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No citizen search committee currently planned in hunt for next city manager

The job opening has now been officially posted and the search for Norman's next city manager is under way with recruiting firm Springsted Waters, but the city council currently has no plans to involve a citizen committee in the process.

Mayor Lynne Miller said the idea has been discussed but it's not one the council favors. Instead, she said the recruiting firm is looking at other ways to gather input from residents, such as a survey and focus groups.

See **SEARCH** Page A2

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From **Page A1** "Right now the public might be a little surveyed out," she said. "But they certainly have some citizen component in mind."

Still, Miller said she wasn't alone on council in expressing support for forming a citizen committee, and on Tuesday, Norman Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Scott Martin urged the council to revisit the idea.

"Historically, this has been the practice adopted by previous councils and provides a method of meaningful input from the general public as the council considers who will be Norman's next city manager," he said.

"A citizen search committee helps open the process and engages thoughtful citizens in this important decision."

Martin said it would have been an ideal inclusion from the beginning, but he said there's still time.

"It's not too late to do the right thing," he told the council Tuesday. "Openness, transparency and citizen

Waters' ability to target quality candidates, he said the firm doesn't know Norman as well as its residents. He said they can add a much needed local perspective and open up the process.

"The final decision is obviously going to be in the council's hands," he said. "But the committee serves as a great sounding board and I think that's the intent for all of the boards and commissions that are in place today. They provide a voice for the common citizen and give the council the ability to deploy qualified people to help work through this process."

As for the timeline to hire the next city manager, Miller said it could be a relatively quick process, taking as little as three months. Still, she said she believes there is time to put a committee together should the council change course.

"Up until now there hasn't been much for a citizen committee to do," she said. "I know there is community interest in it and certainly not just from the chamber. [Martin] just happened to be the one who got up and spoke."

Interim City Manager Mary Rupp said advertising for the position is coming and candidates have been encouraged to apply no later than Feb. 1. Following

involvement are hallmarks of good government."

Miller agreed that it's not too late for a committee to be formed, and, after hearing Martin's pleas, she said the council may be willing to reconsider.

City Clerk Brenda Hall said there hasn't been much discussion about a citizen committee this time around. Whether one is to be added later, she said, has not been determined but past city councils have, more often than not, used them. Hall said the last three city manager hires, going back to Andy Anderson in 1999, were made with input from a citizen steering committee.

"[The citizen committee] was involved in working with both the recruiter and council to determine what the city was looking for," Hall said. "Once the applications came in, the committee was also involved in whittling down the candidates."

Martin, who served as assistant city manager from 1999 to 2006, has past experiences serving on such committees and said they proved to be valuable. While he said he does not doubt Springsted

that, she said, Springsted Waters and the council will begin reviewing candidates.

Martin said some time has already been lost, but, like Miller, Rupp said the timing isn't critical and there is still ample opportunity to garner citizen input.

"We're kind of in a holding pattern now while applications are being submitted," she said. "So, if the council decided to utilize a citizen committee it would just be a matter of determining who would serve on that and what their role would be."

Miller said she is hopeful that the decision will be finalized before she leaves office in June. Unlike former OU football coach Bob Stoops, who was able to hand over the reins to the tested and trusted Lincoln Riley, Miller finds herself in the waining days of her term leading a council that is still searching for the right person to fill the city's top staff position.