

**GOVERNMENT REVIEW STUDY COMMISSION
COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM
418 EAST SECOND STREET
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5 2025
5:30 PM**



- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Communications from the Public - (This time is set aside for the public to comment on items that are either on the agenda, but not a public hearing or on items not on the agenda. City officials do not respond during these comments but may respond or follow-up later on the agenda or at another time. The presiding officer has the option of limiting such communications to three minutes depending on the number of citizens who want to comment and the length of the meeting agenda)
- 3) Approval of January 8, 2025, Minutes
- 4) Old Business
 - a) Review and Approve Timetable (7-3-186, M.C.A) – Action required
- 5) New Business
 - a) Discuss communication strategies with City council, city staff, and other groups, possible sub-committees
 - b) Begin discussion on survey timeline
 - c) Begin reviewing City Charter
 - d) Introduction to LGR webpage (Engage Whitefish)
- 6) Public Comment
- 7) Communication to or from Study Commissioners
- 8) Next meeting: March 12, 2025
- 9) Adjournment

GOVERNMENT REVIEW STUDY COMMISSION
January 8, 2025
5:30 PM

1) Call to Order

Temporary Presiding Officer Saundra Alessi called the meeting to order. Commissioners present were Nathan Dugan, Kevin McDowell, Dakota Whitman, Scott Wurster, and Ex-officio Michelle Howke, and City Attorney Angela Jacobs. Councilor Norton was in the audience.

- 2) Communications from the Public - (This time is set aside for the public to comment on items that are either on the agenda, but not a public hearing or on items not on the agenda. City officials do not respond during these comments but may respond or follow-up later on the agenda or at another time. The presiding officer has the option of limiting such communications to three minutes depending on the number of citizens who want to comment and the length of the meeting agenda)

Councilor Norton – talked to Sara Fitzgerald, who served on the LGR 20 years ago and is interested in meeting with the current Commissioners. She suggested each Commissioner think about what they are most interested in researching in the city. This will help to learn what to recommend to council and staff to improve.

- 3) Approval of Minutes
- a) December 10, 2024, Minutes
 - b) December 12, 2024, Minutes

Commissioner Whitman, seconded by Commissioner Dugan to approve the minutes. The motion carried.

- 4) Old Business
- a) Elect Chair and Vice Chair

Scott made a motion, seconded by Nathan to nominate Kevin as Chair. The motion carried.

Dakota made a motion, seconded by Scott to nominate Nathan as Vice Chair. The motion carried.

- b) Review and Adopt Bylaws

Nathan made a motion to approve the bylaws, seconded by Scott as presented.

Saundra made a motion, seconded by Nathan to amend Section 3.03, Communications to or from Study Commissioners. The motion carried.

Saundra made a motion, *Section 3.02 All agenda matters requiring consideration, discussion or decision proposed by a commission member shall be included on the agenda and shall be submitted in writing to the Chairperson...*, seconded by Scott. Nathan understands sentiment, not support, concerns about ability to hold efficient meeting. He feels there is a place on the agenda to hold discussion for most items. **After some discussion, Saundra rescinded her amendment.**

Nathan made a motion, seconded by Dakota to correct Section 2.03 Public Posting, to 2.04. The motion carried.

The original motion to approve the Bylaws as amended was carried.

- c) Discuss Draft Budget for Approval

Kevin moved, seconded by Dakota to approve the budget. The motion carried.

- d) Discuss and Review Timetable (7-3-186, M.C.A)

Discussion and direction from the Commissioners for Michelle to create a 2-year timetable and bring to the next meeting. **Nathan made a motion, seconded by Dakota to postpone this discussion to February meeting. The motion carried.**

- 5) New Business

- a) Discuss Recording Policy – Commissioner Alessi

Meetings will be recorded via TEAMS and uploaded to the website.

- 6) Public Comment

None

- 7) Schedule Next Meeting

- a) Commissioner Alessi proposal to meet on February 11, 2025

Kevin made a motion, seconded by Scott to move the next meeting to February 5, 2025, at 5:30pm. The motion carried.

Commissioner Comments

Scott – option to create sub-committees to be added to the next meeting agenda.

Kevin will send surveys that Rebecca provided to him from the last LGR, to the Commissioners.

- 8) Adjournment

The meeting was adjourn the meeting at 7:19pm.

