

Civil Service - County

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# CAO Selection Process Vexes Civil Service Panel Chairman

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The dispute between county supervisors and civil service commissioners about the process of selecting a county administrative officer isn't over yet.

The issue of whether the commission will certify Acting County Administrative Officer George Newell has been separated from the commission-supervisors controversy, but the battle still rages over the selection procedure.

Ron Berry, Civil Service Commission chairman, made it clear that he's not too happy about amendments to ordinances relating to the selection process and qualifications that were adopted in concept by supervisors this week.

Supervisors unanimously opted for amendments proposed by Supervisor Gary Patton, in lieu of amendments proposed by the commission.

The supervisors' amendment to the selection procedure, which is contingent upon the commission's approval, gives commissioners far less say than they want.

"It appears to me that the board has passed a modification, rather than a clarification," Berry stated.

He said that Commissioners Jack Samuelson and Shelley Emerson, an attorney, researched the history of the commission's responsibility in selecting candidates for the job.

The two also discussed the matter at length with Hulda McLean, who was a member of the Board of Supervisors at the time the or-

dinances relating to selection of a county administrative officer were adopted.

"Shelley Emerson is a very competent attorney and that's why we asked her to be a member of this group. It was her opinion that the intent of the original ordinances was unequivocal in that it makes the commission responsible for performing these acts," Berry said.

Under their proposed amendment, commissioners want to be able to select a list of qualified candidates, submit the list to supervisors and then certify the supervisors' choice.

Supervisors, on the other hand, want merely to consult with commissioners when recruiting a new county administrative officer. Their proposed amendment states they will "take into consideration" any screening and examination procedures recommended by the commission.

The selection of Newell three years ago by supervisors bothered some commissioners, they told the press later, because he was not chosen from a field of candidates, but rather promoted from the ranks and then sent to the commission for certification.

For three years, commissioners have refused to certify the 37-year-old Newell's appointment for various reasons, including concerns about his qualifications, his young age and his practice of promoting analysts in his office to top departmental positions.

Commissioners believe the qualifications section of the ordinance ought to be amended to require academic training in public administration, accounting, financing,

budgeting and public relations.

Supervisors want the ordinance to state, as it basically does now, that this type of academic training merely is preferred. While supervisors sent this amendment to the commission for review, they didn't make their final approval contingent upon the commission's OK.

Berry explained that commissioners want this type of experience so that they can document the experience listed by candidates for the job in the future.

"By requiring this kind of experience, then you can document it," Berry explained. "The problem now is

trying to get any information out of former employers.

"The board is right that a person may have large amounts of invaluable (non-academic) experience, but we have no way of sorting out that an applicant is telling the truth (about his or her experience.)"

When asked what he thinks the

chances are that the commission will go along with the board's recommended amendments when it meets Sept. 8, Berry replied:

"... In my opinion, the civil service ordinance is already so diluted from its original content that it wouldn't be in the interest of the public to dilute it any further."

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