

As the council explores options for a finance officer, it is important to frame this discussion in a larger context. Yachats has never had professional financial expertise on staff and yet financial decisions touch almost every aspect of city services and consume considerable council discussion time largely due to a lack of relevant data. Also missing from staff expertise is the ability to do professional analysis of financial and statistical examination of city projects, utility rates, and other topics that include financial or numerical data. Finally, when data is presented, it is rarely in a form that is understood. The pattern seems to be if a little data is good, a lot data must be better. Non-technical people are generally more visually oriented. What is needed is someone that understands both what the audience needs and how to present the data most effectively.

The finance committee was originally conceived to help fill this void and was chartered to look beyond the current time horizon to identify long term financial issues; examine the options and recommend to the city council solutions. It does not appear to be functioning in a proactive role as originally envisioned. This is not meant to be critical of the finance committee. Instead this is a failure of leadership to understand the original intent and provide the necessary guidance about the committee's role and tasks.

Historically the city has had two appointed positions. A city recorder and a public works director. When the public works director position was eliminated to help pay for the new city manager, the council and community lost that second voice. There is reason to believe that decision was a mistake.

At the council begins the discussion about the need for financial expertise, the following charter sections should be considered:

Section 5. Construction. The charter will be liberally construed so that the city may exercise fully all powers possible under this charter and under United States and Oregon law.

Section 18. Resolutions. The council will normally exercise its administrative authority by approving resolutions. The approving clause for resolutions may state "The City of Yachats resolves as follows:"

Section 35. Appointive Officers. Additional officers as the Council deems necessary shall be appointed and may be removed by a majority vote of the entire Council.

As the city council begins the discussion about how to address the need for financial and analytical expertise, consider the following option. The council could create a new appointed position for a finance officer. Like the former public works director, this person would be hired by and report directly to the city council. This places the onus on the council to define the job both in terms of skill and scope of responsibility. The position could also serve as the budget officer which would be similar to the structure used by most cities.

Final Thoughts

After participating in two regional typical recruitments for a city manager, I have come to the realization this option is a mistake for a small community like Yachats. We simply can't afford to pay the salary that qualified people expect and that larger cities can afford. By the time Yachats is ready to make a decision, the better applicants have found jobs. I have come to the conclusion that an alternate recruitment process is the best option. One option could be a local search for an individual with financial and analytical skills but not necessarily city experience. More important than actual municipal experience is a willingness to understand the local culture and values; the capacity to learn; the ability to lead by example and the willingness to do what is necessary.

The council needs to do a better job defining council expectations; setting standards for performance and measuring outcomes.

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