

**GOVERNMENT REVIEW STUDY COMMISSION
COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM
418 EAST SECOND STREET
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2025
5:30 PM**

1) Call to Order

Commissioner Chair, Kevin McDowell called the meeting to order. Commissioners present were Alessi, Wurster, Whitman, Dugan, Ex-Officio Howke, and City Manager Smith. Columbia Falls Study Commissioner Hopkins and City Councilor Caltabiano were in attendance.

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)

Roger Hopkins is a member of the Columbia Falls Study Commission. Columbia Falls Commissioners are working trying to figure out if they should go to a Charter form of government. He is interested to see what Whitefish has done and look into cooperative agreements between the two municipalities. Columbia Falls next meeting is April 16th at City Hall, 5pm.

3) Approval of March 12, 2025, Minutes

Commissioner Wurster made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Alessi, to approve the March 12th minutes. Scott has had corrections to the minutes: *Next meeting: ~~March 12~~April 2, 2025 and Commissioner Wurster made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Alessi to amend the January 8, 2025 minutes to read as follows: “Commissioner Wurster made a motion, seconded by Nathan for a two-year timeline. The motion Carried unanimously”. “As the basis for his motion, Commissioner Wurster stated that he consulted with Council person Norton to confirm his recollection that there had been a vote, a unanimous vote for a two-year timeline at the January 8, 2025, that was passed unanimously. During the meeting Commissioner Alessi confirmed that recollection. Nathan feels it is difficult to amend minutes months down the road, especially since the meeting was not recorded to verify if the motion was made. The motion to amend the January 8, 2025 minutes failed 3 to 2, Commissioners Wurster and Alessi voting for the motion.*

The motion to approve the minutes as amended carried.

4) Old Business

a) Review LGR webpage – provide input to Michelle

Discussion for survey – look into sending postcard to 59937 (\$5,000 or less), splash page, CVB/Explore Whitefish e-Newsletter, Chamber of Commerce e-Newsletter, Hear of Whitefish email, Whitefish Pilot/Flathead Beacon, volunteer boards, city staff

Deadline May 15th include dates of the public meetings on the postcard.

Commissioner Alessi made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Dugan to mail a postcard to 59937, to include the survey and dates for public hearings, and the deadline of the survey to be May 15th, and a splash page on the website. The motion carried.

Discussion followed between the Commissioners pertaining to the wording the community survey question 2d) *Planning and zoning, by their nature, have a profound impact on the policy of Whitefish. According to our current charter, the Zoning Administrator answers to the City Manager, the executive portion of our city government. Would you prefer the Zoning Administrator answer to our elected policy making body, the City Council?* Commissioner Dugan expressed concerns about the leading nature of Question D, suggesting it singles out a department and introduces bias. He noted that while Questions A, B, and C address broader governance topics, Question D focuses on a specific political issue, potentially skewing responses. Commissioner Alessi acknowledged the concern but emphasized the importance of the question, citing discrepancies between policymaking and executive functions, particularly in zoning regulations affecting rental markets. She proposed rewording the question but opposed its removal, stressing the need for clarity in the roles of policymaking and executive branches. Commissioner Dugan acknowledged her perspective but reiterated his reservations about including a potentially agenda-driven question. **Commissioner Dugan made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Whitman to strike 2d) *Planning and zoning, by their nature, have a profound impact on the policy of Whitefish. According to our current charter, the Zoning Administrator answers to the City Manager, the executive portion of our city government. Would you prefer the Zoning Administrator answer to our elected policy making body, the City Council?* From the survey.** Commissioner Wurster opposed omitting the question, emphasizing its importance to the Charter and rejecting claims of an anti-growth agenda. Commissioner Alessi highlighted the impact of Airbnb's on housing for renters. Manager Smith clarified that zoning decisions are made by the Council, not the Zoning Administrator, who drafts zoning but does not have authority to change it. Commissioner Dugan expressed concerns about the question derailing work and leading to biased survey results. Commissioner Whitman suggested rewording the question for neutrality. Commissioner Dugan suggested rewording the question to be more neutral as such, *all city departments currently answer to the city manager. Should they answer to the elected body?* Commissioner Alessi noted the question's significance in shifting departmental oversight from the City Manager to the Council. Manager Smith explained that appointing officials would increase costs due to potential firing at Council meetings.

Commissioner Dugan changed his original motion to strike 2d), seconded by Commissioner Whitman to ~~Planning and zoning, by their nature, have a profound impact on the policy of Whitefish. According to our current charter, the Zoning Administrator answers to~~ is hired by and reports to the City Manager, ~~the executive portion of our city government.~~ Would you prefer the Zoning Administrator answer to our elected policy making body be appointed by and report to; the City Council? The motion carried.

5) New Business

a) Set open house date/time for the Tap House – late April

Tap House Podcast – April 9th at 7pm. Potential Quorum.

Prep-meeting - April 17th @ 5:00 pm at City Hall

Open House at Tap House – April 24th 6:30pm – 8:00pm

b) Set formal public meeting date/time/location

Adopt Tentative Report – May 29th at 6:00pm at Chambers

Commissioner Wurster shared his concerns for a condensed timeline. Chair McDowell stated the timeline has been discussed and approved. He feels if we are not moving this forward, and not getting all the input right now, we are never going to get it, and it is going to get washed out.

6) Review City Charter (Standing Agenda Item)

Commissioners provided suggestions on reviewing the Charter and how to move forward as a group.

Commissioner Whitman stated when chatting around town he heard frustration w/boards and committee, can there be limits on the number of committees, are there different ways to structure the requirements, etc.

Commissioner Alessi – suggested the Commission write questions that need clarification and start the review from those questions.

Commissioner Wurster –suggested having a session with the Local Government Center, to review and break the charter down for better understanding. Michelle will contact the Local Government Center to set a time to meet.

Commissioner Dugan – marked up version, everybody mark up with questions, send to Kevin, Michelle decipher attorney questions, LGC questions.

Commissioner McDowell – marked up charters to Kevin/Michelle by end of day April 18th. Local Government Center, meet at May meeting. Not limit their options to the May meeting include CFALLS.

7) Public Comment

Roger – Columbia Falls, Ruis, CFAC property, 1500-1800 housing units, what might be possible if we leverage.

8) Communication to or from Study Commissioners

a) Commissioners provide report from individual group meetings

Kevin reached out to school board, mixed reviews, and Dave Means, and called Mrs. Boksich. Kevin moose lodge, Kiwanis, Rotary, not reached out to Chamber – Kevin/Dakota meet.

Commissioners Wurster/McDowell/Alessi – Logan Health

Commissioner Dugan -April 25th Mr. Webb classroom

Commissioner Whitman – Scott talking about conservation groups. Sandra – performing arts – chat

Commissioner Alessi – no updates

Commissioner Wurster – economic chamber/sat down with Eric Schmidt, make contacts – host meeting

Commissioner Dugan – track down group of renters.

9) Next meeting: April 17, 2025- Open House preparation meeting

April 24, 2025- Open House

May 7, 2025 – Commissioner Meeting

10) Adjournment

Commissioner Alessi made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Whitman to adjourn the meeting at 7:21pm.



Kevin McDowell - Chair

Attest:



Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk