

June 30, 2008

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE REPORT

The Personnel Committee met Monday, June 30, 2008 at 3:00 p.m., in the QC Meeting Room, Third Floor, County Administration Building, 215 East Central, Bentonville

Committee Members Present: Hill, Hobbs, Stephenson, Williams, Winscott, Wolf

Others Present: Barbara Ludwig, Richard McComas, Sheriff Keith Ferguson, Chief Don Townsend, Assessor Bill Moutray, County Judge Gary Black

Media: Scarlett Simms – Morning News, Tabatha Hunter – Benton County Daily Record

1. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Ranking of Additional Positions Requested

JP Stephenson stated that the request for an additional Juvenile Case Manager position has been withdrawn, so the ranking sheets should be numbered 1-14.

The committee ranked the positions on worksheets, and Comptroller Richard McComas added the totals.

JP Winscott stated that he did not want to rank positions that he did not feel were needed. Richard McComas stated that they needed to be numbered, and JP Winscott could rank those positions lowest, because the numbers will be skewed.

JP Stephenson stated that it is the function of the Personnel Committee to rank the positions in order of importance, and members of the Finance Committee, the Committee of Thirteen, and the Quorum Court will all have an opportunity to state their opinions on whether a position is necessary. JP Winscott asked who established this method. Richard McComas stated that it has been in practice for the last several years, and was established through an agreement between the Finance and Personnel Committees. JP Stephenson noted that nothing ranked above 5, 6, or 7 is going anywhere anyway.

JP Winscott stated that he will rank them, but he does not agree with the process. JP Wolf pointed out that it is a waste of time to continue having this discussion each time, there is obviously a reason for the way they are doing the rankings, and if someone wants to change the procedure, it should be addressed at some other time. JP Winscott stated that he has been talking about it for 6 months. JP Stephenson repeated that it can be brought up to the Finance Committee, the Committee of Thirteen, and the Quorum Court.

JP Stephenson asked County Judge Gary Black if he understands the purpose of the Personnel Committee correctly, and was it not decided several years ago that the committee would rank the requests in order of priority and the Finance Committee would determine how much money was available, and then fund the requests as far as available funds will allow. County Judge Gary Black stated that he did not see any need to change it, and asked if anyone had a problem with it.

JP Winscott stated that he had a problem with it from the standpoint that they are telling the Finance Committee that if there is money available, they should spend it on increasing personnel, and he does not think that they should always spend extra money on personnel. Richard McComas stated that JP Winscott should address that concern to the Finance Committee. JP Winscott stated that he is not a member. Richard McComas stated that he could still come to the meeting and address the committee. JP Winscott stated that he could do that, but he would not have a vote. JP Stephenson reminded him that he has a vote on the Committee of Thirteen and the Quorum Court.

Barbara Ludwig explained that Public Defender Jay Saxton asked her to let the committee know that he is withdrawing his request for an additional Juvenile Case Manager position, because they are still trying to get information on how many criminal cases they are going to be assigned.

2. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Elected Officials' Salaries

Barbara Ludwig stated that she has spoken with County Attorney Robin Green, and she has said that a current Quorum Court cannot make a decision which is binding on a future Court. She said there is nothing wrong with making the decision in February, prior to the filing period, but they would have to do it with the understanding that it is not binding until the budget ordinance is approved. She said she has been asked by several Elected Officials who could not be here today for an additional meeting to give them an opportunity to discuss the issue. JP Stephenson asked if they could have some idea of what type of input these Elected Officials are wanting. Barbara Ludwig stated that her recommendations were based on a market study of other counties, but if there is discussion on it, some of the Elected Officials wanted to be present. JP Stephenson asked what action needed to be taken at this time. Barbara Ludwig stated that she needs to know if they want to move forward with the proposal to set Elected Officials' salaries in February, knowing that it is not binding, so that people filing for the office would have some idea of the salary which would take effect in January of the first year of their term. She added that the salaries would be in effect for 2 years.

JP Williams stated that she is not sure why it is not binding considering that the budget for the following year is adopted before they leave office at the end of December. Barbara Ludwig stated that it is not so much the 2009 budget that is the concern, but the 2010 budget, because the procedure they are discussing would set the salaries for 2 years. JP Stephenson stated that the current salaries have been set longer than that, because they have not discussed it for several years. Barbara Ludwig stated that this discussion started when objections were raised concerning Elected Officials receiving the same percentage of salary increase that was given to employees each year, so they began trying to establish some sort of procedure to deal with Elected Officials' salaries. Richard McComas stated that once an Elected Official's salary has been set, it cannot be lowered the following year. JP Williams stated she thought that was correct, so she does not understand the argument about obligating a budget two years away.

JP Stephenson asked what was found out from the County Attorney regarding the County Surveyor. Barbara Ludwig stated that she did not have that information yet, and was not aware

that it was urgent since it had not been on any of the agendas. JP Stephenson stated that he would think that as a matter of courtesy, when she is specifically requested to do something, that she would do it if it were possible. Barbara Ludwig stated that she will get the information, but had just come from another meeting and there have been several personnel issues to deal with over the last two days.

JP Wolf asked if the County Attorney Robin Green does not think they can set the elected officials salaries in the manner that has been proposed. Barbara Ludwig stated that the County Attorney's issue is setting an amount that will be in the budget two years from now. JP Winscott asked if it would be acceptable to simply state that it was their intent for the salaries to remain the same for the next two years. He said then, the voters would understand that the incoming officials would be the recipients of the raises, and those are not necessarily the same people who will be voting on the raises. JP Winscott asked Richard McComas if that would work. Richard McComas stated that all they are doing is making a recommendation which will have to be approved in the budget process. Barbara Ludwig explained that they had intended to raise the salary one amount, and split it over the two years, and that would not be possible.

