

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
NEW COURTHOUSE, 117 DICK STREET, 5TH FLOOR, ROOM 564
SEPTEMBER 18, 2009 - 10:00 AM
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Jeannette Council
Commissioner Breeden Blackwell
Commissioner Kenneth Edge
Commissioner Billy King
Commissioner Jimmy Keefe
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager
James Lawson, Human Resources Manager
Laura Blackley, Human Resources Analyst
Sally Shutt, Communications Manager
Stephen K. Strauss, Ph.D, Developmental Associates
Marie Colgan, Clerk to the Board
Candice H. White, Deputy Clerk to the Board

ABSENT: Commissioner Ed Melvin
Commissioner Marshall Faircloth

Chairman Council called the meeting to order and recognized James Lawson, Human Resources Manager. Mr. Lawson stated the purpose of the meeting was for Stephen K. Strauss, Consultant with Developmental Associates, to meet with the Commissioners to gather information as part of the job analysis so he could design the Assessment Center process. Mr. Lawson stated Mr. Strauss would ask questions of the Commissioners that would help him to better understand the important aspects of the County Attorney position and what the Commissioners expect of the position.

In response to a question posed by Commissioner Council, Mr. Lawson stated five applications had been received to date and the post mark would be used to determine the cut off for acceptance of applications. Mr. Lawson reviewed recruitment sources that had been used and stated additional applications could be submitted prior to closing. Mr. Strauss stated out of any group he had worked with, he found that those currently serving in municipal or county attorney positions were much more cautious about submitting their applications because of concern that their boards may find out. Discussion ensued regarding the recruitment sources that had been used and the possibility of extending the recruitment period if only a minimal number of applications were received.

Commissioner Council recognized Mr. Strauss who stated that following his job analysis and design of the Assessment Center process, the candidates would be taken through a process specific to the County Attorney position as opposed to a process generic to other legal positions. Mr. Strauss advised he had three basic questions to ask the Commissioners as part of his job analysis.

Question 1: What do the Commissioners see as major challenges that the county is either facing or will have to face over the next two to three years; what things are important for the County Attorney's office to be able to handle?

Responses from Board of Commissioners:

- Knowledge/experience with redistricting of County Commission election districts
- Strength in economic development
- Legal knowledge appropriate to the position
- Coordinate, facilitate and participate in a collaborative process with the Board of Commissioners, County Manager, Clerk to the Board and department heads as well as within the County Attorney's office
- Open, sharing, supportive in relationships
- Instill trust and be completely honest, even in disagreement
- Work as a team member and respect individual roles of team members; able to reach conclusions as part of a team in order to present as a united front to Commissioners

- Build camaraderie with staff; know how to recognize, work with and form plans to improve skills and provide training for staff that may have development issues
- Creative interpretation of the law/case studies in order to present recommendations and options to the Board of Commissioners
- Skilled as a mediator
- Provides to all board members information that is consistent with what has been provided to an individual board member or members
- Does not disclose privileged or confidential information
- Ability to manage details of County Attorney's office
- Operates County Attorney's office in efficient manner; demonstrates fiscal/budgetary responsibility when contracting for legal services
- Balance of self confidence, ego, strong work ethic and allegiance to the best interests of citizens

Question 2: What are the most important tasks that the County Attorney carries out; what does the County Attorney do that the Commissioners think is important; what kinds of services do the Commissioners want the County Attorney to provide?

Responses from Board of Commissioners:

- Reduce liability/protect from liability
- Diligent, doesn't "shoot from the hip"
- Clearly understands role (don't need "8th Commissioner")
- Quiet self confidence; someone who at a glance can communicate how things are going
- Proactive; looks for new opportunities
- Can stay connected with county staff to ensure matters are up to date and that county is protected; has awareness of issues early on; can put out fires before they become too big
- Up to date on federal and state court decisions as they affect county government
- Pursues continuing education/training and stays abreast of county legal matters
- Knowledge/expertise/experience in securing property and in eminent domain (positives and negatives); able to mediate in a dignified respectful way
- Maintains trust

Question 3: What kinds of competencies are expected for an effective County Attorney?

Responses from Board of Commissioners:

- Confidence in and able to address controversial issues; will stand up and represent the desire of the Board of Commissioners; appropriate aggressiveness when carrying out the direction of the Board of Commissioners
- Basic knowledge of all facets and components that make up mandates of county government; does not need a consultant or another attorney brought in for each and every situation
- Good written and oral communication skills in both layman and legal terms
- Strong litigation skills
- Ability to handle standard county business in-office with confidence and competence, with only those matters not normal to county government being contracted

Responses from staff:

- Ability to work with Finance Department, Assistant County Manager and bond related financial matters
- Ability to work with county department heads
- Professional credibility; provide opinions that will withstand question and debate without waver
- Earns respect; gets the job done and does what is right for the county
- Develops a positive sense that spreads throughout the organization that in turn prevents a negative sense from spreading out into the community
- Fosters a team that can work together
- Handles matters in a timely manner
- Gains trust; has integrity
- Allows staff to have confidence in information that is provided to them and in what is being done with information provided to the County Attorney's office

- Appreciates/realizes the importance of historical knowledge; values input of others and respects that they understand why certain things have been done in a particular way that contributes to a better understanding of how best to move forward
- Recognizes role is to advise/counsel as well as support/represent
- Has effective technical knowledge of county government operations and related legal issues
- Open to discussion/dialogue; legal office should be approachable and credible
- Knowledge of public records law; ability to handle press and provide guidance as to what can be released; does not brief press off the record
- Provides in-depth review of board minutes; does not compromise official record of proceedings
- Engenders confidence in competency
- Capacity to balance attention to detail with big picture

Commissioner Council called for closing remarks. Following a brief discussion, consensus was to further consider an extension to the recruitment period during the special meeting scheduled for Monday, September 21, 2009.

Mr. Martin advised that Mr. Strauss had met with the Interim County Attorney and the Assistant County Attorney and would meet with department heads in a group setting as part of his job analysis to develop the Assessment Center process for the County Attorney's position.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 11:45 AM

Clerk to the Board