

Building a Strong Mayor/Administrator Relationship

Sandra Johnson/Brent Hinson
City of Washington
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About Us

- ▶ **Mayor Sandra Johnson**
 - Retired from USDA, Farm Service Agency
 - Downtown building owner (and renovator!)
 - Community volunteer– Main Street, Chamber Ambassadors
 - Mayor since 2008
 - Previous served on Council from 2000–2008
 - Sigourney native; Washington resident since 1970
- ▶ **City Administrator Brent Hinson**
 - Administrator since 2011
 - Previous city experience in Iowa Falls (Finance Director/City Clerk) and Garner (City Administrator)

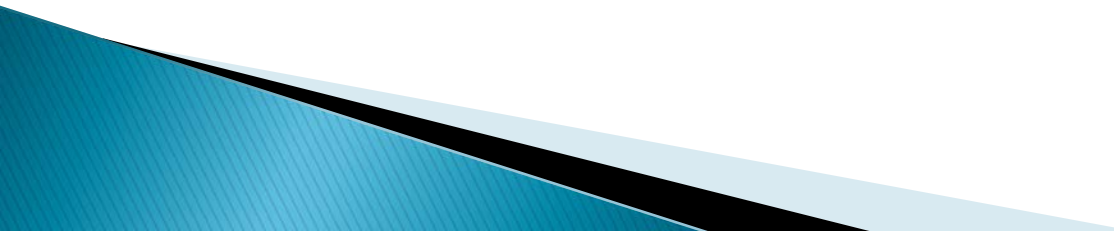
History of the Position/ Mayor's Perspective

- ▶ Public Management Assistance study done by Institute of Public Affairs in 2001
 - Washington was one of the few communities of its size without a City Administrator
 - There was a perceived overall lack of coordination and a general consensus of the need for a City Manager or Administrator
 - The City chose to use the title “City Administrator” but adopt an ordinance based on Iowa Code 372.8 (City Manager), giving the CA hire/fire authority, authority on employee compensation, limited appointment power, etc.
- ▶ This changed the position of the Mayor considerably, as some previous Mayors worked nearly full-time (for \$6,000/yr, not necessarily with a great deal of training or support)


Administrator Ordinance v2.0: An Example of Collaboration

- ▶ We worked together in 2014 to revise the Mayor, Clerk and Administrator Ordinances in the Code
 - While the Administrator ordinance (adopted 2001) was mostly solid, a number of conflicts existed based on the pre-existing code
 - Mayor ordinance, in particular, contained many overlaps with CA duties that could be problematic in the future in the wrong hands
 - The code lacked consistency and needed a thorough and comprehensive review
 - We thought it was important to have clear lines of authority and/or to reflect current practices accurately
 - Revisions were proposed & passed with minimal fanfare

How We Communicate

- ▶ Sandra attends department head meetings
 - ▶ We have a scheduled meeting weekly following the dept head meeting
 - Freewheeling; often up to 3 hours
 - ▶ We regularly talk and email outside of these meetings
 - ▶ Brent prepares a weekly CA Update memo to Mayor, Council, staff and stakeholders
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Keys to Collaboration

- ▶ Open, honest communication
 - ▶ Mayor and Administrator as “administrative team”, even though individual management styles may differ
 - ▶ Respect each other’s office and give each other space to perform their duties
 - ▶ We may disagree from time to time, but we work through these disagreements and toward what is best for the organization and the community
 - Even when we disagree, we make efforts to accommodate the other person
 - ▶ Each provides lots of ideas (some more practical than others), but try to always be working toward progress rather than just talking about it
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Final Thoughts

- ▶ A Mayor and Administrator working together have much more power than working separately
 - The Mayor has the legitimacy of being popularly elected and can carry a lot of weight publicly with his/her priorities and statements, but has less formal authority than in pre-administrator days
 - The Administrator brings professional expertise and has formal authority under the Code of Ordinances, but needs the support of the elected officials, especially the Mayor, to accomplish anything of enduring significance