



Local Government Review Board 6/18/26 (Open House at 5pm)

Minutes

June 18, 2026 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order

Chair Sergent called the Local Government Review Board meeting to order at 5:30pm, following the open house.

2. New Business

a. Approval of Minutes: May 28th, 2026

Motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from May 28th, 2026.

Motion made by Whiteman, Seconded by Mayer.

Voting Yea: Sergent, Whiteman, Mayer

b. Public Hearing: Tentative Report

Chairperson Sergent called the Public Hearing to order at **5:31 p.m.**

Interim CAO Chamberlin explained that the purpose of the public hearing was to gather public input regarding the Local Government Review Board's tentative report recommendations. She explained the Board is considering two potential ballot questions:

Chairperson Sergent called for proponents three times.

Mr. DiFonzo spoke generally in favor of placing Self-Governing Powers before the voters. He stated the City has operated successfully under the current General Powers structure for many years and noted he had attended City Council meetings for more than four decades. While he was not fully convinced that changing to Self-Governing Powers was necessary, he believed the question should be considered by the public.

Mr. DiFonzo expressed opposition to the proposed at-large council structure. He stated he agreed with concerns raised regarding representation and believed the current ward structure provides balanced representation throughout the community. He expressed concern that an at-large system could eventually result in one area of town having

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disproportionate representation while other areas lose their voice in City government. He further stated that low voter turnout in municipal elections could amplify those concerns and create inequities in representation.

Mr. Schoepp stated he believed the current ward structure is the fairest form of representation because council members must reside within the ward they represent. He inquired into more details or examples for the Self-Governing Powers and Interim CAO provided examples that Sidney could use or have used these powers including the recent discussions around kratom regulation and a vacant building registry's. She also detailed that cons to the change could include charters and the unforeseen negative outcomes that are difficult to reverse and legal ambiguity because of no MT Code to follow to set regulations.

Rick Norby

Mayor Norby expressed support for Self-Governing Powers and noted there could be benefits to giving local government additional authority to address issues specific to Sidney. He further stated he did not support the proposed at-large council structure. Instead, he suggested exploring a system similar to county commissioners where all voters could vote for ward representatives while maintaining ward residency requirements. He believed such a structure could increase voter participation while preserving geographic representation and could be pursued by the City Council if Self-Governing Powers were granted.

Chairperson Sergent called for proponents three times. No additional proponents came forward.

Chairperson Sergent called for opponents three times.

Interim CAO Chamberlin read into the record a letter submitted by Council Member Kelly Buxton.

Mrs. Buxbaum expressed support for placing Self-Governing Powers before the voters, stating it would provide the City greater flexibility to address local issues locally. However, she opposed changing three council positions to at-large seats.

She stated the current ward structure guarantees equal geographic representation throughout Sidney and expressed concern that at-large positions could gradually shift representation toward certain areas of town while reducing representation in others. She noted that future decisions involving infrastructure, growth, parks, utilities, drainage, transportation, and capital improvements could affect different neighborhoods differently, making balanced geographic representation important.

Mrs. Buxbaum further stated she did not believe changing council representation would significantly improve civic engagement because opportunities already exist through public

meetings, boards, committees, and elections. She expressed concern that many voters may not fully understand the long-term impacts of the proposed representation change and noted that reversing such a change could be difficult in the future.

She indicated she would support exploring a system under Self-Governing Powers where all voters could vote for all council seats while maintaining ward residency requirements and equal ward representation.

Council Member Larson stated she agreed with the concerns expressed by Mrs. Buxbaum regarding at-large representation. She stated she did not believe changing to at-large council seats would improve representation and expressed concern that multiple council members could eventually come from the same area of town. Mrs. Larson also emphasized the importance of clear ballot language if either proposal is placed before voters. She stated voters should clearly understand what changes they are being asked to approve.

Ms. Seigfreid spoke in opposition to the proposed at-large council structure. She stated she believed the current ward system provides balanced and equitable representation throughout the community. She expressed concern that at-large positions could lead to overrepresentation in some neighborhoods and underrepresentation in others. Ms. Seigfreid stated that once such a change is implemented it may be difficult to reverse and believed maintaining equal ward representation was the more cautious and responsible approach. She further stated that opportunities for civic engagement already exist and that creating at-large positions was not the best method of increasing public participation.

Chairperson Sergent called for opponents three times. No additional opponents came forward.

The Public Hearing was closed at 5:51 p.m.

c. Discuss and Approve Final Report

Board members discussed comments received during the public hearing. Several members indicated they wished to further review the representation proposal before finalizing the report.

Discussion also occurred regarding Self-Governing Powers. Questions were asked regarding whether approval of Self-Governing Powers would automatically require the City to exercise additional authority. Interim CAO Chamberlin explained that any future use of Self-Governing Powers would still require City Council action through ordinances and public processes, including multiple readings and opportunities for public input.

Board members discussed whether to finalize the report during the current meeting or continue discussion at a future meeting. Following discussion and consideration of testimony received during the public hearing, members expressed a desire to further review the proposed representation changes before making a final recommendation.

Motion was made and seconded to table action on the Final Report until the next meeting.

Motion made by Whiteman, Seconded by Mayer.

Voting Yea: Sergent, Whiteman, Mayer

3. Old Business

Nothing.

4. Questions/ Comments from Public

Ms. Seigfreid thanked the Board, Interim CAO Chamberlin, and staff for the time and effort invested in the Local Government Review process. She stated the examples provided throughout the process helped make complex governmental concepts easier for the public to understand.

5. Questions/ Comments from Board

Chairperson also publicly thanked Ivy Cross and Interim CAO Chamberlin for their work on the Local Government Review process.

6. Adjournment

at 6:03pm.