



Local Government Review Board 5/28/26

Agenda

May 28, 2026 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order
2. New Business
 - a. [May 7th, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - b. [Review and Approve Tentative Report](#)
 - c. [Public Outreach/Social Media Plan for Tentative Report and Open House Planning 6/18/26](#)
3. Old Business
4. Questions/ Comments from Public
5. Questions/ Comments from Board
6. Adjournment



Local Government Review Board 5/7/26
Minutes
May 07, 2026 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order

Chair Sergeant called the Local Government Review Board meeting to order at 5:30pm.

2. Old Business

a. Ward Representation

The LGRB continued the discussion on the hybrid at-large election model, where wards 1, 2, and 3 elect together, and at-large seats 1, 5, and 6 are elected together, alternating every two years. Concerns for the hybrid model included a potential for the majority control in one neighborhood with benefits including more opportunities for qualified candidates to run and the survey indicating majority support for at-large representation.

Motion was made to put in the tentative report the proposal for the ballot to change the representation structure for the City of Sidney to being a the hybrid model.

Motion made by Whiteman, Seconded by Mayer.
Voting Yea: Sergeant, Whiteman, Mayer

3. New Business

a. March 5th, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve.

Motion made by Mayer, Seconded by Whiteman.
Voting Yea: Sergeant, Whiteman, Mayer

b. April 9th, 2026 Training Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve.

Motion made by Whiteman, Seconded by Sergent.
Voting Yea: Sergent, Whiteman, Mayer

c. Schedule Update/Special Meetings

Interim CAO Chamberlin presented a tentative updated schedule for meetings and task items, should there be ballot items. She stated the meetings could be subject to change depending on public participation and the want of the LGRB, as there time available to schedule more meetings and push the final adoption. The LGRB requested the meeting on June 18th also contain an open house with food such as pizza to entice people to attend and ask questions.

d. General vs Self-Governing Powers

The LGRB discussed the report provided in the packet explaining the general versus self-governing powers. They also reviewed examples with Mayor Norby and Interim CAO Chamberlin where being self-governing would have been beneficial, especially during the oil boom and the need for nuisance controls and service fees being refined to better suit the community. The LGRB discussed a charter not being pursued as part of the self-governing powers, as they do not feel it is necessary to refine or restrict the city at this time.

Motion was made to put in the tentative report the proposal for the ballot to change the City of Sidney powers to self-governing.

Motion made by Mayer, Seconded by Whiteman.
Voting Yea: Sergent, Whiteman, Mayer

e. Recommendation for Tentative Report Items

4. Questions/ Comments from Public

Nothing.

5. Questions/ Comments from Board

Nothing.

6. Adjournment

at 6:01pm.

Tentative Final Report

2024-2026

City of Sidney Local Government Review Board

Study Commissioners

Janet Sergent, Chair

Wade Whiteman

Jordan Mayer

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1. Introduction

The City of Sidney Local Government Review Board was established pursuant to Article XI, Section 9 of the Montana Constitution and Title 7, Chapter 3 of the Montana Code Annotated, which requires periodic voter review of local government. This review process provides the community with an opportunity to evaluate the City’s current form, structure, powers, and service responsibilities and to consider alternative forms or powers of government authorized under Montana law.

Throughout the review process, the Board held public meetings, analyzed Montana statutes and constitutional provisions, examined governance structures used in other comparable Montana municipalities, and gathered feedback from residents, elected officials, staff, and community stakeholders.

This Tentative Final Report summarizes the Board’s work, outlines the options considered, and presents recommendations and ballot questions for voter consideration.

2. Letter to the Citizens of Sidney

To the Citizens of Sidney:

The Sidney Local Government Review Board respectfully submits this Tentative Final Report to the residents of the City of Sidney.

The purpose of the Local Government Review process is to periodically examine the structure and powers of local government and determine whether changes should be considered by the voters. Over the course of this review, the Board examined Sidney's current representation structure, reviewed self-governing powers authorized under Montana law, evaluated practices used by other Montana municipalities, and gathered feedback through public outreach and discussion. Following its review, the Board voted to recommend retaining Sidney's current Mayor-Council form of government without change.

The Board also voted to place two separate questions before the voters:

1. A proposed change to the City Council representation structure while maintaining six council members and three wards; and
2. Whether the City of Sidney should adopt self-governing powers.

