

Umatilla County embarks on overdue charter review

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla County is past due for a review of its home rule charter, the document that establishes the form and functions of county government. The county is working to remedy that.

The charter requires a committee of at least five county citizens to conduct the review every four years. The last review was in 2008.

County counsel Doug Olsen said the board of commissioners have a goal of appointing seven citizens to the review committee by March 1. They would have until July 1, 2019, to deliver a report and any recommendations for changes to the charter.

"They can change any terms of the charter or introduce something different," Olsen said, while Commissioner George Murdock said the committee "can lay the foundation to restructure county government."

Olsen and Murdock said commissioners would not serve on the committee so it would be free of their influence. So far all four applicants for the committee are from the west end of the county: former county fair board member Dan Dorran of Hermiston; attorney Sally Anderson Hansell of Hermiston; Darla Huxel, police chief of Umatilla; and Hermiston's Glenn Youngman, who served as county commissioner when voters



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla County is set to undergo a review of its home rule charter. This would be the first time a review has been performed since 2008.

adopted the home rule charter in 1992.

Anderson Hansell said she grew interested in serving on the committee after talking with county commissioners about the process and observing Hermiston recently revise its charter.

"The charter is the cornerstone of county government," she said, and thus

worth attending meetings for 16 months to make sure the charter provides the government structure to serve the community now and into the future.

Oregon in 1958 gave voters the right to adopt charters to organize county governments and prescribe what powers they have and procedures they should fol-

low. According to the Oregon Association of Counties, Umatilla County is one of nine counties operating under home rule instead of state laws.

Umatilla County's charter runs seven pages. The charter establishes the three-member board of nonpartisan commissioners to oversee county government. They, along with the sheriff, are the county's elective offices. The charter did away with the assessor, clerk, treasurer, and surveyor as elected positions.

"The more elected officials you have, the more fiefdoms that exist," Murdock said. "I don't know if I really appreciated that when I became commissioner [in 2013]."

The charter grants the board the power to make local laws, hire and fire department heads and employees, as well as reorganize, combine and abolish departments.

The charter dictates the election process, how to fill vacancies and it allows the county to form intergovernmental relations.

Youngman said it was high time for the review and there is no excuse for the delay. He said he pushed in the mid-1990s for a change to a county manager system of government and continues to advocate for that.

"I feel it should come back before the voters and give them a chance to vote on it," he said.

Immigration forum strives to answer questions, bridge gaps

HERMISTON HERALD

An immigration forum next week will focus on educating people on all sides — everyone from recent immigrants wanting to know their rights to longtime citizens who want to gain a better understanding of what immigrants face to reach legal status.

"The whole aim is to build bridges between communities," said Jesse Roa, one of the event's organizers. "There are some cultural gaps. We need to eliminate some of the fear and misunderstanding going on, and show people that there's solidarity."

Roa said speakers at the event would present in both English and Spanish, and would cover issues related to immigration reform, filing for legal immigrant status, and resources for community members.

"We want to give people a basic understanding," he said. "Immigration and filing for legal status is not

just like going to the DMV and getting your driver's license. The process takes years."

People from local and regional groups will be present, including the Walla Walla and Tri-Cities Immigration Coalitions, Oregon Rural Action, and Consejo Latino. Eammon Roach, a Pasco immigration attorney, will be the special guest speaker.

Roa said he hoped people would take advantage of the resources in the area.

"This area seems to feel isolated from everyone," he said. "We're not in Washington, we're far from the west side of the state. So we want to bridge those

"The whole aim is to build bridges between communities."

Jesse Roa, Organizer

gaps."

The event will be Saturday from 3-6 p.m., and will be held at St. John's Episcopal Church, at 665 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. Dinner will be catered by Ruty's Restaurant.

Contact Roa for more details, at 509-378-4181, or at jesse_roa@yahoo.com.

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