

GOVERNMENT REVIEW STUDY COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025
5:30 PM

1) Call to Order

Commissioner Chair McDowell called the meeting to order at 5:40pm. Commissioners present were Alessi, Dugan, Wurster, Whitman (virtual), Ex-officio/City Clerk Howke, City Manager Smith, and City Attorney Jacobs. Approximately 7 people were 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)

Roger Hopkins, Columbia Falls Study Commissioner, clarified a misunderstanding from the May 7th meeting minutes, which had suggested a commissioner was not interested in making changes. Although he was unable to attend that meeting, he has since communicated with Commissioner Wurster and others in the community. Hopkins reported that the commissioner in question is, in fact, willing to pursue changes and supports moving forward with establishing local government authority. The commission will not pursue a full charter but will recommend the city council adopt a new plan to incorporate self-government powers. He expressed appreciation for the Study Commissioners' engagement with Columbia Falls and congratulated them on their progress.

3) Approval of July 2, 2025, Minutes

Commissioner Dugan made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Wurster to approve July 2, 2025 minutes. The motion carried.

4) Public Hearing

a) Local Government Study Commission Final Report

Chair McDowell opened the Public Hearing.

Rebecca Norton, Scott Avenue, thanked the Commissioners for their service. She shared that while reviewing past documents, she found unimplemented recommendations from a previous city manager and interviewed former commissioners. She suggested creating a running list of proposed changes—both to the charter and other public recommendations—to track discussions over time. Norton recommended using the City Council's annual retreat as an opportunity to revisit such ideas, citing examples like adopting a citywide gender-neutral policy. She noted that many issues tend to resurface a decade later.

There being no further public comment, Chair McDowell closed the Public Hearing and turned matters over to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Commissioner Wurster made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Alessi to approve the Final Report. The motion carried on a 4-1 vote, Commissioner Dugan voting in opposition.

5) Communication to or from Study Commissioners

Commissioner Alessi stated she is pleased with how everything turned out. She hopes the Council will take the recommendations.

Commissioner Dugan expressed his opposition to the final report and indicated he will sign the minority report. He noted that the process yielded 300 survey responses—a significant number by city government standards. According to the survey, 64% of respondents showed interest in changing local government, which he believes reflects broader public support, as evidenced by the initial vote to conduct a government review. He expressed disappointment that potential changes were not explored further for voter consideration.

Commissioner Wurster thanked the fellow commissioners and the staff for facilitating this process.

Commissioner McDowell emphasized the importance of public participation in government. He thanked attendees for their presence and acknowledged the few community members who have attended recent meetings. He expressed a commitment to increasing public education about local government to encourage broader civic engagement moving forward.

6) Next meeting: September 3, 2025 at 5:30pm.

The Commissioners discussed and agreed that Commissioners Alessi and Wurster will draft the Publication of Summary to discuss and approve at the next meeting.

7) Adjournment

Chair McDowell adjourned the meeting at 5:49pm

/s/Kevin McDowell

Kevin McDowell - Chair

Attest:


Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk