

## Compilation of Department Head Interview Responses Concerning a City Administrator

### What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Continuity, consistency, stability
  - Avoid having to train and educate a new mayor
  - Clear line of accountability and authority
  - Management of long-term projects to completion so the time invested in them is not lost
  - Establish priorities
  - Construct the budget
- Knowledge and experience
  - City administrator would be hired for their expertise, knowledge, and experience, not popularity via election (Mayor)
  - Better approach to a long-term vision for City operations
  - Could help collaboration between department heads
  - Need a CEO to run a \$70 million+ organization
- Focus on operations
  - Currently the Mayor's duties are split between public interaction and City operations
  - Takes politics out of the agenda (x3)
  - Can evaluate departments for proper level of staffing and hold them accountable and evaluate performance
  - Better long-range planning
  - Having someone that is a professional in all of the things a department head is not – currently department heads have dedicated their working adult life to becoming experts in their profession but maybe not in budgeting or other essential things that happen in the city. Hiring a city administrator would be able to bring that experience and professionalism
  - Clear lines of accountability and authority
  - City administrator would have more time to interact with department heads
  - Can provide a clear and reliable reference point for private sector promoters to contact and interact for the development of beneficial partnerships.
- Can enhance communication between citizens and city government
- Government administrators are common in local governments
- A city administrator would be able to have a better perspective if something would go to referendum and if so would have the time to look into that and research that (right now no one has that job)

### What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Hiring the right person for the job
  - The relationship between elected officials (mayor and council members) and the administrator must be particularly cooperative, respectful and clearly defined/established.
  - The hire of an administrator with proven professionalism, communication skills, and abilities for collaboration with politicians will be particularly important for the first hire of an administrator for the City of La Crosse as the practical patterns of this alteration in the form of local government are established.
  - The administrator should have exceptional communication skills. How much responsibility will the administrator have for educating the citizenry about governmental activities? How will these educational responsibilities relate to and coordinate with the political responsibilities of the elected officials.
  - This hire should not be anyone who works in La Crosse government currently.

- How do we measure success of having a city administrator and how often? What are the benchmarks?
- How would the addition of a City Administrator to the City's organization potentially affect the level of responsibilities, job descriptions and remuneration of current staff leadership positions?
- The position may bring to the forefront needed efficiencies or standards of operations that department heads may not want or like to hear leading to fiscal accountability and cuts.
- Cost
  - Annual salary and benefits
  - Executive assistant salary and benefits?
  - Office space (waiting list for space in City Hall) and remodeling cost
  - How will the position be paid for? (x3)
  - What support staff will be necessary? (x3)
  - Viability of the expense – right now there are many more staff needed in each department already that we are getting denied that would improve our city so it is tough seeing those getting denied and adding a city administrator
- City administrator turnover
  - Typical 5-7 years for a city administrator at a medium sized municipality
- Will voters feel that their votes now have less influence with the addition of a city administrator?

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- With a city administrator would we need a full-time mayor?
- As a department head – what does that mean for me? Many unanswered questions so far.
- Consider having an assistant city administrator to fill in when city administrator is on vacation or during job vacancy
- Will seasoned department heads and staff be part of the hiring process, i.e. participate in interviews, tours of departments
- Will the selection process be completed internally, externally. (third party recruitment and hire?)
- The legislation as presented does not seem complete
- Hiring a person before we have a clear job description doesn't make sense
- Will new/incoming Council members elected in April be able to digest the gravity of this issue?
- Will the Mayor's role be more clearly defined?

**Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Consider hiring a consultant to evaluate the need for a city administrator and hold public information sessions
- Having a city administrator may be helpful in situations where someone of authority (above dept head) would be influential in a mtg or negotiations (because of their role and expertise)
- Is this process being rushed?
- Do the citizens of La Crosse want this?

## Uncompiled Department Head Interview Responses Concerning a City Administrator

### What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Continuity-lots of time onboarding new Mayors—train and educate on city govt
- Administrator should have the knowledge/experience already for job duties (high level functions) which just leaves learning the specifics re: City of La Crosse...i.e. similar to Dept heads—hired based on expertise not popularity
- Accountability without micromanagement
- We can do better: More collaboration, teamwork and dept head/staff support

### What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Hiring the “right” person
- Transition & Uncertainty—will the administrator take on any of the dept head responsibilities?
- Will Dept heads feel they are being micromanaged?
- Full time mayor—needed ????
- Citizen buy in—perception of some members of the public-- will lose power/influence (voting) by adding Administrator vs only a Mayor

### Do you have any other questions/comments?

- NA

### Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?

- Office space---City Hall is full—waiting list

**What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

Ideally an experienced city administrator could benefit the City by collaborating effectively with the Mayor, department heads, and staff to improve operational efficiencies and fiscal responsibility.

**What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

The annual salary and benefits for a city administrator, potential executive assistant, and possible deputy administrator would be significant. There would also be the cost of remodeling a space in City Hall to accommodate the city administrator and staff.

For the next four years there would be an overlap of duties between the Mayor and city administrator. Can they work and collaborate together productively for the benefit of the City?