This report provides background information, analysis, and explanation regarding those proposals so that voters may make informed decisions.

The Board thanks the residents of Sidney for their participation, feedback, and engagement throughout this process.

Respectfully submitted,

City of Sidney Local Government Review Board

Janet Sergent, Chair

Wade Whiteman

Jordan Mayer

3. Summary of Study Commission Activities

The Sidney Local Government Review Board conducted its review over approximately eighteen months. During that time, the Board held public meetings, did public outreach, reviewed Montana statutes and constitutional provisions relating to local government, examined examples from other Montana communities, and discussed community concerns related to representation, governance, and local authority.

Public participation and transparency were central components of the review process. Meetings were open to the public, public comment was accepted throughout the process, and meeting materials were made available consistent with Montana open meeting laws. The Board:

- Conducted regular public meetings and work sessions
- Reviewed Montana constitutional and statutory provisions relating to local government review
- Reviewed forms and powers of government available under Montana law
- Examined examples from other Montana municipalities regarding ward representation, at-large representation, and self-governing powers
- Reviewed public comments and survey feedback
- Discussed representation, governance, administrative flexibility, and local authority

In early 2025, prior to the commencement of the formal review process, members of the Local Government Review Board attended study commissioner training provided by the MSU Local Government Center. During this training, Board members received an overview of the purpose and responsibilities of the local government review process, the current powers, form, and structure of the City of Sidney, and the alternative forms of government and powers authorized under Montana law.

In April 2026, members of the Board attended Local Government Review and governance-related training sessions referenced in Board meeting minutes. The training focused on the forms and powers of government available under Montana law and the procedural responsibilities of local government review boards. Including:

- General governing powers versus self-governing powers
- Charter governments
- Ward and at-large representation structures
- Statutory and constitutional limitations on local governments
- Ballot requirements and voter education responsibilities
- Examples of governance structures utilized by other Montana municipalities

4. Findings of the Study Commission

Scope of Review

The Board examined the City of Sidney's current structure of representation and powers under Montana law. Sidney currently operates under a Mayor-Council form of government with general governing powers. We currently have:

- Three wards
- Six council members
- Two council members elected from each ward
- Four-year staggered terms
- Every two years, one council member from each ward is elected (3 are up for election at one time)

Representation Findings

The Board discussed the strengths and limitations of the current representation structure. Board members reviewed examples from other Montana municipalities utilizing ward-based, at-large, and hybrid representation structures.

Supporters of the existing structure emphasized:

- Strong neighborhood representation
- Direct accountability between council members and ward residents
- Geographic balance throughout the community
- Familiarity and continuity within the existing election structure

Supporters of a hybrid representation structure emphasized:

- Increased citywide accountability
- Broader representation of community-wide issues
- Greater opportunity for collaboration between council members
- Retaining ward representation while incorporating citywide elected positions
- Increase likeliness of voter participation

Following discussion and review, the Board determined that presenting a hybrid representation structure to voters would allow residents to directly determine whether a combination of ward and at-large representation would better serve the community moving forward.

Under the proposed structure:

- Sidney would continue to have three wards
- Sidney would continue to have six council members

- One council member would be elected from each ward
- Three council members would be elected at-large by all city voters
- Council members would continue serving staggered four-year terms

The proposed election cycle would maintain staggered elections every two years, with either:

- One ward seat and two at-large seats elected, or
- Two ward seats and one at-large seat elected

Self-Governing Powers Findings

The Board also reviewed the differences between general governing powers and self-governing powers under Montana law.

Under general governing powers, municipalities may exercise only those powers specifically authorized by state law.

Under self-governing powers, municipalities may exercise powers not prohibited by the Montana Constitution, state law, or the municipality's charter.

The Board reviewed educational materials, statutory language, examples from Montana municipalities, public comments, and information presented during governance training sessions.

Considerations Discussed in Support of Self-Governing Powers

Board discussions identified several reasons some communities choose to adopt self-governing powers, including:

- Increased local flexibility
- Greater ability to address local concerns without seeking additional state authorization
- Additional flexibility in local administration and organization
- Ability to tailor ordinances, procedures, and local programs to community needs
- Increased local control over administrative and operational decisions

Supporters of self-governing powers often described the concept as providing local governments with a broader toolbox for local problem solving while still remaining subject to constitutional and statutory limitations.