JP Williams asked if they are discussing the procedure, why then can they not discuss the raises. Barbara Ludwig stated that she has no problem with them discussing the amount of raises; she just wanted to let them know that two elected officials had called and asked that if the amount of raises were to be discussed, they would like to be present. JP Stephenson said there was no point in discussing it if they were waiting on two other people to be available. JP Stephenson asked who the two officials were. Barbara Ludwig stated that Treasurer Deanna Ratcliffe and Circuit Clerk Brenda DeShields were both out of town on long-scheduled trips. JP Stephenson stated that he could not see what they would have to add to the discussion, other than to say they did not want the raises. Richard McComas stated that he thought they wanted to be present if there were going to be any changes other than what had previously been discussed.

JP Williams asked why the Elected Officials will not be getting the same increase as other county employees. Richard McComas stated that is a decision for the Quorum Court. JP Williams stated that she would like to discuss the issue at least to the point that they can decide if they want to move forward with it or not. She said she understands that everyone deserves salary increases, but she has looked at the proposed increases which put Benton County in line with other counties, and she is not unhappy that Benton County is 3rd or 4th in the ranking. She said she is not saying that the elected officials do not deserve some type of raise, but some of the proposed increases are close to 15% at a time when we cannot afford to hire enough police officers and other personnel that are needed. She said our Elected Officials work hard, put in a lot of time, and deserve some consideration. She said that if they receive a 3% cost of living increase in January, and then receive a 3% increase in addition to that, then they will know they are appreciated, but they have not simply bumped all of the salaries across the board to the maximum of the range. She said that she just cannot see a 10%, 12%, or 15% increase in this economy.

JP Williams added that she feels \$300 is an adequate amount of compensation for the Quorum Court members, and another \$50 will not make much difference. She does think that raising the

per committee meeting fee from \$75 to \$100 is fair, because they spend a lot of time in the committee meetings, and felt that was a fair increase without being unreasonable.

JP Stephenson asked what is being planned for elected officials' salaries for 2009. Richard McComas stated that they will probably discuss that in the Finance Committee during the budget process, but if there is a cost of living increase, they will be receiving that. JP Stephenson asked if they would be receiving any other raise. Richard McComas stated that as of right now they are not.

JP Winscott stated that he finds the proposed increase excessive as they are pretty much 10% across the board. He said he does not know anyone who gets a 10% raise without a promotion which comes with significant increased responsibilities, not just a couple of people added to their staff. He said he agreed with JP Williams—that they should get a 3% cost of living and another 2% to 3% as some sort of merit increase. Barbara Ludwig stated that when they are looking at the proposed increase, to remember that the amount is spread over two years, so instead of 10%, it is actually 5%.

JP Hobbs stated that she too has a problem with such a large increase, and although government works differently than what she likes to refer to as “the real world”, she thinks some people, including herself, run for public office because they think government should be run more like the “real world”. She referred to her experience on a non-profit board, and stated that they struggle to give their employees even a 3% increase, so she thinks they should look at that. She said as far as the increase for the Quorum Court members, when you look at what City Council members are making, the \$50 increase does not seem unreasonable.

JP Wolf stated that she would like to give the elected officials the opportunity to come back with another figure for the proposed increase, because she senses that this amount is not going to fly. She said it would not make sense to just pick a figure out of the air without hearing from the elected officials, as there is plenty of time. JP Stephenson stated that his concern about that is that elected officials do not set their salaries. JP Wolf stated that she is not suggesting that they set their salaries, but they should be given an opportunity for some input.

JP Stephenson asked if it was the consensus of the committee to set another a meeting to discuss this issue with elected officials. JP Hobbs stated that she would like to postpone the discussion until the cost of living increase figures are available in September as Richard McComas mentioned. JP Hobbs added that it is not going into effect until 2009. Richard McComas stated the reason it had come up for discussion this early was to address the problem of people running for office and not knowing what the salary is going to be; otherwise it could be addressed during budget discussions, but that takes place in October after people have filed for office. JP Stephenson stated no matter when they do it, they will never satisfy all of those who are paranoid about voting raises for elected officials.

B. Ranking Results

Richard McComas listed the results of the priority rankings as follows:

Ranking Sheet

Rank positions from 1 - 14 with "1" being the position ranked as the highest priority											Totals
Fund	Dept	Position Title	Rank								
010	5	Investigator - CID	1	1	1	1	8	1	1		13
010	68	Telecommunicator	2	8	6	3	3	2	2		24
930	67	Jail Transport	3	3	2	6	1	7	7		26
010	68	Telecommunicator	4	9	9	4	4	3	3		32
010	67	Jail Deputy	5	5	5	11	6	4	4		35
930	67	Jail Transport	6	4	3	7	2	10	10		36
010	68	Telecommunicator	7	10	12	5	7	5	5		44
010	67	Jail Deputy	8	6	8	10	9	6	6		45
010	67	Jail Deputy	9	7	10	2	11	8	8		46
020	44	Heavy Equipment Operator	10	12	4	13	5	11	11		56
010	67	Jail Sergeant	11	2	11	14	13	9	9		58
020	44	Heavy Equipment Operator	12	11	7	12	10	13	13		66
010	23	Janitor/Bldg. Maintenance (Part-time)	13	13	14	9	14	12	12		74
010	23	Janitor/Bldg. Maintenance	14	14	13	8	12	14	14		75
TOTALS			105		630						

JP Stephenson stated that these results will be forwarded to the Finance Committee on July 8, 2008.

Meeting adjourned at 3:38 p.m.