

**Kootenai County
Optional Forms of Government
Study Commission**

Meeting Minutes
Monday, June 23, 2021
5:30 p.m.

451 N. Government Way
Administration Building, 1st Floor Room 1A/B

Commission Members Present: Kristen Wing, Tamara Bateson, Bob Fish, Dave Botting, Brian Cleary, David Levine, Bryant Bushling, Kurt Andersen, Phil Ward, and alternates Joan Genter, Cheri Zao, and Bruce Mattare.

I. Call Meeting to Order

Chair Dave Botting called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting participants recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Approval of the Agenda / Changes to the Agenda

There were no proposed changes to the agenda. Motion was made by Kurt Andersen to approve the agenda as submitted. The motion was seconded by Brian Cleary. The motion was approved by a show of hands.

IV. Announcements

There were no announcements.

V. Approval of Minutes

No changes to the minutes were requested. A motion to approve the June 9, 2021, meeting minutes as presented was made by Phil Ward. Bob Fish seconded the motion. The vote was taken and the motion passed.

VI. Reports

There was no discussion.

VII. Old Business

There was no discussion.

VIII. New Business

- a. Interview of 1996 Study Commission Members Bob Schmand and Mike Anderson
- b. Interview of former County Clerk and County Administrator Tom Taggart

Bob Schmand provided his recollection of the process that was used in 1996 to craft a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. The idea of expanding the number of county commissioners to five was intended to broaden the voice of the public. In retrospect, he felt it may have been better to keep the Sheriff and Prosecuting Attorney as elected officials. When asked later why he changed his view, he indicated that that change may have made the recommendation more acceptable to the public. Mr. Schmand opined that it would be important to educate the public as part of the current process, since there is so much information regarding how county government actually works.

Mr. Anderson stated that he felt the row officers should be hired and report to a county manager. In 1996, the county was growing and needed to consider different options. Expanding the number of county commissioners to five or seven would reduce the ability for third parties to influence county government. He felt that getting changes approved by the voters would be difficult and that is why educating the public on the proposal and the reason supporting the change is important.

Former Clerk & Administrator Tom Taggart explained that his role was created to relieve the county commissioners of the day-to-day workload so they could focus on other important areas. In essence, his position was focused on implementing the decisions of the county commissioners. He opined that if one were developing a county government organization from the ground up, you would never create what we have today. He agreed that it is difficult to get people to approve replacing elected officials, but said he felt this process is an opportunity to explain to the public how county government works.

After opening comments were made, all three guests responded to questions from the study group members. Mr. Taggart attended remotely and, due to technical difficulties, he was unable to fully participate in the question-and-answer period.

Both Mr. Anderson and Mr. Schmand confirmed that the study commission evaluated several different forms of government before they came up with their final recommendation. Neither could think of other people or organizations that they wished they had consulted. When asked if they discussed marketing or educating the public, Mike Anderson said they were a little naïve on that topic and he did not recall talking about education or outreach at all. Mr. Schmand agreed.

Mr. Anderson and Mr. Schmand both emphasized that, while no county has opted for an optional form of government, cities operate in a matter consistent with their recommendation in 1996. Kurt Andersen pointed out that city and county charters are different and that comparison may not be appropriate. Brian Cleary asked if the current system is not effective, how adding more county commissioners would be an improvement. Mr. Anderson said that was why they recommended appointing row officials, since both changes were necessary to improve overall effectiveness. Responding to another question, Mr. Schmand said that adding county commissioners would make the system more responsive to the public since each commissioner would be representing fewer citizens.

Mr. Taggart was asked if, based on his experience, he found any drawbacks in the administrator model. He said it was an experiment and he thought it could have worked if the role had been better designed.

When questioned about getting input from the public and organizations, Bob Schmand indicated they did not leave anyone out and he believed they had a balance of views represented.

Several questions regarding the cost of implementing their 1996 recommendations were posed. While no financial study was done, Mr. Schmand believed that common sense would say that savings could be found with consolidation and a move to part-time county commissioners.

- c. List of Potential Candidates for Interviews (Action)
 - a. Present Candidate List
 - b. Discussion of Candidates
 - c. Prioritize Candidates

Chair Botting opened up the discussion and the commission members suggested several potential candidates and supportive reasoning for interviews. It was agreed that Communication Manager Nancy Jones would send a recap of the list of potential candidates that were previously submitted. Additional candidate nominations should be sent to Nancy prior to next week's meeting.

Additional information was requested about row official job descriptions, staff levels by department and spending information. Communication Manager Nancy Jones agreed to provide links to the county website that would provide access to the requested information. Chair Botting indicated that a financial analysis would be something the current study group may consider once there is something to evaluate.

IX. Items for Next Meeting Agenda

June 30, 2021 – Invitations were to be extended to Commissioner Leslie Duncan and Kootenai County Republican Central Committee Chair Brent Regan

July 7, 2021 – Invitations were to be extended to Commissioner Bill Brooks and Commissioner Chris Fillios.

The row officials (the six elected officials other than the county commissioners) were to be asked to attend one of the commission meetings on July 14th, 21st, or 28th. Their chief deputies for the Sheriff, Prosecutor, Clerk and Coroner were to be scheduled for August 4th and 11th. It was agreed that chief deputies who are new in their positions (Assessor and Treasurer) would not need to attend.

Brian Cleary offered to develop a standard set of questions that could be used during future discussions with the row officials. Suggestions were to be sent to Mr. Cleary by Monday, June 28th.

X. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Kurt Andersen and seconded by Tamara Bateson. The vote was taken and the motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Jones, Deputy Clerk