The Board also discussed examples of local authority that may be impacted by self-governing powers, including:

- Local nuisance and noise ordinances
- Administrative organization and procedures
- Ethics and disclosure policies

- Recreation and local service programs
- Local licensing or operational regulations where not preempted by state law

Considerations Discussed Against Self-Governing Powers

The Board also discussed concerns commonly associated with self-governing powers, including:

- Concerns regarding the use of a charter restrict the city in the future in unknown ways today
- Concerns regarding public understanding of self-governing authority
- Self-governing powers are not irreversible. Future voters retain the ability through Montana’s local government review and election processes to return the City to general powers if the community later determines that is appropriate.

Board members also emphasized that self-governing powers do not:

- Allow the City to override state or federal law
- Provide unlimited governmental authority
- Override constitutional protections or rights
- Remove the Legislature’s ability to limit or preempt local authority

The Board concluded that the issue of self-governing powers involves long-term questions regarding local authority and flexibility and is therefore appropriate for direct voter consideration.

5. Comparison of Existing and Proposed Plans of Government

a. Comparison of Specific Characteristics

Characteristic	Existing Structure	Proposed Structure
Number of Wards	3	3
Number of Council Members	6	6
Ward Representatives	2 per ward	1 per ward
At-Large Representatives	None	3
Terms of Office	4 years staggered	4 years staggered
Election Cycle	1 seat per ward every 2 years	Combination of ward and at-large seats every 2 years
Government Powers	General Governing Powers	Self-Governing Powers if approved

b. Recommendations and Reasons

The Board recommends presenting both proposals directly to the voters.

The Board determined that:

- The proposed hybrid representation structure could improve balance between ward representation and citywide accountability
- Maintaining six council members preserves representation levels while modernizing the structure
- The question of self-governing powers is appropriate for voter consideration because it affects the long-term authority and flexibility of the City

The Board also recognizes that reasonable arguments exist both in favor of and against self-governing powers and changes to representation structure.

6. Minority Report

Pursuant to Montana law, Jordan Mayer submits the following Minority Report.

While I respect the work completed by the Board and support providing voters with clear choices, I believe additional caution should be exercised regarding the adoption of self-governing powers.

Self-governing powers provide broader local authority and flexibility; however, they may also create uncertainty regarding the extent of local governmental powers and increase the potential for inconsistent regulation or legal disputes. Additionally, self-governing powers may lead to increased regulation or governmental expansion, reduced consistency between local governments across the state, and broader authority being exercised by future elected officials than currently exists under general governing powers.

I also believe the current representation structure has historically provided strong geographic representation through direct ward-based elections. While Sidney may not be a large community, it is diverse enough that a majority of City Council representation originating from one area or neighborhood could influence decision-making in a way that may not fully reflect the interests of the community as a whole.

The proposed hybrid representation model is an approach currently being explored by many communities and may offer potential benefits; however, it remains relatively untested in comparison to more traditional ward-based structures. As a result, the long-term impacts and potential unintended consequences of such a system remain uncertain.

For these reasons, I believe voters should carefully consider both the potential benefits and potential drawbacks associated with the proposed changes.

I also believe voters should consider the relatively limited level of public participation during the review process compared to the overall population of the City of Sidney. Public attendance at Local Government Review Board meetings totaled approximately twenty-five (25) individuals across five meetings, excluding Board members and City staff, and the public survey received approximately eighty-one (81) responses. While those who participated provided valuable input, these participation levels represent only a small portion of the community. Given the significance and long-term impact of potential changes to the City's governmental powers and representation structure, I believe broader public engagement would provide greater confidence that the proposed changes reflect the informed preferences of the community as a whole.

Respectfully submitted,

Jordan Mayer

7. Supplementary Report

The Board may include supplemental materials, public comments, survey summaries, or additional explanatory information in this section prior to adoption of the Final Report.

8. Certificate A - Existing Plan of Government

The City of Sidney currently operates under a Mayor-Council form of government with general governing powers as authorized under Montana law.

