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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION
AGENDA
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026
PUBLIC WORKS OFFICE**

WORKSHOP 5:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION:

1. Memorandum:

ADJOURN

Memorandum to Commissioners Nicosia, Konopatzke and Commission Chairman Piper, for February 18, 2026 Workshop

When addressing the City Council February 2, I cited the Grateful Dead lyric from their 1970 song, "Truckin": "What a long strange trip it's been."

When we started our work last year the three of us agreed the city manager form of government was working well. That agreement may have led to a presumption that we could wrap up our work quickly without a recommendation to the city council for any changes. From my perspective things moved too fast. By the time I raised the idea of adopting self-governing powers we had already conducted two public surveys, neither which asked the public's opinion of this prospective change in how the city legislates or if citizen's believed the idea was worth putting to a vote.

Upon considering self-government powers for the city, again we were in some agreement: while there could be benefit for the city to have self-governing authority, we could not identify an immediate need for it. Where we differed was whether the commission should call for the public vote on the question or leave it up to the council to do so, if and when a need for self-government should arise.

As commissioner Konopatzke has said, there is no downside to giving the city this power. She and I agree it is better for the city to have the authority before it is needed, to be proactive rather than reactive. So we voted 2-1 in favor of putting the question to the voters on the June primary ballot.

Since then I have changed my mind, twice, the first time agreeing with Commissioner Nicosia that if put to the voters now, it will mostly likely fail, and thus be a waste of time and financial resources. Based upon the fact the commission had not asked the public to weigh in on the proposal, had not met with city and community leaders, did not have a constituency backing the idea, I, too, doubted it could pass in June.

As I still believed the proposal has merit, if only given more support, I was planning to recommend that the city council weigh in by putting the matter to a vote. I believed that was possible if the council passed an ordinance calling for an election on self-government powers in time for it to go onto the November general election ballot. Although the council would be under no obligation to do so, should the council pass an ordinance calling for the vote, that would at least be an indication that the elected government body believed there was merit to the idea. Public discourse by the council would also give the proposal more publicity and backing, and potentially more support than we have garnered as a commission.

I now realize that is a cop-out. If I believe the city can benefit by having self-government powers, it is my Constitutional duty to recommend the proposal to voters. Therefore my fourth, and my final recommendation, is for the study commission to recommend putting the matter on the November general election ballot. I intend to make this motion at our Feb. 18 workshop for discussion.

Sincerely,
Roger Hopkins, vice-chair, Columbia Falls Government Study Commission