



ROOM A | 130 6TH STREET WEST
COLUMBIA FALLS, MT 59912

PHONE (406) 892-4391
FAX (406) 892-4413

**STUDY COMMISSION MEETING
AGENDA
WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 2025
COUNCIL CHAMBERS CITY HALL**

REGULAR MEETING – 5:00 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

1. Approval of May 15, 2025 Study Commission Minutes
2. Approval of June 18, 2025 Study Commission Minutes

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on agenda)

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

3. Self Governance - Review and call for a Public Hearing in September

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA

ADJOURN

Next Scheduled Meetings:

Study Commission Meeting - August 20, 2025 5:00 P.M.

Columbia Falls Study Commission
Workshop Minutes
May 16, 2025

Item No.1.

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.

Chair

**Columbia Falls Study Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes
June 18, 2025**

Item No.2.

Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 5:10 pm by Chairman Piper.

Roll Call: Present: Study Commissioners Hopkins, Konopatzke, Nicosia and Piper. Also present: City Manager Hanks.

Visitors/Public Comment: None

Approval of Minutes: Konopatzke made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, second by Hopkins, motion carried with all members voting in favor.

Discussion:

Self Governance/Call for a Public Hearing

The Commission thoroughly discussed the self-governance issue as reviewed in the workshop with Dan Clark in May. Hopkins wished to pursue self-governing powers to provide the city council with another tool in their toolbox if needed in the future. Konopatzke reported on other cities with self-governing powers. Nicosia reported that she too had researched the question and did not find anything that stood out at this time, such as adding the Juneteenth holiday, something the legislature has not done.

Konopatzke and Hopkins were in favor of recommending to the Council to submit to the voters the question of adopting self-governing powers. Nicosia noted the difficulty that Havre had in passing self-governing powers, finally passing on the 5th election submitting the question to the voters; elections are expensive, and Nicosia was not in favor of holding an election just for the sake of holding an election without an apparent need for the self-governing powers. Nicosia also noted that the last few legislative sessions have seen considerable additions limiting self-governing powers. Piper noted that pursuant to state law, 7-3-149, MCA, the council calls for the election.

After additional discussion, Konopatzke made a motion to draft the tentative report recommending to the city council a future election on the matter and formally amending the Study Commission's original timeline to accommodate the additional study on self-governing powers by calling for the public hearing in September, 2025, adopting final report in October and holding the final meeting in November and publishing the final report, motion seconded by Hopkins, motion carried with all members voting in favor. Nicosia volunteered to draft the final report for review by the Commission at the regular July meeting.

City Manager Hanks reported on receiving an invoice for \$1,240 for Local Government Center Dan Clark's participation in the May workshop. The invoice was surprising as the Commission originally understood from Commissioner Hopkins that Mr. Clark stated that he would already be in the area for full workshops in other cities and that he could just stop in for a shortened Columbia Falls Study Commission discussion. During event coordination with the City Manager and Hopkins, Mr. Clark did not disclose any fees or any expectation that Columbia Falls would incur equal cost-sharing of expenses with the cities hosting full workshops.

Adjourn: Meeting Duly adjourned at 6:42 pm.

Chair