The current representation structure consists of:

- Three wards
- Six council members
- Two council members elected from each ward
- Four-year staggered terms

9. Certificate B – Proposed Plan of Government - Representation Change

If approved by the voters, the proposed representation structure shall consist of:

- Three wards
- Six council member's total
- One council member elected from each ward
- Three council members elected at-large
- Four-year staggered terms

Elections shall continue every two years on a staggered basis.

10. Certificate C – Proposed Plan of Government - Self-Governing Powers

If approved by the voters, the City of Sidney shall adopt self-governing powers pursuant to Article XI, Section 6 of the Montana Constitution.

The City shall retain its existing Mayor-Council form of government unless otherwise modified by law.

11. Certificate D – Establishing the Election Date

The proposed ballot questions shall be submitted to the voters of the City of Sidney at the November 2026 General Election.

12. Certificate E – Official Ballot Language

Question 1 – Representation Structure

Shall the City of Sidney revise its council representation structure from:

- Three wards with two council members elected from each ward?

to:

- Three wards with one council member elected from each ward and three council members elected at-large citywide?

FOR the proposed representation change
 AGAINST the proposed representation change

Question 2 – Self-Governing Powers

Shall the City of Sidney adopt self-governing powers pursuant to Article XI, Section 6 of the Montana Constitution?

FOR adopting self-governing powers
 AGAINST adopting self-governing powers

13. Certificate F – Effective Date If Approved

If approved by the voters, the proposed changes shall take effect January 1, 2027, unless otherwise provided by law.

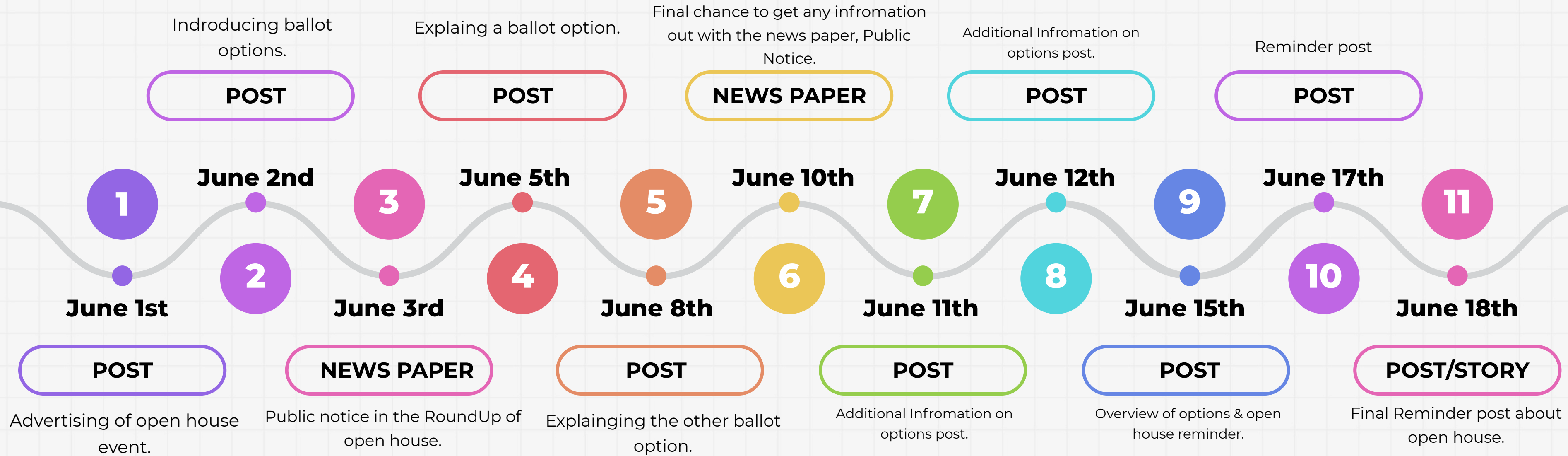
14. Appendix

a. City of Sidney Local Government Review Survey

The appendix shall include survey materials, public outreach summaries, and related supporting documents utilized during the Local Government Review process.



LGRB Time Line June 1st-18th



Three posts a week should garner engagement without overcrowding the page.



Open House

OPTIONS



1

Pizza

Includes small drink bar
i.e. water & coffee.

Con:
How many would we need? What happens if there is too much or too little.

Pro:
Easy.
Tends to be widely liked.

2

Board

charcuterie board

Con:
Tends to be more expensive.

