



City of Columbia Falls  
130 6<sup>th</sup> Street West  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912  
Phone: (406) 892-4391

## **Columbia Falls Study Commission Workshop Minutes May 15, 2025**

Call to Order - Workshop called to order by Chair Piper at 1:03 pm.

Roll Call - Present: Study Commissioners Hopkins (via Zoom), Konopatzke, Nicosia and Piper. Also present: City Manager Hanks, MSU LGC Director Dan Clark

Montana State University Local Government Center Director Dan Clark discussed Self-Governing Powers at the request of the Study Commission. Mr. Clark reported that not all governments with self-governing powers have charters. Mr. Clark noted that he no longer recommends adopting a separate charter. Mr. Clark noted that the City of Havre had submitted the question of self-governing powers to their voters four times before it was adopted in 2021. The community was having difficulty addressing abandoned and boarded buildings pursuant to the general government powers in state statute; so, they adopted self-governing powers to adopt code that could address the issue, patterned after the Butte Silver Bow code. Clark noted that a government with self-governing powers has “shared sovereignty with the state” as defined by the Supreme Court in the Madison County lawsuit after they adopted self-governing powers in 1976.

The Study Commissioners discussed whether there were any issues that the City of Columbia Falls could address with self-governing powers. Hopkins felt that the city might want self-governing powers to give tools to future city councils. Nicosia noted that it would be difficult to present self-governing powers to the voters without a specified need, such as the Havre example. Konopatzke reviewed the information she had prepared on self-governing power communities in preparation for this workshop. The Study Commission will formally discuss recommendations at their next meeting in June.

Chair Piper asked if there was any Public Comment on the workshop discussion:

Scott Wuerster, Whitefish Study Commission – Interested in discussion.

Shirley Folkwein – Interested in learning more about self-governing powers.

Matt Hutcheson – Interested in knowing what voice the public has if the City has self-governing powers. Chair Piper noted that all municipal code changes require a public hearing and two readings before the adoption of any new codes and that process would remain the same with self-governing powers.

Adjourn: Duly adjourned at 1:40 pm.

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Chair