

The City of Montague

SUMMARY:

The 2018-2019 session of the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury received 11 complaints concerning the operation of the Montague City Council. These complaints alleged various issues such as cronyism and unprofessionalism within the City Government. In addition, there are complaints of miscommunication and confusion about job duties. Also noted, was inadequate housing for stray animals.

BACKGROUND:

While reviewing the 2016-2017 Siskiyou Civil Grand Jury Report, it was found that they also “received complaints...alleging a multitude of problems”. The 2018-2019 Civil Grand Jury decided to investigate the new complaints and do a follow-up on the 2016-2017 “Montague City Council” report. These new complaints are basically alleging the same issues, as well as a few new, “multitude of problems”. It was observed all of these complaints have been submitted by a single source. To state otherwise would give the impression that the whole town is up-in-arms.

METHODOLOGY:

The Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury (SCCGJ) requested documentation to show whether the Montague City Council has complied with the recommendations of the 2016-2017 SCCGJ Report.

Interviews were conducted with members of the City Council and staff to receive input about the complaints.

DISCUSSION:

The City of Montague has 1,440 citizens, a City Council of 5 elected and/or appointed members, an elected or appointed Mayor and Mayor pro tem. Much of the city’s revenue comes from various grants as the city is economically challenged.

There were complaints of cronyism which commonly occur in small cities with limited human capital or resources. Nepotism was also alleged. Many of the complaints stem from lack of expertise in administering a city which could be attributed to the small population or inexperience of its governing officers and staff.

Another complaint was lodged concerning the inadequate housing of stray animals. Montague has lost its contract with the City of Yreka for the housing of stray animals. It was found that a 2-compartment kennel was constructed on city property to temporarily facilitate housing of strays.

A complaint was made that city council positions were being filled by appointment in lieu of election.

Professional training is an ongoing issue compounded by a shortage of available funds and high turnover of staff and city officials. The Montague City Council and its departments are operating with limited resources.

The documentation provided to the Civil Grand Jury by the City of Montague showed us that the recommendations of the 2016-2017 SCCGJ report have either been addressed, or are a work in progress.

FINDINGS:

F1. Progress is being made on implementing and updating the training programs, policy and procedures manual, and organizational chart to make the running of Montague more efficient.

F2. During the investigation, no issues of nepotism or cronyism were discovered.

F3. There is a local temporary kennel to house abandoned animals awaiting openings at private shelters. This appears to be an adequate solution.

F4. Vacancies in the City Council and lack of applicants have necessitated appointments in lieu of elections which is allowed by law under certain circumstances.

F5. Interviews indicated that proper training is being implemented with city employees.

F6. We believe Montague City Council and its departments could benefit from improved communication skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. Continue working on updating the training programs, policy and procedures manual, and organizational chart to make the running of Montague more efficient. Add training for improvement of communication skills.
- R2. When working with co-workers, keep personal issues separate from city business and always maintain a professional work environment.
- R3. Continue to establish a relationship with outside agencies to provide a shelter for stray animals. Increase fees (or other penalties) to decrease the number of stray and abandoned animals.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury requests the Montague City Council respond to the findings and recommendations in this report and take action as appropriate.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individual interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that report of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.