Pro:
Allows for small snacking and easy variety for different preferences.

Includes small drink bar
i.e. water & coffee as well.

3

Sweets

Sweets Board

Con:
Not everybody likes sweets. Variety.

Pro:
Can be small and quick- easy to set up & clean up.
Could be incorporated into other options.



**CITY OF
SIDNEY**
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REVIEW BOARD



Open House:

**How should our government
be shaped?**



Refreshments, drinks, and good discussion provided!

June 18th 5:00 pm



City Hall (115 2nd St SE, Sidney)



SIDNEY BALLOT OPTIONS

CITY COUNCIL

Item c.

CURRENT SYSTEM:

- Three Wards with two concil members from each ward.

OR

HYBRID SYSTEM:

- Three Wards with one concil member from each ward and the remining three voted in by the whole city.

AND

CITY POWERS

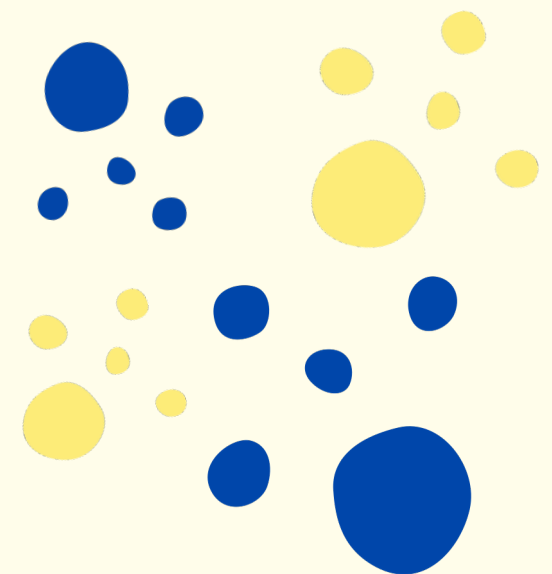
SELF- GOVERNING:

- We can do anything that is not specifically prohibited by state law or the Constitution.

OR

GENERAL:

- (What we currently have): We can only do what state law specifically says it is allowed to do.



SELF GOVERNING POWERS

HERE'S WHAT WILL BE ON THE BALLOT:

Self Governing powers: A city can do anything that is not specifically prohibited by state law or the Constitution.

OR

General Powers (What we currently have): A city can only do what state law specifically says it is allowed to do.

HOWEVER, **SELF GOVERNING** POWERS COULD POSSIBLY LEAD TO SOME **UNCERTAIN LEGAL TERRITORIES.**

WITH SELF GOVERNING POWERS WE COULD:

-  INFRASTRUCTURE
-  CITY BUDGETS
-  PUBLIC SAFETY
-  LOCAL POLICIES

Sidney Upcoming Ballot Options:

Item c.

HYBRID COUNCIL SYSTEM

Imagine Sidney is a pizza.

- 🍕 The whole pizza = the city
- 🍕 Each slice = a ward

Each slice gets a council member to represent them.

Their job?

- ✓ Talk about city issues
- ✓ Make decisions about budgets and projects
- ✓ Try not to argue longer than a Thanksgiving dinner

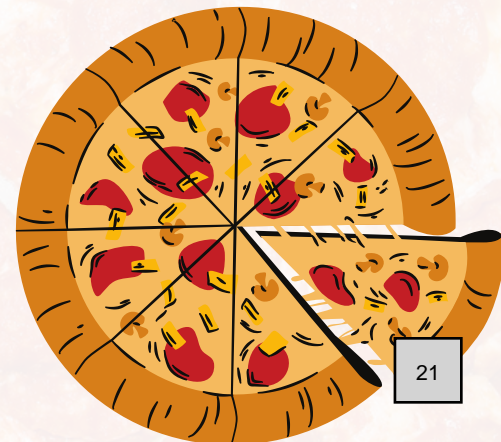
Some cities vote by ward.

Some vote citywide.

Some do both.

Different recipes... same pizza. 🍕

TAKE A LOOK →



Our Options?

Item c.