Temporary Presiding Officer Alessi

Attest:

Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk

City of Whitefish Study Commission

Timetable for Study Commission Deliberations and Actions

This timetable for the deliberations and actions of the Whitefish Study Commission is established as required by 7-3-186, MCA for the purpose of assuring full public information concerning the Local Government Review process in our City and enabling informed citizen participation. To participate, receive news and updates, please register and subscribe to the website [Engage Whitefish website].

All meetings of the Study Commission are open to the public.

Date	Action
11/21/2024	First Study Commission organizational meeting
12/10/2024	Montana State University Local Government Center regional Study Commission Trainings
12/21/2024	Regular monthly Study Commission meeting, Town Hall. And thereafter the second Wednesday in each succeeding month at 5:30 pm
2/19/2025	Timetable established and published within 90 days of organizational meeting
March 2025	First Public Hearing —to gather citizen input on the form, functions, powers, and problems of city government and the adequacy of city services.
April 2025	Meeting with various city officials, city staff, partners
April 2025	Adopt a Tentative Report
May 2025	Second Public Hearing —to gather citizen response to Tentative Report
June 2025	Adopt the Final Report Publish summary of findings and recommendations once each week for two successive weeks.
DEADLINES IF STUDY COMMISSION RECOMMENDS NO CHANGE	
August 2025	Deadline to publish and distribute Final Report -The final report must be published and distributed within 60 days of its adoption. Copies must be prepared for public distribution
August 2025	Study Commission term ends -If the commission recommends no alternative plan, the term ends 30 days after submission of the final report.
DEADLINES IF STUDY COMMISSION RECOMMENDS CHANGES	
June 2025	Provide County Clerk and Recorder with a ballot certificate
July 8, 2025	File Final Report
August 22, 2025	Deadline for issuing a call for election
August 2025	Prepare public education materials to help citizens understand the proposal and compare the proposal with existing governmental form, structures, and powers
September 2025	Approve public education materials and conduct public forum
October 2025	Make final report available to electors
November 4, 2025	Election on proposed alternative or amendment
November 13, 2025	If the proposed alternative is approved by the voters, the study commission term is extended 90 days after the vote. The Study Commission prepare a transition plan for the new government
November 24, 2025	Deadline for governing body to meet, approve the new plan of government, and order the election to elect officials required under the new plan. The first election must be held in accordance with Title 13, Chapter 1, Part 4. A primary election may not be held.
February 2, 2026	Study Commission term of office ends. All minutes and other study commission documents must be filed with the County Clerk and Recorder office.
November 3, 2026	Next general election
January 2, 2027	First meeting of the new governing body

CHARTER OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH

PREAMBLE

We, the people of the city of Whitefish, Montana, in accordance with article XI, section 5 of the Montana Constitution, and in accordance with title 7, chapter 3, part 7 Montana Code Annotated 1979, in order to modernize our form of local government, increase its efficiency and to provide for local self-determination, do hereby adopt this charter.

Article I

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Section 1.01: Powers Of The City: The city of Whitefish shall possess self-government powers and have all powers not prohibited by the constitution of Montana, the laws of Montana or this charter.

Section 1.02: Interpretation Of Powers: The powers and authority of the city of Whitefish shall be liberally construed. Every reasonable doubt as to the existence of a power or authority shall be resolved in favor of the existence of that power or authority.

Section 1.03: Charter Supremacy: As provided in article XI, section 5 of the constitution of Montana, and title 7, chapter 3, part 701(2), Montana Code Annotated 1979, provisions herein establishing an executive, legislative and administrative structure and organization are superior to statutory provisions.

Section 1.04: Intergovernmental Cooperation: As provided by article XI, section 7 of the constitution of Montana, unless prohibited by law or this charter, the city of Whitefish may:

1. Delegate any of its power to;
2. Delegate any of its functions to; or
3. Cooperate in the financing of any services with any one or more local government units, school districts, the state or the United States.

Section 1.05: Oath Of Office: Before entering upon the duties of office, all elected city officials shall take and subscribe the oath of office as prescribed in article III, section 3 of the constitution of Montana. (January 5, 1981)

Article II

CITY COUNCIL

Section 2.01: Composition, Election, Qualifications, Compensation, Removal, Filling Of Vacancies:

1. There shall be a city council of six (6) members, three (3) of whom shall be elected every two (2) years. (January 5, 1981)

2. All council members shall be elected at large and be a qualified voter of the city of Whitefish and that the three (3) candidates for council receiving the most votes at each biannual election shall be elected to the office of city council. (Amended November 1985)

3. Members of the council shall be elected for terms of four (4) years on a nonpartisan basis.

4. Members of the council shall receive no salary. As provided by ordinance, they shall receive per diem and mileage allowances for expenses incurred in the performance of their duties of office.

