

## Auburn BPW Met; Voted to Create Taskforce With Residents Regarding City Administrator

Written by Nemaha County Herald

Saturday, 13 March 2010 16:28 - Last Updated Friday, 26 March 2010 02:46

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The Auburn Board of Public Works met on Monday, March 8, for a regular scheduled meeting, with a lengthy discussion regarding a proposal to create a city administrator position. The board voted unanimously to move forward and create a taskforce that would include officials and residents to study whether or not a public administrator would be beneficial for the community. The taskforce has three months to return to the board with a recommendation.

A handful of Auburn residents attended the meeting to voice their concerns regarding the agenda item to take action on whether or not to hire a new city administrator. The overall feeling regarding the issue wasn't in opposition of the idea, but rather the public needs more information before action should be taken.

Resident Dottie Holliday presented the board members with a list of questions regarding a "Matrix" conducted by a committee of two city council members and two BPW members. The "Matrix" is available to the public at Auburn City Hall.

BPW member Dan Snyder, who helped create the "Matrix" responded to Holliday's questions. Snyder said the towns selected to survey were of chosen because Mayor Bob Engles and himself knew officials in those communities and the questions submitted in the questionnaires were established through the committee. Snyder said following the return of the surveys, the committee members met with officials in those communities for follow up questions.

The communities of Central City, Fairbury, Wayne, Nebraska City and Beatrice were the only towns surveyed, Snyder said.

Another concern raised by residents was the job description posted for the position. Many of the residents, including Jeff Jones, said the description was too vague and opened the door for a less experienced candidate to get the job in the future. He noted his personal job description is much more lengthy than the proposed city administrator position.

The committee's recommendation has been to offer the position to BPW General Manager David Hunter, Jr., with a salary of \$92,000 a year with a three year contract. Hunter, in his current position, earns \$82,000 a year. Under the proposed contract, the city of Auburn would contribute an additional \$10,000 to his annual salary. The city administrator would work out of the BPW office.

The current proposed job description, which is available for public viewing at city hall and was to be presented to the Auburn City Council on Monday night, states that the proposed city administrator would manage all city and BPW personnel and would report directly to the Mayor. Resident Katy Billings said by adding more responsibility to Hunter he will be stretched too thin and that would impact some facet of his duties.

"Are we expecting our city administrator to work 80 hours a week?" Billings said.

Billings was the one who recommended that the BPW create a taskforce concerning the issue of the city administrator.

Board member Mark Kubik also shared his concerns about a proposed city administrator and the possibility the city will become too controlling over the BPW.

"The city council is political and the BPW makes decisions based on business," Kubik said. "It could create political problems. Maybe we are moving too fast."

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BPW Chairman Rich Schneider reminded Kubik that the city is able to unappoint the current BPW members and reappoint new members at any time.

"The BPW could be disbanded tomorrow," Schneider told Kubik.

Dennis Wittman, a city council member and a committee member, told the BPW and the residents that by hiring a city administrator the two businesses would become more efficient because of collaboration between the two entities.

Holliday told the BPW she was not objecting to the idea and most likely the city would benefit, but her concern, she said, was that there was inadequate information being provided.

"The information is very sketchy," she said. "I have talked to council and BPW members and people have a different interpretation of what will be expected. You should have a written plan."

Holliday also recommended that the vote should take place once new officials are in office in December. The Auburn council will be led by a new mayor and will have two new council members.

"Let the new city council and mayor have input. They are the ones who are going to have to live with it," Holliday said.

It was also noted during the meeting that if approved, the new city administrator would be Hunter or there would be no city administrator.

### Other Board Action

- The board approved a payment of \$114,324.98 to Eriksen Construction Co., Inc., for work completed at the new water treatment plant.
- A payment in the amount of \$105,221.20 was approved to be awarded to K2 Construction for work completed on the new water mainline east of Auburn, in addition to a new well.
- The board approved a payment of \$175,860.63 to Graham Construction, Inc., for work completed at the new wastewater treatment plant.

Hunter updated the board on progress at the new WWTP, telling them that the plant is operating and a diversion pipe has been put into place to reroute the sewer through the plant. One new clarifier and one aeration basin are operating.

- The board also approved a payment of \$170,504.64 to Vank Kirk Bros. Contracting for work done on the Sixth Street sewer phase one project.
- At the recommendation of Kent Prior with HDR Engineering, the board awarded the Sixth Street sewer phase two project bid to TJ Osborn Construction of Lincoln for the amount of \$468,000. The engineer's estimate for the project was \$756,457.

Prior told the board that the company was very capable of completing the project. He noted that the company was awarded a multi-million bid for a northeast sewer project in Lincoln last year. The board still has approximately \$500,000 to spend on sewer projects through the USDA loan and grant.