Currently: We have 3 wards with two representatives each totalling 6 memebers

But we have another option:

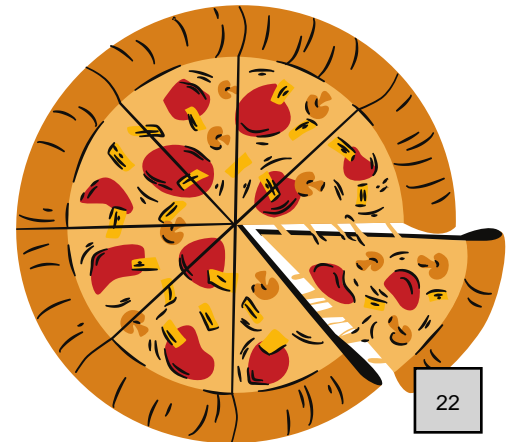
HYBRID COUNCIL:

We will still have 3 wards but now only one representative for each.
The other 3? They are elected at large. Still totaling 6 members.

That means we get 3 that represent the entirety of Sidney and not just the wards and 3 to represent the wards individually. You would vote for two candidates: 1 ward and 1 for the entire of Sidney

How do you want to be represented?

<https://cityofsidneymt.com/>



SELF-GOVERNING POWERS

WHAT THIS BALLOT QUESTION MEANS:

Self-Governing Powers:

A city may take action on local issues as long as state law doesn't forbid it.

General Powers (Current System):

A city may only do what state law specifically allows.

Note: Self-governing authority can offer flexibility, but may also create uncertain legal territory that requires interpretation.



Infrastructure



City Budgets



Public Safety



Local Policies

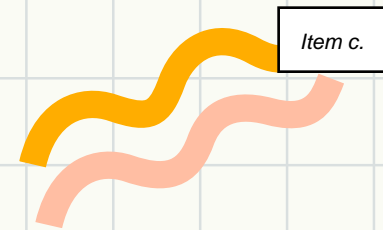
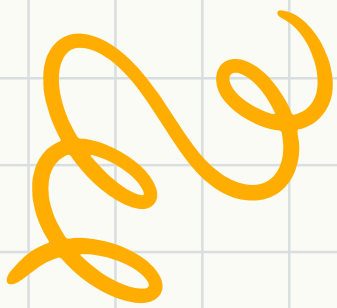


CITY OF SIDNEY: CITY COUNCIL

What are our upcoming ballot options?