5.a. The office of a council member shall become vacant upon his death, resignation, removal from office in any manner authorized by law or forfeiture of his office;

b. A council member shall forfeit his office if he:

i. Loses his eligibility for election to his council seat;

ii. Violates any express prohibition of this charter;

iii. Is convicted of a felony;

iv. Without council approval, fails to attend three (3) consecutive regularly scheduled council meetings.

Section 2.02: Powers And Duties Of The Council:

1. The city council shall be the legislative and policy determining body of the city of Whitefish. Except as prohibited by the constitution of the state of Montana, the laws of the state of Montana or this charter, the council shall provide for the exercise of all powers of the city and for performance of all duties and obligations of the city.

2. The council shall appoint or remove the city administrator with the concurrence of four (4) of its members.

3. The council shall adopt an annual budget by ordinance.

4. The council shall provide for an independent annual audit of all city accounts and may provide for such more frequent audits as it deems necessary. If the state makes such an audit, the council may accept it as satisfying the requirements of this section.

5. The council shall adopt by ordinance and maintain an administrative code and a personnel system as provided in article IV of this charter.

6. The council may make investigations into the affairs of the city and the conduct of any city department, office or agency and for this purpose may subpoena witnesses, administer oaths, take testimony and require the production of evidence.

7. In the event of vacancy, the council shall, within thirty (30) days, by majority vote of the remaining members, appoint a person, eligible to hold such council seat, to fill the vacancy until the next regular city election at which time the remainder of the terms shall be filled as provided by law.

8. The council shall be the judge of the election and qualifications of its members and of the grounds of forfeiture of their office and for that purpose shall have power to subpoena witnesses, administer oaths and require the production of evidence. A member charged with conduct constituting grounds for forfeiture of his office shall be entitled to a public hearing on demand, and notice of such hearing shall be published in a manner consistent with state law. (Effective 1-5-1981)

9. A mayor shall be elected every four (4) years, at large on a nonpartisan basis. The mayor shall preside at meetings of the council, shall be recognized as the head of the city government for all ceremonial purposes (or may delegate this duty) and by the governor for the purposes of military law. The mayor shall have no administrative duties. The mayor shall vote in the case of tie votes on the council. (Effective 1-5-1981; amd. Approved by voters 11-7-2006, eff. 1-2-2007)

10. The council shall elect from among its members a deputy mayor who shall act as mayor during the absence or disability of the mayor and, if a vacancy occurs in the office of the mayor, shall become mayor for the remainder of the unexpired term. (Effective 1-5-1981)

11. The council shall appoint a citizen's standing committee or board of three (3) to five (5) members who shall serve at the will of the council for the purpose whereby citizens or other interested parties may first submit or present their proposals for action of the city council for study, review and recommendations by the committee or board to the council as a whole. This provision shall not prohibit the appointment of ad hoc committees by the mayor or council.

12. The council shall create and establish a board of park commissioners pursuant to and subject to all the provisions of MCA sections 7-16-4201 through 7-16-4226. (Amended by voters 11-1985, eff. 1-1-1986)

Section 2.03: Restrictions On The Council:

1. Except where authorized by law, no council person shall hold any other city office or city employment for compensation.

2. Neither the council nor any of its members shall in any manner dictate the appointment or removal of any city administrative offices or employees whom the administrator or any of his subordinates are empowered to appoint, but the council may express its views and fully and freely discuss with the administrator anything pertaining to appointment and removal of such officers and employees.

3. Except for the purpose of inquiries and investigations under article II, section 2.02 of this charter, the council or its members shall deal with city officers and employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the administrator solely through the administrator, and neither the council nor its members shall give orders to any such officer or employee, either publicly or privately.

Section 2.04: Council Procedure, Public Participation:

1. Council procedure shall be as prescribed by state law.

2. The council shall meet at least once per month in regular session.
3. The council shall determine its own rules and order of business and shall provide for the keeping of minutes of its proceedings.
4. All meetings shall be open to the public except in such circumstances as are prescribed by state law.
5. All documents and records of the council shall be public records and shall be made available for examining or copying. (January 5, 1981)

Article III

CITY ADMINISTRATOR

Section 3.01: Appointment And Removal, Qualifications, Compensation:

1. The city administrator shall be appointed by the council for an indefinite term on the basis of merit only. The council shall fix his compensation.
2. The city administrator need not be a resident of the city at the time of his appointment but may reside outside the city while employed only with the approval of the council.
3. The council may remove the city administrator from office at any regularly scheduled or special meeting.

