

Minutes of Meeting
Commissioners' Status Update
March 1, 2021
11:00 a.m.

The Kootenai County Board of Commissioners: Chairman Chris Fillios, Commissioner Leslie Duncan, and Commissioner Bill Brooks met to discuss the following agenda items. Also present were Clerk Jim Brannon, Prosecutor Barry McHugh, Assessor Bela Kovacs, Undersheriff Dan Mattos, Captain Stu Miller, Patrol Deputies Alana Hunt and Mike Douglass, Public Defender Anne Taylor, BOCC Senior Business Analyst Nanci Plouffe, Communications Manager Nancy Jones, Auditor Staff Accountant – Budget Michelle Chiaramonte and Deputy Clerk Ronnie Davisson. Also present was Coeur d'Alene Press Staff Writer Madison Hardy and over 100 members of the public.

- A. **Call to Order:** Chairman Chris Fillios called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.
- B. **Changes to the Agenda (Action):** There were no changes to the agenda.
- C. **Business (Discussion):**

In House Custodian

Commissioner Leslie Duncan said they were considering going to RFP (Request for Proposal) for an custodial services and that after receiving three bids, they could determine whether the in-house custodian would be more cost-effective. She said the current position was temporary through March 31, so the discussion needed to be had whether they were interested in continuing the current position and could discuss it in a Human Resources meeting.

The Board was in agreement.

Public Defender Office Space

Commissioner Duncan explained that she had gone and toured an office building on Northwest Boulevard with Public Defender Anne Taylor and former contractor Shawn Riley. She asked if it would be the direction of the Board to enter into informal negotiations with the property manager to see if they can make an agreement on renting the space until the Attorney Center was completed. Commissioner Duncan explained that if they could agree on terms, she would bring the information back to an Executive Session in order to discuss payments and noted that the space was approximately 13,000 square feet.

State of the County Address April 20

Commissioner Duncan said that in the previous years, they had discussed what topics to cover at the State of the County Address. She said if they were amenable, she could have it added to the pending items list for weekly discussion and pointed out there was

mention of a Power Point Presentation, to which Chairman Fillios and Commissioner Bill Brooks agreed.

Pending Items Status Review – List Attached

Citizen Advisory Committee – Commissioner Brooks said that this was still on hold.

Facilities Expansion – Commissioner Duncan said that the next meeting would be on March 10 and that she had just received a proposal for the long-term plan for what space and opportunities the completion of the Attorney Center may bring, which she said she would bring to the following week’s Business Meeting.

PAC Airport Lease – Commissioner Duncan remarked that she had not yet spoken to Airport Director Steven Kjergaard regarding Mr. Jacobsen’s proposal.

1A/B Audio Upgrade – BOCC Communications Manager Nancy Jones said that she sent the full proposal of the upgrade by Abidex to the Commissioners on Friday afternoon, further explaining that Abidex was the company that had initially installed and upgraded the audio equipment. She explained the upgrades that would take place, while noting that the upgrade would also allow for the implementation of Zoom, Facebook, YouTube and online streaming services.

Ms. Jones asked if the Board wanted her to bring it forth at a Business Meeting for approval, to which they affirmed.

Ballot Bond Language – Commissioner Duncan remarked that they had a meeting with Zion and Hawley Troxell on March 8.

Building Financing – Commissioner Duncan said that whether the general obligation bond was passed or forgone was used, the County would still have to take out a loan to cover the cost.

Presentation of Bylaws for Kootenai County Optional Forms of County Government Study Commission

Commissioner Brooks asked Chairman Fillios to read into the record the resolution that had been passed on October 20, 2020.

Commissioner Brooks explained that they had agreed to move forward with a study commission, which would eventually present their findings to the Commissioners. If the results showed that there was an alternate form of government people wished to see, it would be placed on a ballot to be voted on. He said that once the commission was established, they would interview various stakeholders in the County and hold public hearings and town halls in order to gather information and answer questions. Commissioner Brooks said that the final step would be a report that outlined the commission’s recommendation to the BOCC of any change that may be needed. He continued, stating that he felt the responsibility of any commissioner was to improve the conditions in Kootenai County while noting that new ideas were pertinent to the process.

He opined that some people were afraid of new ideas and that open, honest debate of ideas was a mark of good government, while the attempt to stifle or prohibit debate would be tyranny.

Commissioner Brooks pointed out that the study commission would give the citizens the opportunity to vote on any of the ideas, which could also be voted down.

Commissioner Brooks said that the bylaws were clearly marked as a draft and wished to discuss any potential changes in a public setting to allow for public input, as he wished the bylaws to be good for the commission.

Commissioner Duncan said that she did not vote for the study in the first place, as she did not feel it was a good idea to change the current form into one in which there would be un-elected officials that were no longer able to be held accountable by the citizens; rather, just to one individual. She opined that she believed if it were to be added to the ballot, it would be voted down because she felt that people wanted the ability to elect direct representatives.

Chairman Fillios suggested that the Board look at the bylaws again and reconvene the following Monday, or sooner, so they could finalize the issue. He explained that it may be plausible during the study that the Sheriff and Prosecutor positions remained elected, but the other four positions would be appointed. He remarked that if the study commission concluded that an alternate form of government was more appropriate, then it would be very specific and that would be what the citizens would get to vote on. As for the loss of representation, Chairman Fillios opined that if the commission found that five or seven commissioners was better, then there would not be any loss of representation.

