

Morrow County Board of Commissioners Special Meeting
Tuesday, March 12, 2024
Morrow County Government Center, Irrigon, Oregon

Call to Order: 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Jensen introduced the subject of reassessing the residency requirements for the position of County administrator. Mr. Jensen provided documents to the board, all of which are public record.

Mr. Jensen explained that he and his wife were excited to move to Morrow County. Their family has spent the last six months in a rental home and has been continuously watching the real estate market looking for a home in the area. Distance wise, neighboring communities such as Hermiston in Umatilla County are geographically closer to the county seat than some other communities within the County. Some residency stipulations do have reasons such as taxing, however taxes such as income or property taxes are set by the state. Citing reasonable anonymity, Mr. Jensen's wife could for example back a member running for school board without constituents claiming the administrator's wife backing a candidate.

Commissioner Drago noted the importance of living within the County. His preference is that Mr. Jensen find a residence within the County, but if he is unable to find a home, he would like him to stay as County Administrator.

Commissioner Wenholtz echoed the sentiment of preferring the County administrator live within the County. However, given the temperament of citizens, he acknowledged hostilities being lodged against Mr. Jensen and his family and acknowledged the reasoning for the request.

Chair Sykes agreed that his preference is for the County Administrator to live within the County. However, given the climate of the County and hostilities, understands the request as well.

Commissioner Drago proposed offering a 2-year waiver allowing the County Administrator to live outside the County.

Mr. Jensen said his preference is to put down roots and provide stability for his son. He praised Heppner Jr./Sr. High School, and said his desire is to allow his son to finish his education at one school. He added that regardless of his location of residency, he will remain involved in the community and events. Referencing his time with his last municipality, his family lived 10 miles outside of town and remained active in community events.

Chair Sykes asked for Mr. Jensen's opinion on having a waiver vs striking the residency requirement.

The waiver would be a one-time grant that future applicants would adhere to. The residency requirement does limit the recruiting pool and he hopes the outlook remains good and growth continues, but it is something to consider. Cities are beginning to remove residency

requirements, but Counties are a different issue as they have more living options. His family's intent is to stay within the community but would like the request to be considered.

Commissioner Drago has additional input. A previous candidate did not go forward with the application because of the residency requirement. The understanding was that in order to keep the county's best interests, it would be beneficial to allow Mr. Jensen to possibly relocate. Commissioner Drago said "I see boundaries being crossed that shouldn't be crossed. It's not what is affecting Mr. Jensen, but the effect on his family." Commissioner Drago would prefer a waiver, rather than striking the employment requirement entirely.

Commissioner Drago motioned to adopt a waiver to allow Mr. Jensen to relocate with a strong recommendation to remain within the County and allow Chair Sykes to sign. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

Adjourned: 2:16 pm.