Section 3.02: Acting City Administrator: By letter filed with the mayor, the administrator shall designate, subject to approval of the council, a qualified city administrative officer to exercise the powers and perform the duties of administrator during his temporary absence or disability. During such absence or disability, the council may revoke such designation at any time and appoint another officer of the city to serve until the administrator shall return or his disability shall cease.

Section 3.03: Duties Of The City Administrator:

1. The city administrator shall be the chief administrative officer of the city. He shall be responsible to the council for the administration of all city affairs.
2. The city administrator shall:
 - a. Direct, supervise and administer all departments, agencies and offices of the local government unit except as otherwise provided by this charter, law or ordinance;
 - b. Carry out policies established by the council;
 - c. Prepare the council agenda;

- d. Report to the council and recommend measures on the affairs and financial condition of the local government as the council may require;
 - e. Execute bonds, notes, contracts and written obligations of the council, subject to the approval of the council;
 - f. Attend council meetings and may take part in the discussion, but may not vote;
 - g. Prepare and present the budget to the council for its approval and execute the budget adopted by the council; (January 5, 1981)
 - h. Except for city attorney and municipal court judge, appoint, suspend and remove all employees of the city unless otherwise provided by law or ordinance; provided, however, that in the case of the appointment of chief of police for the city, the police commission of the city shall review all applicants for the position and make its recommendations to the city administrator; (Amended November 1985; effective January 1, 1986; amd. Approved by voters 11-3-2009)
 - i. Attend meetings of planning boards on which the city is represented;
 - j. Submit recommended changes in the administrative code or the personnel system to the council.
3. The city administrator shall not delegate any of the duties and responsibilities in this section without consent of the council. (January 5, 1981)

Article IV

ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS

Section 4.01: General:

1. The council may establish city departments, offices or agencies in addition to those created by this charter, and may prescribe the functions of all departments, offices and agencies.
2. All departments, officers and agencies under the direction and supervision of the administrator shall be administered by an officer appointed by and subject to the direction and supervision of the administrator. With the consent of the council, the administrator may serve as the head of one or more such departments, offices or agencies or may appoint one person as the head of two (2) or more of them.

Section 4.02: Legal Officer: There shall be a legal officer of the city, appointed by the city council, who shall serve as chief legal advisor to the council, the administrator and all city departments, offices and agencies, shall represent the city in all legal proceedings and shall perform any other duties prescribed by ordinance.

Section 4.03: Administrative Code: The administrative code shall provide the complete plan of organization and structure of the city government and shall include:

1. The departmental organization of the government, the nature and scope of each department and all required rules and procedures for department operation.
2. Comprehensive budget procedures for the government.
3. Procedures regarding boards, commissions or any other government activities.

Section 4.04: Personnel System: The city personnel system shall include a salary schedule, provisions for vacations, sick leaves, insurance and other benefits for all persons in accordance with the provisions of this charter; procedures for employees to have an opportunity to be heard upon their request pending discharge, suspension or any designated disciplinary action and shall provide for such other procedures as necessary for an efficient personnel system. (January 5, 1981)

Article V

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS, INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM

Section 5.01: Elected Offices: The procedure for the election of all elected city officials shall be as prescribed by law for nonpartisan elections. The procedure for recall of all elected city officials shall be as provided by law.

Section 5.02: Initiative And Referendum: The procedure for initiative and referendum shall be as provided by law. (January 5, 1981)

Section 5.03: Reapportionment Of Wards: (Repealed November 1985; effective January 1, 1986)

Section 5.04: Redistricting: (Repealed November 1985; effective January 1, 1986)

Article VI

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Section 6.01: Amendment Of Charter: This charter may be amended only as provided by state law.

Section 6.02: Effective Date: This charter shall become effective on January 5, 1981.

