

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

Meeting Minutes

July 7, 2021

5:30 p.m.

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

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

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Botting called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

Member Bob Fish led the meeting participants in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**III. Approval of / Changes to the Agenda**

There were no proposed changes to the agenda. Motion was made by Bob Fish to approve the agenda as submitted. The motion was seconded by Kurt Andersen. The vote was taken; the motion passed.

**IV. Announcements**

There were no announcements.

**V. Approval of Minutes – June 30, 2021**

Bruce Mattare voiced concerns that the draft minutes did not completely capture the comments made by Kootenai County Republican Central Committee Chair Brent Regan. It was decided to allow Mr. Mattare to suggest changes to the draft minutes with approval of the June 30, 2021, minutes to be deferred until the July 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**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 Commissioner Leslie Duncan
- b. Interview Former County Commissioner Dan Green

Former Commissioner Dan Green provided a brief summary of the roles he served at the county, which included six (6) years as a Kootenai County Commissioner and seven (7) years on the Kootenai County Planning & Zoning Commission (including five (5) years as Chair).

Commissioner Leslie Duncan (currently serving her third year in office) shared that she enjoys the position and providing representation for the constituents of the county. She outlined her view of the job of a commissioner, mentioning the need for long term planning, allocating funds to other departments to perform the necessary services, and her efforts to streamline administrative processes.

The commission members put forward a number of questions to Ms. Duncan and Mr. Green. Primarily, the questions were focused on how the current structure is organized, whether or not cost and process efficiencies could be effected under the current form of government, what perceived benefits and drawbacks each saw in adding some form of county manager, operating officer, or executive, and what specific challenges are faced today that warrant considering a change in the current structure.

Commissioner Leslie Duncan shared observations, experiences, and opinions on each of the topics mentioned, including:

- Workload – Commissioner Duncan said that she felt the job of county commissioner is a full-time job but not overwhelming. She shared that, initially, she worked more than 40 hours but after adjusting to the position most meeting preparation and participation can be done in under forty hours per week with some time for other projects. She saw the county commissioners' primary roles as making decisions in the best interest of the taxpayers, working to make things better, and providing county departments with necessary resources to deliver mandated services.
- Current form – Commissioner Duncan felt that she had the time and resources available to do the job well and make solid decisions. She felt maintaining relationships with the elected officials is important to understand needs and provide resources. She noted that where improvements are needed, sometimes technology can provide solutions. She opined that voters are smart and would vote for change if they saw benefit to making a change but would need more

detail than “this might work”. She noted that the current form allowed the commissioners to “play off each other’s strength’s” in the current form.

- Accountability – She noted that voters may not know when problems exist and that if they knew, they could hold elected officials more accountable. She stressed that the current form of government has sufficient checks and balances to ensure the resources of the county are protected and gave examples. Felt integrity was an important factor in choosing elected officials.
- View of changes in form – Commissioner Duncan felt that adding a Chief Operating Officer would add another layer between commissioners and other officials and department heads, which could negatively impact relationship building. She supported keeping all ‘row’ officials as elected positions. She felt adding more commissioners would cause them to be less engaged and lead to more potential open meeting violations rather than fewer. She did not feel having more commissioners would increase efficiency or result in cost savings.
- Operations and policy decisions – Commissioner Duncan disagreed with comparing public and private sector business models as business focuses on ‘the bottom line’ where municipalities focus on providing mandated services. She felt the county should provide quick services but that government is structured deliberately toward slower policy changes.

Mr. Green shared observations, experiences, and opinions on each of the topics mentioned, including:

- Workload – Mr. Green said he frequently felt he could attend necessary meetings but had to choose between other obligations, such as outside meetings with groups he served as liaison to or community meetings he was asked to participate in. He said he would have liked more time to work on policy but the administrative work took too much time. He noted that county commissioners carry both policy and administrative responsibilities.
- Current form – Mr. Green said the most surprising thing he learned when he became a Commissioner was how inefficient the county structure was. He said that the work that has been done to hire additional resources has been a positive step but that he felt some of the issues brought before the Commissioners were not worth the time spent on them. He strongly felt that compensation for elected officials should be less than for employees, seeing their positions as public service.
- Accountability – Mr. Green gave examples of times when other elected officials blamed the county commissioners for not funding new positions and programs rather than looking for other solutions. He noted that when the ‘At Will’ hiring policy was adopted, it greatly reduced liability for the county but the commissioners could not require the Sheriff’s Office to adopt it, even though it was a county policy and the county still bore financial and legal liability for those employees.
- View of changes in form – Mr. Green opined that adding a Chief Operating Officer would be a step in the right direction but would not get to the root cause of the problem. He felt that an experienced County Manager could bring different expertise on streamlining operations. He also felt that the County Manager form

could work, given that cities and other government agencies seem to be able to operate with an administrative manager concept and still provide the necessary checks and balances to protect their constituents. He supported a five member Board of Commissioners with potential hiring of the Assessor, Treasurer, and Coroner roles.

- 2012 Ballot Initiative – Mr. Green explained his reasons for pursuing the ballot initiative in 2012, including a goal to improve efficiencies and provide a different level of expertise and experiences among county leadership to support better decision-making for the citizens of the county. A primary intent was to free up county commissioners so they could focus on other responsibilities in the community. He explained that some of the savings described in the proposal came from cutting the county commissioners’ salaries in half and reducing other areas of the budget. All three county commissioners agreed to put the recommendation to the voters.
- c. List of Potential Candidates for Interviews (Action)
1. Present Candidate List
  2. Discussion Candidates
  3. Prioritize & Organize Candidates

This item was deferred until next week.

- d. Interview Questions

This item was deferred but it was agreed to complete the review at next week’s meeting. When Communication Manager Nancy Jones provides the questions to the interviewees, she will let them know that it would be acceptable to submit written statements for the record.

## **IX. Items for Next Meeting Agenda**

- a. Confirm Current Commissioners Availability
  1. Confirm Other Commissioners’ Availability
  2. Confirm Contact with Row Officials
  3. Following Meetings
    - A. July 14, 21, 28; August 3, 11, 18
    - B. August 25; September 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
    - C. Interviewees

It was confirmed that County Commissioners Bill Brooks and Chris Fillios would attend the July 14<sup>h</sup> meeting. The five remaining elected officials and their chief deputies were to be scheduled for July 21<sup>st</sup>, July 28<sup>th</sup>, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, August 11<sup>th</sup> and August 18<sup>th</sup>. Communication Manager Nancy Jones will coordinate the interview schedules and determine if some meetings could accommodate three interviewees. The September schedule would be finalized once the list of additional interviewees was approved.

## X. **Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Kurt Andersen and seconded by Tamara Bateson. A vote was taken and the motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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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](http://www.YouTube.com/KootenaiCountyIdaho).