periods coastwide or slightly more fishing, but with closures in the south.

'What do we do?'

Nancy Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Oregon Salmon Commission, says she is fielding phone calls from



AP Photo/Don Ryan
Oregon Gov. Kate Brown speaks during her State of the State address in Portland in 2015. Brown has joined California Gov. Jerry Brown in asking for a federal disaster declaration over salmon.

fishermen asking, "What do we do?"

Unfortunately, says Fitzpatrick, this is familiar ground.

In 2006, salmon fisheries were also in the middle of a disaster declaration. The fleet faced the possibility of complete closure in some areas and reduced fishing and trip limits in others.

Fishermen had landed 2.6 million pounds in 2005, but in 2006 they only landed 485,500. This represented an 81.5 percent drop in landings for troll-gear fisheries, while the overall harvest revenue was the lowest fishermen had seen since 2000, according to a 2007 study by the Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association.

Declarations of fishery emergencies, failures and disasters followed at the state and federal level. Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski and state agen-

cies put together an industry disaster assistance package that included cash payments, temporary jobs at state agencies, contracts with vessels for research work, human services counseling and other types of assistance.

The Oregon Salmon Commission that year landed a grant that made it possible for them to contract with specialists who worked directly with fishermen, connecting them with resources and information. Fitzpatrick recently forwarded the 2007 report on these activities and the state's involvement at the time to Kate Brown's office.

She doesn't know if a reminder of how the state stepped in to help fisheries 11 years ago will produce any results.

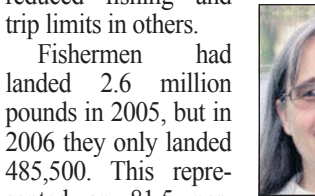
"From what I've heard numbers are pretty tight right now (at the state)," she said.

"I know there are people out there who are saying, 'Fish for other fisheries,'" she added.

"Fish harder."

Fitzpatrick bristles at these kinds of statements. Often the commercial ocean salmon fishermen are already participating in other fisheries. There is crab that typically runs from December through March, salmon that starts up in April and tuna that runs through the summer.

"You can do all three of those and it takes you through the year," Fitzpatrick said. "You take away salmon ... well, you're already fishing harder. You can't just make it up in the other fisheries."



Nancy Fitzpatrick

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