

A special meeting of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 9:00 am.

Councilors Present: Brownson, Rocka, Herman, and Mayor Jones.

Councilors Excused: Hilton

Staff Present: City Manager Estes and Human Resources Manager Houston. The meeting was live streamed and recorded, and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, LLC.

#### CHANGES TO AGENDA

No changes.

#### REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

##### **Item 4(a): Consideration of Employment Agreement for Paul Benoit**

Mayor Jones noted that an updated employment agreement had just been emailed to Staff and Councilors. At the May 16, 2022 City Council meeting, the Council unanimously voted to enter into an employment agreement with former City Manager Paul Benoit to serve as the Interim City Manager effective July 5, 2022. Mr. Benoit's compensation would be the same as City Manager Estes currently receives. While Mr. Benoit works full time for Astoria, he would also be consulting periodically for the City of Piedmont. Mr. Benoit would not be restricted from serving on any non-profit boards. The City would honor his pre-planned absence in late July, during which time he would work remotely. He would not accrue paid time off or earned leave. Mr. Benoit may resign at any time with 14 days advance notice. Mr. Benoit's daughter-in-law works for the City and State law allows the City to adopt policies specifying when a public official may directly supervise a relative. The City Council consulted with Human Resources Attorney Akin Blitz on this and the City's policy has been added to the employment agreement as an addendum. The policy allows the Mayor to resolve any issues between Mr. Benoit and his daughter-in-law.

Councilor Rocka said he believed this employment agreement would keep the City on track. Mr. Benoit has an outstanding track record as Astoria's former City Manager, and he has surely learned more as City Manager of Piedmont.

Councilor Herman stated she was grateful that Mr. Benoit was willing to come back to the City.

Councilor Brownson appreciated Mr. Benoit's willingness to step up. It would be a challenging time for Mr. Benoit, and he hoped the time would be as short as possible for him. He also hoped the City could find a qualified candidate. This arrangement would ease the transition for the City. He looked forward to getting know Mr. Benoit better.

City Manager Estes asked for clarification about Mr. Benoit's start date.

Mayor Jones confirmed with Staff that Mr. Benoit would start in June, not July as he had previously stated. He called for public comments.

Paul Benoit said he was looking forward to working for the City again. He had been in public service for over 40 years and was happily retired. He moved to Astoria in 1981 and when he was asked by the Mayor to consider this position, he knew he could do the job. He knows the City, the job, and how difficult these transitions could be. He would do his best for Astoria.

**City Council Action:** Motion made by Mayor Jones, seconded by Councilor Herman, to approve the temporary employment agreement between the City of Astoria and Paul Benoit. Motion carried unanimously. Ayes: Councilors Brownson, Herman, Rocka, and Mayor Jones; Nays: None.

#### **Item 4(b): Discussion of City Manager Recruitment Process**

City Manager Estes said proposals from several recruitment firms were included in the Agenda packet.

Human Resources Manager Houston provided a general overview of the City's recruitment process. She also explained that recruitment firms are used for high level positions because the number of qualified candidates is low. The recruitment firms are familiar with the candidates and can more easily identify which ones might be a good fit for Astoria. Once a firm is chosen, Staff will work with the firm to develop a candidate profile. She reached out to firms that specialized in local government recruitment and had experience in Oregon. The firms offer varying levels of recruitment services and costs. She explained the fees charged by recruitment firms and best practices recommended by Mr. Blitz. Staff would be taking a second look at the compensation package to make sure it was competitive enough to attract high quality candidates.

Mayor Jones asked how Staff found the comparable used last year when City Council was considering a potential salary increase for City Manager Estes.

Manager Houston said Mr. Blitz had done that survey. It would not take too much time to get updated data. A lot has changed since then, so it was difficult to say whether that original survey was still relevant.

Councilor Herman stated she supported a new survey to make sure that what Astoria is offering is competitive from the beginning.

Councilor Brownson asked if moving costs or other incentives would be offered.

Manager Houston explained that Astoria's practice was to provide for moving expenses. The employee submits receipts, and the City reimburses the employee up to a specified amount. Additionally, the benefit is taxable.

Councilor Brownson asked what level of service Staff wanted from a recruitment firm.

Manager Houston recommended full recruitment services so that the City has someone dedicated from start to finish. This is such an important position, and she has other duties.

Councilor Brownson asked if any the firms that submitted proposals had worked with Astoria before.

Manager Houston listed the firms that Astoria had worked with. She presented the details of all five proposals, which were included in the Agenda packet, and provided background information about each firm. She noted that the costs in each proposal were just estimates.

Mayor Jones noted that all five firms proposed similar timeframes and prices. However, price should not be a driver. The Council should select the firm that could do the best job.

Councilor Herman said she was leaning towards the company in Portland because it sounded like they would provide the most thorough wrap around services and they would draw in candidates interested in moving to Oregon or already living in Oregon. Additionally, they were already familiar with the area. She confirmed with Manager Houston that the company was available.

Manager Houston pointed out that the timelines were general outlines, which will be impacted by how responsive City Staff can be when providing information the firm needs. Some of the timelines could be expedited if Staff can communicate and get the details dialed in.

Mayor Jones said the Council would not be voting to accept any of the proposals now because the Councilors have not read them yet. However, the next City Council meeting was more than two weeks away, so Councilors had time to review the proposals. Additionally, he would rely on Staff's feedback because they had experience with these firms.

City Manager Estes stated he had not yet reviewed the proposals either.

Mr. Benoit explained that while all of the proposals were pretty similar, some recruiters more communicative with their candidates than others, providing them with details about the city and elected officials so that there were no surprises. These same recruiters would also have frank conversations with the cities about the pluses and minuses of each candidate that might not show up on paper. He recommended the City check the references of the firms they are interested in by calling other cities the firms had recruited for in the past.

City Manager Estes agreed and said Staff always discussed communication style with potential recruiters. However, the City Council also needs to be comfortable with the recruiter.

Manager Houston said once it was time to begin interviewing candidates, the Council would need to discuss how to gather feedback. In the past, the City has had community, civic, and professional panels provide feedback about the candidates. The recruiter would make a presentation to the City about the candidates as well. Once a candidate is chosen, reference and background checks would be done and an offer would be negotiated. Staff needed to be proactive about scheduling each step of the process.

City Manager Estes added that Manager Houston would be working alongside the recruiter, but the Council would need to determine what types of committees and whether to have a community meet and greet.

Mayor Jones recommended a special City Council meeting prior to the next regular meeting to choose a recruitment firm. He wanted to get the process moving. He asked Staff to send Councilors their thoughts on each proposal as well.

Councilor Brownson said he believed the Council should be ready to make a decision by the middle of next week. Councilor Herman agreed.

Mayor Jones called for public comments. There were none.


**NEW BUSINESS & MISCELLANEOUS, PUBLIC COMMENTS (NON-AGENDA)**

There was no new business or comments.


**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 pm.

**ATTEST:**

  
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Finance Director

**APPROVED:**

  
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City Manager