

LIBBY LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION
FINAL REPORT 1986

SUMMARY

In August, 1984, a citizen task force was appointed by the Mayor and the Libby City Council to study the existing form of city government and provide improvement alternatives for the voters of Libby. The recommendations submitted in this final report represent two years of intense study and review. The recommended alternative proposes that Libby adopt the Charter form with Self-Government Powers. This option will be voted upon by the inhabitants of Libby this fall. Please remember while reading this proposal that nothing will be approved or changed except by positive vote of the citizenry of Libby. The information contained in this report is for your background to assist you in your voting on alternative local government forms. It does not represent the views of any existing political group nor any special interest group.
THE OPTION IS UP TO THE VOTERS, AND ONLY THE VOTERS, OF LIBBY, MONTANA.

BACKGROUND

We Montanans are involved in a two-year process of reviewing our local city government as required by our state constitution. The Libby Local Government Study Commission listened carefully to everyone who cared to share an opinion with us and studied all alternatives. We concluded that the City of Libby needs a city charter, using the mayor and elected city council to determine policy and a hired administrator to carry out that policy.

One premise of Montana's local government review process is that reform will occur in county and local municipal governments. Change is difficult for most people, especially when it involves giving up a way of doing things that has been used for decades; but change often is essential or required.

The proposed change for the City of Libby governmental format is basically in the area of power. Under the current form, state law defines what the City of Libby may do and specifically how it shall be done. Using the proposed city charter form, the city council may exercise any power which the state of Montana does not deny. The basic advantage is that self-government will give us, the citizens of Libby, more flexibility in solving local problems.

The proposed Charter form government with a mayor-council/administrator possessing self-government powers would allow a definite separation between legislative and administrative functions, and would keep the present relationship between the electorate and the elected officials. In essence, the local government would remain both responsible and accountable to the citizens of Libby. The administrator shall be hired by the city council on the basis of merit to handle the day-by-day operation of the city. Except for the city attorney and city judge, s/he shall appoint and remove all department heads and employees, but shall remain accountable to the mayor-council in all matters of policy.

After two years of study, we members of the Libby Local Government Study Commission propose the adoption of a city charter establishing a Council-Administrator form of government with self-government powers in the belief that such government will best meet the needs of the citizens of Libby, now and in the future. We believe improvements will be found in the following major areas: (1) efficiency; (2) accountability; (3) responsiveness; and, (4) local control for local needs. We strongly believe the proposed form of government would fulfill these goals.

The existing government lacks separation between legislative and administrative duties. The council makes the laws and then carries them out. The existing government lacks centralized authority, a person responsible for supervising the functions and services provided by city government. A full time person is needed to see that the policies of the city are carried out as efficiently as possible. At the present time, these functions are provided on a part-time basis by the Mayor and committees of the City Council. A competent, trained professional is vitally needed to supervise efficient, well-organized city functions. A qualified administrator, hired on the basis of merit, will fulfill this role. S/he will answer the need for a greater degree of expertise in the administration of local government posed by the growth and increasing complexity of government. S/he will relieve the council of its growing burdens and demands of personal time. By combining a professional administrator with direct popular accountability through the council, the proposed council-administrator provides an opportunity to meet the needs of the City of Libby.

The City of Libby, under the proposed form of government, would have self-government powers allowing the city council all powers not prohibited by the Constitution of Montana, the laws of Montana, or the proposed Charter of the City of Libby. This will give our local government more flexibility to solve local problems. Under the proposed form, nonpartisan elections would continue as have been done in the past under the existing form of government. The mayor will no longer have administrative duties, however, will preside at council meetings and break tie votes of the council.

The council will no longer supervise the employees, leaving this duty to the administrator hired by the council. The public shall have the same rights to participate in council meetings as experienced currently. The present employees under the proposed form of government shall have their rights protected for future employment as currently exists and all current ordinances shall remain in effect, except those few which would conflict with the proposed Charter.

The budget will be prepared by the administrator for modification and approval by the council. The administrator will implement the council approved version. It will be the administrators responsibility to balance priorities set by the council with the available city resources. There is no state imposed mill levy limits under this form of government, so that city council members, by ordinance or resolution after public hearing, and not the state legislature, will establish the annual mill levy.

Elected officials will not be compensated, as is the case now. This savings of money will go a long way toward paying the administrator's salary.

The election on adopting the charter for self-government powers and moving to the mayor-council/administrator will be held in the fall of 1986. We urge you to consider the proposal we have presented to you. If you have any questions regarding this proposed change in government for the the City of Libby, please call 293-2731 and we will arrange for someone from the Study Commission to talk to you.

Respectfully submitted by Libby Local Government Study Commission

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