

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

Meeting Minutes

July 21, 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, Phil Ward, and alternates Joan Genter, Cheri Zao, and Bruce Mattare. Brian Cleary attended via phone.

- **Call to Order**

Chair Botting called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

- **Pledge of Allegiance**

Kurt Andersen led the meeting participants in the Pledge of Allegiance.

- **Approval of / Changes to the Agenda**

There were no changes proposed. A motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Bob Fish and seconded by Kristen Wing. The vote was taken; the motion passed.

- Announcements – There were no announcements.

- **Approval of Minutes – July 14, 2021**

No changes were requested. A motion to approve the meeting minutes as submitted was made by Kurt Andersen and seconded by Phil Ward. The vote was taken; the motion passed.

- **Reports**

Kristen Wing said she had contacted the National Association of Counties to gather information, noting that many states have similar statutes that allow for optional forms of government reviews. She was also contacting individual counties around the country to get feedback on what was working and was not working in their organizations. She said she would review her findings once the research was completed.

Brian Cleary had found information that he thought would provide useful information for the study group to consider. However, he was unsure if copyright regulations would permit copies to be made and distributed. Communication Manager Nancy Jones agreed to contact the county legal department to determine how best to proceed.

- **Old Business** – This agenda item was not required for this meeting.

- **New Business**

- a. Interview Kootenai County Democratic Central Committee Chair Evan Koch

Evan Koch began by reading a prepared statement supporting the work of the Study Commission and identifying specific challenges he perceived to exist under the current form of county government. After he read his statement, commission members and alternates took turns asking questions in the following areas:

- Why the Board of Commissioners having more control might be a benefit to the county;
- What outcomes Mr. Koch envisioned and how those would provide potential benefits to the organization;
- How a different form of government might impact growth challenges (noting Ada County is larger but uses the same form of government);
- What objections the democratic central committee might have to an increase in the number of commissioners and how he felt that change might impact community members;
- How using a similar structure to North Idaho College (NIC) would be useful when Mr. Koch referenced current problems at NIC despite that having that structure in place; and
- How a possible consolidation of power with fewer open meeting law restrictions would be preferable.

In answer to the questions, Mr. Koch indicated that he did not have a recommendation in mind regarding a particular form of government, but that he was supportive of the commission's efforts to consider all available options. He did not identify any specific benefits of the available options, noting that to be the job of the commission. He shared his view that elected officials should be chosen based on their skill set, not on their political views, comparing choosing elected officials to choosing a physician. He also opined that comparisons of Ada County to Kootenai County were unbalanced because their per capita budget, programs, and support are different from Kootenai County. He also noted that access to and building relationships with legislators might be different there because of proximity to the Capitol. Mr. Koch felt that the job of the county commissioners is primarily to run operations of the county including, to some extent, the operations of other elected officials. He was not able to identify any particular concerns regarding the concept of increasing the size of the county board of commissioners, expressing his view that a larger board could be less subject to politicization. He shared his view that having commissioners able to discuss county business would improve communication. He also stated that having more commissioners might result in more interaction with people in the community. He acknowledged that polarization exists on the NIC board, despite having a managerial structure, but said he still felt that any form of government is subject to political pressure but that a five-member or seven-member board would be overall less subject to polarization and better for continuity than a three-member board.

b. Interviews – Set Additional Interviewees & Schedule

Nancy Jones confirmed the following interview schedule:

July 28<sup>th</sup>: Clerk Jim Brannon, Chief Deputy Clerk Jennifer Locke, and Finance Director Dena Darrow; August 3<sup>rd</sup>: Coroner Warren Keene and Prosecutor Barry McHugh; August 11<sup>th</sup>: Sheriff Robert Norris and Assessor Bela Kovacs. Additional interviews will be scheduled for Chief Deputies, Department Heads and Line Employees. The group was to consider their updated interview list for discussion at an upcoming meeting.

c. Public Outreach/Communication Plan/Public Comment Meeting

The group discussed the benefits of hearing from the public early-on in the process versus waiting until after the interviews were completed. There was also discussion regarding what type of information should be provided to the public at the meeting, on the county website, or in local newspapers. It was agreed to plan a public comment session in September and provide guidelines on the length of the public comment meeting and the time limits each speaker must observe. This information should be widely distributed.

Nancy Jones will send out a survey for members to complete to gather feedback on the type of communication plan that should be developed based on the audience, the delivery methods and deliverables. She has contacted the county legal department to determine what type of public outreach activities the group is allowed to do. The legal department has also been asked to determine the actual end date of the study commission.

- **Items for Next Meeting Agenda** – This item was covered under new business (item b).
- **Adjournment**

Kristen Wing asked if we needed to discuss the latest interview question document updated by Brian Cleary. He also included a draft memo to elected officials, deputies, and county staff to explain the purpose of the interview session. It was agreed to proceed and Brian Cleary will send Nancy Jones the final document that she will distribute to the interviewees.

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 7:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Nancy Jones, Deputy Clerk

