

Kootenai County
Optional Forms of Government
Study Commission

Meeting Minutes

June 30, 2021

5:30 p.m.

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

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

I. Call to Order

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

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Bryant Bushling led the meeting participants in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Approval of 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 Phil Ward. The motion was approved by a show of hands.

IV. Announcements

Chair Botting made the following statement:

“The mission of this group is to answer one overriding question: Can the County government deliver the services it provides more effectively? Cost is not the most important factor. The cheapest government would be no government, but the law of the jungle. That is neither a legal option nor desirable for most people. Every person who testifies, every question asked of them, should all be directed toward new information pertinent to this mission, the effective delivery of county services.

The people who come to testify before this commission are here on a voluntary basis. We do not have subpoena power. Please remember this and treat every one of our visitors with respect. Both members of this Commission and observers have commented upon the repetitive nature of the questioning. To address the concerns voiced we will change our approach to questioning. We will go around the room,

each member or alternate will ask one question, with the option of one follow-up question to clarify an answer. When we have gone full circle we will repeat, as necessary.”

V. Approval of Minutes – June 23 2021

No changes to the minutes were requested. A motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 23, 2021. as submitted, was made by Phil Ward and seconded by Tamara Bateson. The vote was taken. The motion passed.

VI. Reports

This agenda item was not required for this meeting.

VII. Old Business

This agenda item was not required for this meeting.

VIII. New Business

a. Interview Kootenai County Republican Central Committee Chair Brent Regan

Brent Regan provided a recap of his political and professional experiences. He described his professional experience in system integration work, particularly approaching problem solving using critical thinking and a rational analysis as the best approach. Mr. Regan brought forward a number of questions and points, including:

- Why was the Study Commission formed? He opined that it was in response to a campaign promise.
- What is the Goal of the Study Commission? He referenced previous comments that the group was “tasked to decide if the current form of government is the most efficient and effective”.
- What is the stable balance between accountability and efficiency? He felt that a ‘benevolent dictatorship’ (i.e. county manager) has the highest efficiency but low accountability and was not a stable system. He felt that having all elected officials has low efficiency but maximum accountability (but still was not a stable system). He opined that the current system is near optimum with good stability.
- What is broken in the current form of government? Problems he identified or had heard of included commissioners possibly having too many meetings and insufficient interoperability between departments. He did not feel that changing the form of government would address either problem because he didn’t think having more commissioners would reduce the number of meetings. He noted that 43 other counties function fine with this structure and suggested a better solution would be to elect better commissioners.

- How can we improve interoperability between departments? Mr. Regan recommended not micromanaging employees, having commissioners set goals and then let department heads organize, and consider copying the form of government used by Ada County, with a Chief Operating Officer, Public Information Officer, Office Manager, and three clerks. He noted that none of these changes required a ballot initiative to implement.
- Mr. Regan opined that organizational changes often have unintended consequences with negative impacts that are not discovered until much later. He felt that is why organizational reviews normally involve departmental employees and require time to understand how the department function before changes can be proposed. He noted the challenge involved in finding the correct balance between efficiency of government and accountability to the citizens of the county.

b. Interview Current County Treasurer Steve Matheson

Steve Matheson indicated that he did not have an opening statement but was ready to answer questions from the study commission.

In response to the question of whether comparing how business and government operate is a valid comparison, both Mr. Matheson and Mr. Regan did not think so because government has more direct power over citizens and offer no alternatives for the services they provide. On the issue of accountability, both felt that the County was organized to provide the necessary checks and balances and to allow the citizens decide who they want to represent them. Mr. Matheson gave examples of why checks and balances were needed and indicated that, if anything, he felt that the County Commissioners have too much power. Both felt that adopting the County Manager option would reduce the checks and balances and limit the accountability to the citizens. Mr. Matheson also noted the importance in acknowledging that many of the obligations of the county are not determined by county officials but are dictated by the state of Idaho.

When asked about continuity of government when elected officials change, Steve Matheson described how he transitioned into his position. He spent a great deal of time studying the role before he was elected and relied on his Chief Deputy to help with the transition. He said that each elected official decides what works best for them and indicated that the County Commissioners may have the most difficult time transitioning into their new role. Mr. Regan added that the Chief Operating Officer role could help with the transition of new County Commissioners.

The 1996 study commission report highlighted many of the weaknesses of the current system and, since the county has grown significantly, this prompted a question about why those problems have not magnified. Mr. Regan said that this may indicated that we are on the right track and compared the Kootenai County size with Ada County. He felt that the best approach may be to make small changes instead of making a complete overall of the system.

When asked about the biggest challenges he faced, Steve Matheson indicated the state legislature was the biggest challenge (with staff retention and replacing the existing computer system as other focus areas). He also emphasized the importance of electing and hiring the right people and added that if his position was changed to an hired or appointed role, he would not serve in his current capacity.

c. List of Potential Candidates for Interviews

1. Present Candidate List
2. Discussion Candidates
3. Prioritize & Organize Candidates
4. Discuss Possible Candidate Questions

This agenda item was deferred until next week's meeting. Communication Manager Nancy Jones will add Ada County Commissioner Beck to the candidate list and distribute the list prior to next week's meeting.

IX. Items for Next Meeting Agenda

a. Confirm Current Commissioners Availability

1. Following Meetings – June 30th / July 7th / July 21st / July 28th
2. Interviewees

It was confirmed that County Commissioner Duncan and former County Commissioner Green would attend the July 7th meeting. County Commissioners Fillios and Brooks were scheduled for July 14th. The five remaining elected officials were to be scheduled for July 21th, July 28th and August 3rd, if needed. Chief Deputy interviews would likely be planned in September.

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 adjourned at 7:44 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Jones, Deputy Clerk

*At the time the minutes were approved, a full video of this meeting was also available online at www.YouTube.com/KootenaiCountyIdaho.