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COUNTY COUNCIL
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 S. HIGH STREET
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793
www.MauiCounty.us

September 1, 2015

Mr. Gregory G. Evans, Vice-Chair
and Members of the Cost of Government Commission
c/o Office of the County Auditor
County of Maui
Wailuku, Hawaii 96793

Dear Mr. Evans and Members:

**SUBJECT: COUNTY MANAGER AS A 2015-2016 SUBJECT
MATTER FOR THE COGC ANNUAL REPORT**

On June 28, *The Maui News* ran an editorial entitled, "Is the County Structure right," which discussed the possibility of moving towards a county manager form of government. The topic generated much interest among the public, including many letters to the editor. I too, subsequently covered the subject in my Sunday, July 19 column published by *The Maui News*. I am including both pieces for your reference.

A county manager would be a professional administrator appointed by the council. This form of administration would provide stability in operations and draw professionally qualified department heads and deputies. The county manager would carry out the policies and execute ordinances established by the Council.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has reported the county manager system can promote efficiency and professionalism in government. NACo recently found a county manager, or equivalent position, exists in more than 81 percent of surveyed counties. The county manager system is now the predominant form of government among all municipalities according to the Harvard Law & Policy Review.

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Although a charter amendment would be required to change the way our government operates, I believe the logical and prudent first step in reviewing this matter is understanding the potential cost savings and efficiencies that may be achieved by a county manager form of government.

Therefore, I am urging the Cost of Government Commission to please include this as a topic for your review in the 2015-2016 Annual Report.

I believe your findings will help to guide and inform decision makers on whether the county manager form of government is the best way forward for Maui County.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with any questions at (808) 270-5507 or by e-mail at Mike.White@MauiCounty.us.

Sincerely,



MIKE WHITE
Council Chair

Enclosure

Is it time for county manager government structure?

By Mike White

Published in The Maui News, July 19, 2015

By MIKE WHITE, for The Maui News

The June 28 Maui News editorial ("Is county's structure right?") has generated interest in considering whether the time has come for a county manager form of government. There are some provocative pros and cons to this question.

A county manager would be a professional administrator appointed by the County Council, replacing the position of an elected mayor. This form of administration would provide stability in operations and draw professionally qualified department heads and deputies. The county manager would carry out the policies and execute ordinances established by the council.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has reported the county manager system can promote efficiency and professionalism in government. NACo recently found a county manager, or equivalent position, exists in more than 81 percent of surveyed counties. The county manager system is now the predominant form of government among all municipalities, according to the Harvard Law & Policy Review.

Until 1969, Maui County had an elected Board of Supervisors holding both legislative and executive authority. A new charter, approved by the electorate in 1968, established the current "strong mayor" system in which an elected mayor appoints department heads and executes ordinances and other policies. The population of Maui County was 45,000.

At the time, the Charter Commission asserted the sharing of power by an elected mayor and an elected council, in separate branches, would provide checks and balances in government.

Interestingly, Elmer Cravalho, who was Maui County's first mayor (1969-1979), told the Charter Commission in 1975 he supported abolition of his office in favor of an appointed county manager.

If this new form of administration was adopted, Maui County could still have a mayor, albeit more ceremonial than administrative. The old argument that there is greater recognition for an elected mayor is no longer valid, especially since the vast majority of municipalities have moved to a county manager form of government.

Accountability to the electorate would be equal for all the council members, as it is now.

The most recent Charter Commission again considered proposing a county manager in 2011-2012. Testifiers cited competence and efficiency as basis for the proposal, with one member of the public stating: "The day-to-day operations of our government should be in the hands of a trained professional, not an elected official."

Instead of recommending a ballot proposal, the Charter Commission decided not to put the proposal on the 2012 general election ballot. In its final report, the commission noted after its yearlong study of governance in Maui County, it made the following recommendation to the council and mayor:

"The Commission recommends that a task force be established to thoroughly review the structure of the County of Maui government, research other models of county governments and prepare a report."

I welcome continued robust community discussion on this issue, as the council considers whether to move ahead with these structural considerations. Perhaps the time is right to consider the Charter Commission's recommendation.

Mahalo.

** Mike White is chair of the Maui County Council and vice chair of the council's Budget and Finance Committee. He holds the council seat for the Paia-Haiku-Makawao residency area. "Chair's 3 Minutes" is a weekly column to explain the latest news on county legislative matters. Go to mauicounty.us for more information.*

The Maui News

Newspaper Since 1900

SUNDAY, June 28, 2015

B8 — Sunday, June 28, 2015 — THE MAUI NEWS

opinion

TODAY'S EDITORIAL

Is county's structure right?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Maui County's population in 2014 was an estimated 163,019.

That was up some 8,184 (or 5.3 percent) from 2010's official census total of 154,835. If our current rate of growth continues, our population will reach 175,295 by the end of the decade — a rise of 13.2 percent.

Maui is evolving from a small town, rural community into the equivalent of a fairly good-sized city. Our county government's annual budget will reach \$621 million in 2016, which begs a fundamental question:

Is Maui County's governmental structure set up to manage the demands of a quickly growing community?

We realize a strong mayor/county council is the form of government throughout Hawaii. Frankly, though, Hawaii is the only place we know of in the United States where a mayor heads up a county government. Generally, mayors oversee municipalities and, even there, the concept of a strong mayor being the chief administrator seems to be waning.

Instead, there is more prevalence today of the council-manager structure where a political body (council, board, etc.) oversees a professional administrator.

The International City/County Management Association is quoted in about jobs.com defining the council/manager structure:

"(It) combines the strong political leadership of elected officials with the strong managerial experience of an appointed manager or administrator. All power and authority to set policy rests with an elected governing body, which includes a mayor or chairperson and members of the council, commission, or board.

"The governing body in turn hires a non-partisan manager who has very broad authority to run the organization."

As the county grows and its budget approaches two-thirds of a billion dollars, we should consider if hiring a professional manager is in Maui's best interest. It can easily be argued that the skill set needed to be a successful politician is not necessarily the same set needed to be a good administrator.

It can also be argued that going to the council-manager model will take the politics out of administering county business. It is not a criticism of either council members or the mayor to suggest studying another governmental structure.

Such a move would require a change in the County Charter. The earliest that could happen would be the 2016 election. The earliest a change in structure could be implemented would be the end of our incumbent mayor's term in 2018.

As we march inexorably toward billion-dollar county budgets, we should study carefully to see if the time is coming for a professional administrator.

■ Editorials reflect the opinion of the publisher.