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Is this related to a legislative agenda item?

Yes

No

Agenda item number (if known)

26-0071

Subject*

26-0071 Statement in Support of City Administrator Charter Ordinance

Message*

Dear Common Council:

I submit this in my personal capacity, and as a retired professor of public administration with two decades personnel policy legal experience at the Pentagon. I strongly support this charter ordinance and believe it is long overdue.

Through greater fiscal oversight and administration, professional management will generate cost savings many multiples greater than the personnel cost. In fact, I would advocate for inclusion of a deputy administrator position to match that of other similarly sized municipalities.

In addition to cost savings, this ordinance also ensures proper lines of control by limiting direct contact and tasking of department heads by political officials. This greatly reduces outside influence not transparent to residents, thus facilitating efficient and effective administration. This was a much needed addition to prior ordinance iterations.

There is, however, a significant fault within the draft that must be corrected before passage. As written, only those with five years of municipal/county experience can apply — such a screening prerequisite is uncommon, and not necessary. It may, unfortunately, disqualify highly qualified candidates while pushing through the mediocre. The screening panel should be looking at competencies held, not where they were obtained. No one would view a former Army garrison commander having guided personnel, programs, and employees for a 30,000 person installation to not be exceptionally qualified. Or a senior executive within a state agency. Or someone leaving the corporate world having managed major operations. None of these individuals would be considered minimally qualified, while a town leader of just a few hundred residents is deemed better qualified and forwarded for consideration.

The screening panel will be more than capable of identifying qualified candidates without a mechanical disqualifier, especially one that believes only local government employees could perform the job. Though I strongly disagree, if you find it necessary to put qualifications in an ordinance, I recommend deleting "shall" language and inserting language to the effect: "Typically, ideal candidates will possess..."

I commend the Council for taking this on as it will have lasting benefit to the City of La Crosse, especially in the very trying budgetary times ahead where extremely impactful decisions will need to be made. Professional management will help ensure that these decisions are prudent, necessary, and equitable. I encourage swift passage of this draft charter ordinance.

James N. Szymalak, JD, PhD

Attachments (optional)