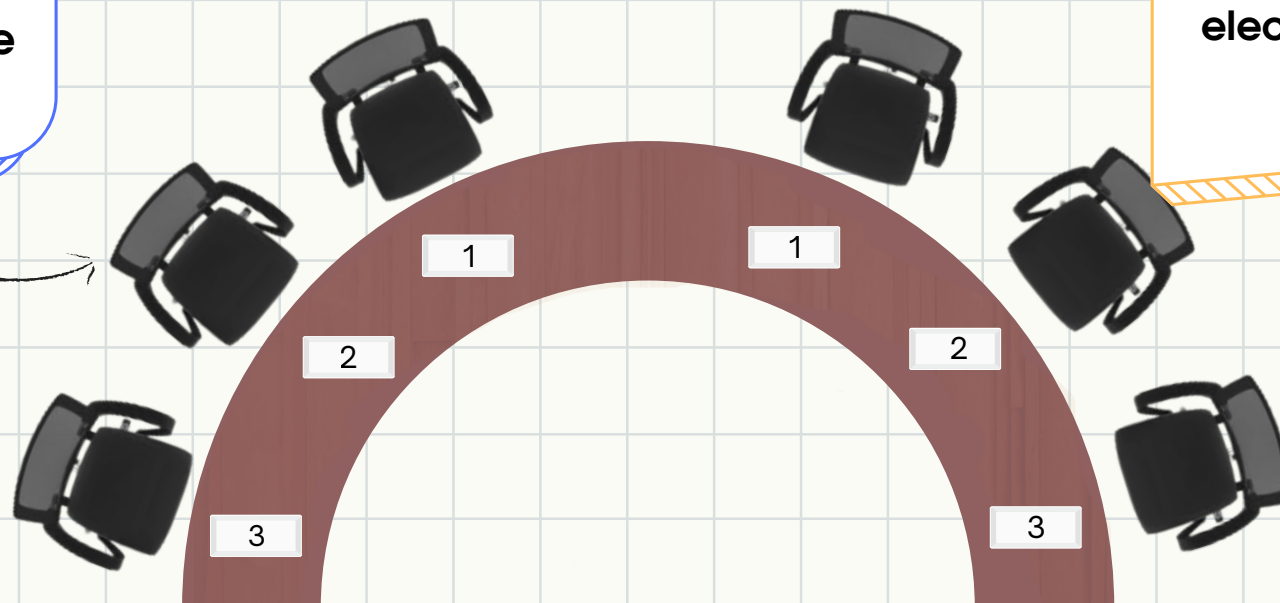


LET'S TAKE A LOOK



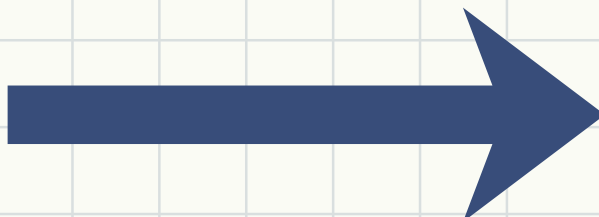
CURRENT SYSTEM:

This half is also elected at the same time.



This half of the table is elected at the same time.

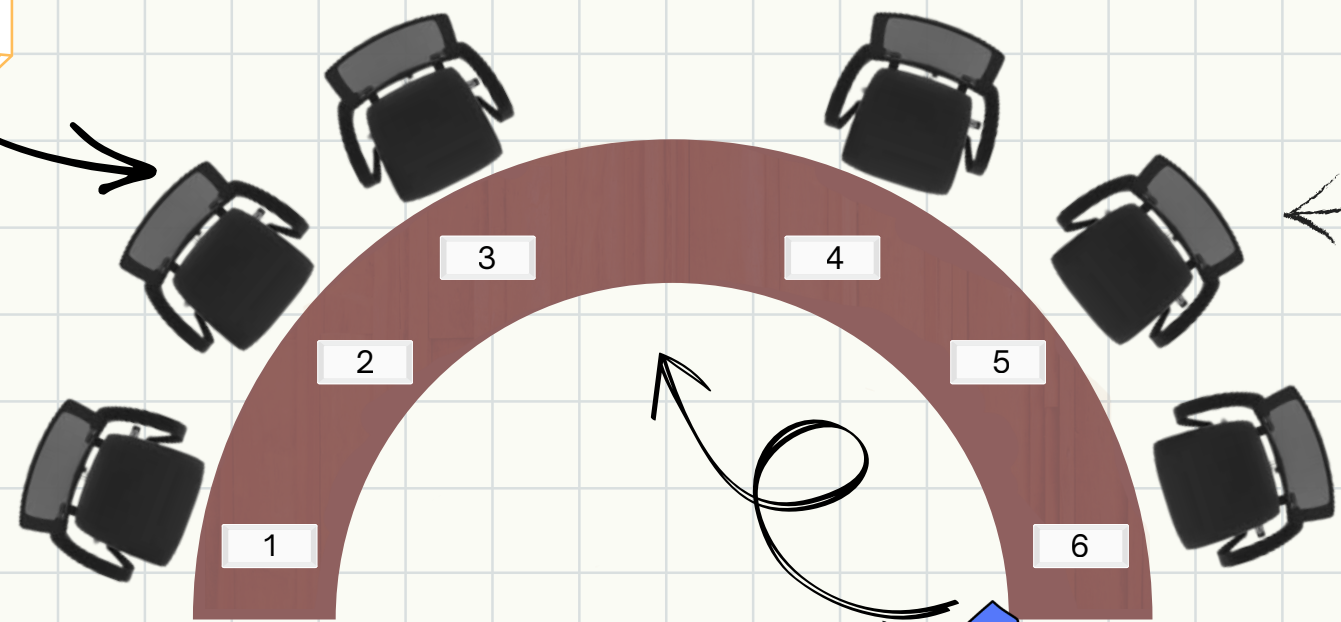
In our current system we have two ward members elected by wards. One from each up for election every two years. This creates a stable 3-and-3 rotation every two years.



HYBRID SYSTEM:

This half of the table is ward elected city council members

This half of the table is at large elected council members



Seats 5, 6 and 1 are up for election at the same time

Seats 2, 3 and 4 are up for election at the same time

One at-large seat shares a term cycle with two wards.
Two at-large seats share a term cycle with one ward.
This creates a stable 3-and-3 rotation every two years.



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