How will the city administrator interact with department heads? Would department head job responsibilities change and will they have their salaries reduced?

It is very important to have the best search, screen, and interview process possible for hiring a city administrator. We need the right person.

Since the City is facing necessary upcoming budgetary reductions, how would a city administrator approach finding the necessary cost savings?

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

How would the success and effectiveness of having a city administrator be measured? What benchmarks would be used?

If a city administrator is hired, would the Mayor's position remain full-time or changed to a part-time position when possible?

**What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Continuity-lots of time onboarding new Mayors—train and educate on city govt
- Administrator should have the knowledge/experience already for job duties (high level functions) which just leaves learning the specifics re: City of La Crosse...i.e. similar to Dept heads—hired based on expertise not popularity
- Accountability without micromanagement
- We can do better: More collaboration, teamwork and dept head/staff support

**What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Hiring the “right” person
- Transition & Uncertainty—will the administrator take on any of the dept head responsibilities?
- Will Dept heads feel they are being micromanaged?
- Full time mayor—needed ????
- Citizen buy in—perception of some members of the public-- will lose power/influence (voting) by adding Administrator vs only a Mayor

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- NA

**Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Office space---City Hall is full—waiting list

**What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Leadership
- **Clear direction** and focus—currently Mayor position pulls person in 2 directions (public vs time focused on city hall)
- Continuity
- Forced to be more responsive, better communication
- Clear lines of accountability and authority
- More oversight—consistently checking in with dept heads—how are things going? How can I assist?
- Reduce silos and departments working so independently
- Prioritize
- **Consistency** with less transition of staff/mayor, council members

**What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- People don't like change-dept heads, staff, public
- Abuse of power (up to Dept heads to speak up if this is an issue)
- High turn over—trend for city administrators
- Resistance from staff, dept heads, public—administrator would need to build relationships

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- Consider the idea of having an Assistant City Administrator (Dept head), they would attend high level mtgs and be in the loop to fill in the absence of the City Administrator (vacation or job vacancy)
- Involve seasoned dept heads and staff in hiring process—interview, tours of their dept, gather input from staff

**Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Administrator could be helpful in situations where someone of authority (above dept head) would be influential in a mtg or negotiations (because of their role and expertise)

### **Benefits of City Administrator:**

- Need a CEO to run a 72-74million dollar entity (X2)
- Takes politics out of the agenda (X3)
- CA can look at departments and see where they may be heavy. Hold departments accountable to their budgets. Employee/staff performance
- Enhance communication efforts between citizens and City government
- Removes the boundaries of incoming/outgoing elected official-establishes relationships that can flourish from Administration to Administration
- Established priorities
- Support department heads with and within governmental framework
- Most popular form of government in the US
- Construct the budget
- Frees up Mayor to be more public facing.

### **Barriers/Challenges to City Administrator position:**

- The wrong person and lack of operational capacity could cripple a city
- The position may bring to the forefront needed efficiencies or standards of operations that we may not want or like to hear
- Fiscal accountability will lead to cuts. It will get ugly.
- Should not be anyone who works in La Crosse government currently.
- New CA would be expected to hold directors and department heads accountable and work in collaboration. Some may not like this. If the wrong person is hired it could cause adversarial and damaging relationships that could harm the city.
- The legislation as presented does not seem complete
- Hiring person before we have a clear job description doesn't make sense

### **Questions about City Administrator position:**

- Is there going to be a push for a public referendum. If so, will the Council cede to the public's position or will they vote the way they think it should be?
- Are new/incoming Council Members elected in April – be able to digest the gravity of this issue
- Will the Mayor's role be more clearly defined
- Will the CA hold departments accountable to legislation and ordinances on the books – not done with consistency now
- How will this position be paid for (X3)
- How do we now what kind of support staff they will need (X3)
- Will the selection process be completed internally, externally. (Third party recruitment and hire?)
- Do the citizens/taxpayers of La Crosse want this? Are we doing it right? Are we rushing into this?

### **What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Add stability
- Having another staff is general is a benefit to the city
- Having someone take the time to see a project from start to finish - project manager - maybe we would be better off getting multiple project managers
- Sometimes department heads spend 100s of hours working on a project for a mayor and then when there is a change in the mayor that project gets dropped and all of that time was wasted
- This person would be able to have a better perspective if any department should go to any referendum and if so would have the time to look into that and research that (right now no one has that job)
- We could have a longer vision plan – where are we going in 5 years and how are we getting there – right now department heads need to be so into the day to day it is tough to do any long-term planning
- Have a long-term plan of how we are getting out of this budget crisis
- Having someone that is a professional in all of the things a department head is not – currently department heads have dedicated their working adult life to this profession and are experts but maybe not in budgeting or other essential things that happen in the city – a City Admin would be able to bring that experience and professionalism
- Bringing in a City Admin is a better way to run the city – not because the current system is broken or department heads don't know what they are doing – but because we can be better than we are
- Assist local government to run more effectively and efficiently
- This person could assist in things like being the in between with the union in some ways – when it comes to pay we currently have our department heads working on representing their employees while having to consider what is best for the city – that is a tough spot to be in
- A leader that can help steer the ship long term – strategic plan?
- Someone that can guide collaboration between department heads!