- D. Public Comment:** This section is reserved for citizens wishing to address the Board regarding a County related issue. Idaho Law prohibits Board action on items brought under this section except in an emergency circumstance. Comments related to future public hearings should be held for that public hearing.

Doug Balija explained that in 2012 there was a proposal presented by former Commissioner Dan Green called 'Streamline' that had been placed on the ballot and voted down. Mr. Balija said that he did not like the thought of one manager managing Elected Officials, like the Treasurer, Coroner and Assessor, for example. He remarked that those people needed to be able to be held accountable by the citizens.

Charity Myser quoted Commissioner Brooks by stating that "when people do not know what they are voting for, they make bad decisions", and said that she agreed with the comment, as people did not know who they were voting for and were now left to fight for their individual liberties. She explained that there was a crisis of faith in the election process, and to suggest the County Clerk be changed into a position that would have an employee working for a candidate that may be running for election was completely unacceptable. Ms. Myser also said that she would be opposed to any structure of County government that would remove any political power from the people.

Sandy Turner suggested that if more commissioners were needed, the bylaws should be changed to where more could be elected.

Chris Kraft opined that he believed in elections, not appointments. He also suggested that the Pledge of Allegiance be recited before every meeting.

Mark Price asked since the taxpayers were paying for the study if the public had been notified of it. Further, he explained that everyone should be elected and there should be more commissioners, but that the public should be made aware before the money was spent and the study was conducted.

Erin Barnard, Coeur d'Alene, said that she agreed with each comment before her; however, when she looked at the bylaws, she was getting the wrong impression from some of the wording. She pointed out that the bylaws outlined some of the types of alternate forms of government, but the responsibilities outlined were more in line with a county manager position rather than an alternate form of government. Ms. Barnard continued, stating that the objective does not clearly define what the commission should look for while conducting interviews.

Jennifer Zaner asked how the commission members would be elected to the commission, pointing out that since those members would not be elected, there would be skepticism about whether they were like-minded or relatable to the citizens. She said that the BOCC was undermining those people that wanted to attend the meeting, but could not, because they were working and said that the meeting should be held at night so everyone could attend.

A gentleman who wished to remain anonymous spoke to mandates and expressed support for Commissioner Duncan.

Katie McCollum asked whether this topic on the ballot would be similar to the previous Advisory Vote on the Prison Reentry Center. Chairman Fillios explained an Advisory Vote and noted that the members of the commission would not be paid and that there was no violation of laws in forming the commission.

Pierce Clegg said that he had been part of the study in 1996, had opposed it then and would continue to oppose it now. He said that he would be open to discussion on an administrator type position, but the Elected Officials should remain elected.

Chris Watts, Athol, opined that the money spent on the commission was a waste and pointed out that it felt as though they were spending money to see what else they could spend money on.

Les Warren said the reason he attended the meeting was the idea of not being able to elect the Sheriff. He said it would be a waste of effort and money to determine whether the citizens wished to be able to elect the Sheriff. Mr. Warren also pointed out that if there was a need for additional Commissioners, then it should be added to the ballot. Commissioner Duncan explained that it would have to go through the Legal team for determination.

John Allsup asked why the bylaws had already been drafted if there was no committee even selected yet, pointing out that the outcome of what they wanted was within the bylaws. Mr. Allsup said that he felt it should be up to the commission to determine what the bylaws are. Commissioner Duncan expressed her understanding and acknowledged that there would be plenty of discussion on the bylaws.

Troy McCollum asked if the members of the commission would be vetted before their appointment, whether the names would be made public and when to expect the announcement. Commissioner Brooks affirmed they would be made public and Commissioner Duncan said the bylaws needed to be approved first, then the nominations to the commission could take place.

Kirk Robinson, Coeur d'Alene, said that he felt this was a waste of time as there should be less government, not more. He also said that he did not appreciate how last minute the meeting was because it did not give anyone that had concerns the opportunity to attend.

Brian Cleary, via teleconference, asked if it were possible that the commission may come back with more than one suggestion, to which Commissioner Brooks affirmed that it was, only if it were covered by state statute. Mr. Cleary said that he felt people were very concerned about being able to elect their Sheriff.

Sandy White, via teleconference, asked if the commission was going to be bipartisan and stated that she believed the study to be a waste of time and money.

Mary Gunn pointed out that there were thousands of citizens being represented by the few hundred people that showed up to voice their concerns.

Brent Regan agreed that the three Commissioner form of county government was a terrible form of government and the only advantage was all others were worse. He explained that, as Chair of the Kootenai County Republican Central Committee (KCRCC), the KCRCC was one of the most diverse committees in the County. Mr. Regan said that because of that diversity, they had an ability to know what the voters wanted on issues. He pointed out that appointing a single person as a county manager and giving them budget authority, would also require a full staff to support the position and would be a large budgetary impact. Mr. Regan suggested working on making the current form of government better and more efficient rather than revisiting the study.

E. Adjournment: Chairman Fillios adjourned the meeting at 12:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

JIM BRANNON, CLERK

CHRIS FILLIOS, CHAIRMAN

BY: _____
Ronnie Davisson, Deputy Clerk