Section 6.03: Separability: If any provision of this charter is held invalid, the other provisions of this charter shall not be affected thereby. If the application of the charter, or any part of its provisions, to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the application of the charter and its provisions to other persons or circumstances shall not be affected thereby. (January 5, 1981)

CERTIFICATE AS TO ORDINANCE AND ADOPTING VOTE

I, the undersigned, being the duly qualified and acting recording officer of the City of Whitefish, Flathead County, Montana (the "City"), hereby certify that the attached ordinance is a true copy of an ordinance, entitled: " AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA, SUBMITTING TO THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA, THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO AMEND ARTICLE II, SECTION 2.01(4) OF THE CITY CHARTER TO DELETE THE PROVISION PROHIBITING CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS FROM RECEIVING SALARIES" on file in the original records of the City in my legal custody; that the ordinance was duly adopted on first reading by the City Council of the City at a meeting on May 6, 2024, and on second reading at a meeting held on May 20, 2024, that the meetings were duly held by the City Council and were attended throughout by a quorum, pursuant to call and notice of such meeting given as required by law; and that the ordinance has not as of the date hereof been amended or repealed.

I further certify that, upon vote being taken on the ordinance at said meeting, the following Council Members voted in favor thereof: Councilors Feury, Norton, Davis, Sweeney and Caltabiano; voted against the same: _____; abstained from voting thereon: _____; or were absent: Councilor Qunell.

WITNESS my hand and seal officially this 20th day of May 2024.

/s/Michelle Howke

City Clerk

(SEAL)

ORDINANCE NO. 24-04

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA, SUBMITTING TO THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA, THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO AMEND ARTICLE II, SECTION 2.01(4) OF THE CITY CHARTER TO DELETE THE PROVISION PROHIBITING CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS FROM RECEIVING SALARIES.

RECITALS

WHEREAS, the City's current Charter, which was originally adopted by the voters of the City of Whitefish in 1980, provides in the first sentence of Article II, Section 2.01(4) that members of the City Council shall receive no salary; and

WHEREAS, § 7-3-103, MCA, provides an amendment to a self-government charter may only be made by submitting the question of amendment to the electors of the local government as provided in § 7-3-149, MCA, which amendment may be proposed by ordinance; and

WHEREAS, § 7-3-149(1)(b), MCA, provides the City may call an election on the question of an amendment to its Charter upon the adoption of a local ordinance; and

WHEREAS, § 7-3-149(4)(a), MCA, provides the affirmative vote of a simple majority of those voting on the question of amendment is required for adoption.

WHEREAS, it will be in the best interests of the City, and its inhabitants, to present to the voters a proposed amendment to Article II, Section 2.01(4) of the City Charter to delete the provision prohibiting City Council members from receiving salaries.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Whitefish, Montana, as follows:

Section 1: That the recitals set forth above are hereby adopted as Findings of Fact.

Section 2: The Whitefish City Council presents to qualified voters of the City of Whitefish the following amendment to Article II, Section 2.01(4) of the City Charter:

Members of the City Council may receive compensation, such as a salary, stipend, City-paid health insurance, per diem, or mileage allowance, all as set by resolution after a public hearing.

Section 3: If approved by the majority of the electors, the amendment to the City Charter would become effective January 1, 2025.

Section 4: Other than the amendment set forth in Section 2 above, the Whitefish City Council does not propose any other changes to the City Charter.

Section 5: The election on the proposed amendment to be submitted to the voters shall be held on November 5, 2024, in accordance with §§ 13-1-405 and 13-1-104, MCA.

Section 6: The question to be presented to the voters and the ballot issue shall be in substantially the same form as Exhibit "A," attached to this Ordinance; provided, however, that the City Attorney is authorized to revise Exhibit "A," as necessary, to conform to State law and to satisfy the Flathead County Election Department.

Section 7: A copy of this Ordinance will be provided to the Flathead County Election Administrator as soon as possible after its adoption and approval in order to inform them of the details of the election and the pertinent requests and authorizations as to the conduct of the election.

Section 8: This Ordinance shall take effect thirty (30) days after its adoption by the City Council of the City of Whitefish, Montana, and the signing by the Mayor thereof. .

PASSED AND ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA, THIS 20TH DAY OF MAY 2024.

/s/John Muhlfeld
John M. Muhlfeld, Mayor

ATTEST:

/s/Michelle Howke
Michelle Howke, City Clerk

EXHIBIT A

CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA
BALLOT ISSUE

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS: Make an X or similar mark in the blank before the words "FOR this amendment" if you wish to vote for the amendment; if you are opposed to the amendment, make an X or similar mark in the blank before the words "AGAINST this amendment."

To amend Article II, Section 2.01(4) of the Whitefish City Charter effective January 1, 2025, as follows:

Members of the City Council may receive compensation, such as a salary, stipend, City-paid health insurance, per diem, or mileage allowance, all as set by resolution after a public hearing.

_____ FOR this amendment

_____ AGAINST this amendment