### **What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- As a department head – what does that mean for me? Many unanswered questions so far.
- Who do we answer to – Mayor, commissions, administrator, and council? It is going to look different at each city and maybe for each department but that is an unknown
- Don't see a world where we need both a full-time mayor and a full-time city admin
- What is council and mayor are not on the same page – that is tough to balance for a department head – what happens when there is a third person thrown into that mix?
- Viability of the expense – right now there are many more staff needed in each department already that we are getting denied for that would improve our city so it is tough seeing those getting denied and adding a staff like this
- Is this another political layer? Strong mayor and weak mayor – would this have an impact on the city admin

### **Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- I know some cities have done it well and some have done it bad!

### **Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Have we considered a consultant to explore this as an outside source? This consultant could take a look at the city of lacrosse and get a better understanding of what a City Administrator could come in and do – have that consultant answer the unanswered questions (non-bias) and hold public information sessions. Then bring that information to the council to vote on.



- La Crosse has a deep history – including having strong and weak mayors and how do we get beyond that and that is a piece of all of this
- What is the real picture of a financial expense of adding this – will they need an assistant? Most likely and what will that cost be?
- Logistically where will they have an office? Currently a list of plenty of people looking for an office space – there would most likely need to be some renovations – cost of that?
- Internally – what does the city really need? Job description is very vague and maybe a consult could help us see what we really need first
- A good city admin would be able to see what holes they could fill so maybe it is a benefit to having the job description be vague but concerning – do we actually need more boots on the grounds people?
- Depending on the city admin background this could look very different for each department – like if they have a background in a certain area do we also need that dept head?
- Concerns about the current timeline with a new mayor and partial new council possibly – what does this mean if we pass it in May – is that the best time?
- Is there something else we could look into like a deputy mayor?
- What is the exact need? Where can we even cut?
- What are some of the big issues in La Crosse? Example – floodplain is one of them and we are looking at hiring a city admin possibly and we can't even pay a floodplain manager well enough to stay

**1. What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

Continuity of Departmental Projects: City Departments establish projects that are long range and not directly related to specific elected officials' terms in office, but rather relate to the achievement of multiyear and multidecade City plans. Departmental projects result in the appropriation of resources (both of personnel and budgetary allocations). The Office of the City Administrator [Sec 19 (a)] would target *a more efficient, effective and responsible government*. The professional organization and coordination of citywide resources would be facilitated by the professional and specifically trained skills of a municipal administrator.

The Fact that Local Government Administrators are Common: As local governments on county and municipal levels establish for themselves appointed (non-elected) positions to function as Chief Operating Officers (COO), this fact weighs in favor of the office being recognized as advantageous to deal effectively with the increasing complexity of the function of local government.

*Promote the economic well-being and growth of the City through public and private sector cooperation* [Section 19 (e) (1) (k)] The office of administrator can provide a clear and reliable reference point for private sector promoters to contact and interact with local City government for the development of beneficial partnerships.

**2. What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

Cooperation: The Functions and Duties of the Administrator [Section 19 (e) (5) (a)] *All officials and employees of the City shall cooperate with and assist the administrator so that the City government shall function effectively and efficiently.* For this to be achieved it is a priority that a careful selection for the hire of the administrator be performed. The candidate for hire must have a proven track record for professional management of local government. The elected officials and departmental leadership must be able to readily gain confidence in the administrator's character, skills and knowledge base. The cost for hiring such a qualified person at real market rates should not be a hindrance to the selection of the best candidate for the job.

The relationship between elected officials (mayor and council members) and the administrator must be particularly cooperative, respectful and clearly defined/established. The hire of an administrator with proven professionalism, communication skills, and abilities for collaboration with politicians will be particularly important for the first hire of an administrator for the City of La Crosse as the practical patterns of this alteration in the form of local government are established.

Finances, Budgeting, and Purchasing [Section 19 (e) (4) (a, b, c, d, e)] Will the hire of a City Administrator result in the need for an alteration in the job description of the Director of Finance. Will the limits and expectations of responsibilities for those two roles be clearly demarcated?

Regular Basis: The ordinance for creation of the Office of City Administrator makes reference to the performance of certain duties on a *regular basis*. [Job performance review, Section 19 (e) (3) (c), and report to Common Council, Section 19 (e) (4) (c)] What does this specifically mean in terms of regularity?

**3. Do you have any other questions/comments?**

How would the addition of a City Administrator to the municipal staff organogram potentially affect the level of responsibilities, job descriptions and remuneration of current staff leadership positions?

The administrator should have exceptional communication skills. How much responsibility will the administrator have for educating the citizenry about governmental activities? How will these educational responsibilities relate to and coordinate with the political responsibilities of the elected officials.

**4. Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

Small word choice questions:

Section 19 (e) (1) (j) “Establish” to replace “Established”

Section 19 (e) (3) (a) “coordination” to replace “coordinator”

In order to find the right good quality candidates for consideration to hire, it is important to advertise the search in good places.