

Citizens Urge Auburn Council to Move Cautiously on City Administrator Position

Written by Nemaha County Herald

Saturday, 13 March 2010 16:20 - Last Updated Friday, 26 March 2010 02:46

During the March 8 meeting, Auburn City Council heard from several members of the public about the movement to create a City Administrator position. This agenda item apparently drew about 20 meeting visitors and followed a decision made earlier in the day by the Board of Public Works to utilize more citizen involvement prior to making any decision on the matter.

Dottie Holliday distributed handouts to everyone in the council chambers Monday night pointing out her concerns with what she had seen from the comparison matrix and job description distributed earlier by an investigative team comprised of two council members and two BPW members.

Holliday said, "My endeavor to investigate the hiring of a City Administrator is my attempt to make sure the two businesses—City of Auburn and Auburn Board of Public Works—have planned sufficiently and effectively before voting to create this position. Based on my findings, I firmly believe more information and planning needs to be made before a decision should be made on this."

Holliday pointed out the comparison matrix regarding a City Manager position when a city with a Mayor instead has a City Administrator, and a number of other issues. Among those were if the City of Auburn was contributing a reasonable amount or if the BPW was being looked upon to pay too high of a percentage of this new position's cost, if the job listing seemed to indicate more City of Auburn responsibilities as compared to Board of Public Works responsibilities, and the qualifications section of the job description was written so many people could believe they are confident in being qualified to seek the position.

Holliday added that people don't understand the apparent desire to rush this matter through. Brenda Draper shared thoughts which she and her husband Larry have about the proposal. She said their reservations about hiring include the timing when the economy is far from strong at this time.

"All the mayor and council want to do is spend, spend, spend," Draper said. "No one has apparently thought about waiting and saving money. This is an election year and there will be at least two new council members and a new mayor after this year's elections. Maybe, the best decision would be to wait until after these new officials take over."

Draper questioned if BPW General Manager Dave Hunter has time to also handle the duties listed in the job description for a City Administrator, "Then maybe we are paying him too much," she said.

Mayor Bob Engles said he believes the City Administrator would be able to efficiently manage the City Services, Police Department and City Hall staff in addition to the other tasks associated with managing the utilities.

Council President Annie Thomas commented that she heard at the latest Nebraska League of Municipalities conference that the city should be sure to advertise for the City Administrator position.

In response to a question, Hunter said the BPW Board earlier in the day agreed to a recommendation to develop a steering committee to look into the City Administrator proposal and bring back its findings in three months.

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Mary Kruger also commented on the public's desire to not rush forward on the City Administrator proposal with a new mayor and council members to be elected. "There needs to be much more thought put into this matter," she said.

Scott Kudrna commented that most of the communities listed in the Comparison Matrix for City Administrator were considerably larger than Auburn. He asked if there is a way to accomplish the work spelled out in the job description without creating a new position.

Merri Johnson commended those serving as the mayor and council members for what sometimes turns out to be thankless work. Johnson said the matter needs more study and to see that, if approved, the City Administrator position would be implemented properly.

In response to a question as to whether the City of Auburn would be contributing its fair share as per the proposed salary in the job description, Mayor Engles said he believes the city's commitment should be closer