

**COUNTY OF GRANITE**  
**Study Commission**  
**March 20, 2025 - 5:00 PM**  
Granite County Courthouse, 220 North Sansome Street, Philipsburg, MT 59858  
Meeting 03/20/2025; not on Zoom.

**Call to Order and Roll Call**

Roll Call was taken, and the following all responded present: Gail Leeper, Robin Wight, and Gary Snyder. The following members were absent: None  
Others present: Blanche McLure, Granite County Ex Officio.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Public in Attendance:** Luke Ulatowski, representing the Philipsburg Mail; Blaine Bradshaw, Granite County Attorney,

**Public Comment:** None

**Minutes**

Thursday, January 16, 2025 Study Commission Meeting Minutes.

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Chair Leeper asked for a motion to approve the January 16, 2025 meeting minutes. Robin Wight made a motion to approve the January 16, 2025 Study Commission Meeting Minutes. Gary Snyder seconded the motion; all yeas, none opposed.

It was noted: due to illness, the February 20, 2025 Granite County Study Commission Meeting was cancelled.

Also noted: there was a lapse in communication; resulting in Study Commissioner Snyder, along with members of the public not notified in a timely manner of said cancellation.

**A. Regular Items**

**1) Study Commission communication with public and government entity**

Presentation: None

Public Comment: None

Discussion: Gail Leeper led the Study Commission discussion informing the commission, during the Local Government online courses there were templates provided to facilitate communication with the public and Local Government Elected Officials and employees.

First, Chair Leeper suggested; the Study Commission Chair should reach out to the County Commissioners to be placed on the Commissioners' Agenda, after the Study Commission's thorough review of the provided questionnaire templates during the April Study Commission Meeting.

Public Comment: None

**2) Study Commissioner Snyder's – Independent Website.**

Presentation: Study Commissioner Snyder provided update; website is still being designed, and will Mr. Snyder will provide update once completed.

Public Comment: None

**3) Philipsburg Mail - Noticing**

Presentation: Chair Leeper asked Study Commissioner Snyder, if he had been able to speak with the paper; which, he had not.

Study Commissioner Snyder posed question to Luke Ulatowski; regarding columns in the paper, and if a fee is paid. Luke responded, that columns and press releases are different; with that press releases are for announcements and noticing, where columns are informative based.

Luke Ulatowski provided the person to contact for press releases, being Peggy Kerr. Peggy sets the guidelines and would be able to provide more information regarding charges for press releases.

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Ex Officio McLure inquired, regarding placing information within the *Community Events Happening* section of the paper; if that would be an option to announce the Study Commission meetings.

Chair Leeper asked, who would be reaching out to Peggy Kerr; regarding press releases and noticing, at which Study Commissioner Snyder volunteered to preform that task.

Discussion led to additionally noticing on Facebook, giving the public more accessible options to receive meeting notices.

Chair Leeper will confirm with Miranda, County Commissioners' Assistant; to ensure noticing is also being placed on the Granite County website.

Study Commissioner Wight questioned; if the Town of Philipsburg has a website and the possibility of placement of noticing on their website, as they are part of the County. Study Commissioner Wight volunteered to reach out to the Town of Philipsburg.

Public Comment: None

**A. New Business**

- 1) Joint Local Government Review Boards Utilizing MSU Informative Training**  
Mayor Dan Reddish, of Philipsburg, reached out to Chair Leeper; regarding the possibility of the Granite County Review Board and the Town of Philipsburg Review Board having Dan Clark, with MSU Local Government, come and give a synopsis of the Local Government Review process; to provide a better understanding to the public of what the Review Boards purpose is.

Study Commissioner Snyder posed the question; if the Study Commissioners from both entities should meet together, prior to meeting with Dan Clark's presentation to the public. Adding, the recommendation Granite County and Town of Philipsburg committees should attend each other meetings.

Chair Leeper interjected, she felt the Granite County Review Board currently was further along in the review process, than the Town of Philipsburg.

Mr. Snyder further stated; he had read in the newspaper, which indicated that to Town of Philipsburg Study Commissioners had previously discussed their thought process as to changes needed, in which they were in agreement.

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Mr. Ulatowski clarified, in the article the Town of Philipsburg Review Board came in with preemptive ideas, such as wanting to make the council smaller; which was communicated at their first meeting. Adding, the Town of Philipsburg have presently held one meeting thus far; which, was led by Marty Ludemann.

Study Commissioner Snyder interjected, "the biggest thing that perked my ears was they said, "oh yeah, they really want to be self-governing; and I thought, so do I." Mr. Snyder continuing; "because I think, if there is any real hope, that's the only way we're going to see it, and it doesn't matter what issue you talk about." Further stating, "that's why I gave you the constitutions; read them very carefully and look at what the State can do and can't do."

Chair Leeper interjected; stating, that's why she feels that Dan should come and talk to Study Commissioners, of what the Review Board is. Further stating, we still have to go by MCA law in this process.

Study Commissioner Snyder insisted; "No, we do not." Further insisting, "the legislature in the constitution is empowered to make laws, but the people have the ability to accept or reject those laws."

Chair Leeper stated; "well, I guess we are going to just have to have differences of opinion on that, and that's why were going to need to have people come in that work in this stuff every day."

Study Commissioner Snyder stated, "okay, yep, that's fine"

County Attorney Blaine Bradshaw interjected; "I think a notion of the Study Commissioners coming in under the preconceived ideas, is incorrect." Adding, "I think the Study Commission is supposed to go out there like you're doing, fact find, and then make the decision." County Attorney Bradshaw continued; "individuals can have their own personal opinions, which could be expressed under public comments." Further stating; "as far as having an agenda to push, I wouldn't do that, go to the people first, get their thoughts; then taking that and then going forward in making recommendations."

Study Commissioner Snyder stated; "Don't take my comments out of context, the primary thing I'm looking for, is to get the voters to vote for what they want, but they need to understand what is available."

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Chair Leeper interjected; "they do, but we are here to research and then make recommendations...but to say; we have studied all this, this could be an option, this could be an option or this could be an option." Ms. Leeper continued; "before we do that at the end of a two-year cycle, we have a lot of leg work to do."

Study Commissioner Snyder stated, "we do; but we also have to be able to present to the people reality. That's why, when we get into the constitution; I don't care if it's Montana or the United States. The United States, we've given up about all our rights. We've given it up to the Legislature, political parties, whatever." Mr. Snyder continuing; "Montana goes even further, when you really truly read your Montana Constitution, it's not Legislature that makes laws and everybody has to follow; it's the people who accept those laws, or don't except those laws."

Study Commissioner Wight interjected, "So, how to proceed." Ms. Wight adding; "I understand what you are saying, but as a group, what are our goals?" Continuing, by asking; "Do we, as far as steps, do we go to the Commissioners and employees first, get their feedback, possibly the

community at the same time.” Ms. Wight continuing; “then the next step, have an open house...”

Both Chair Leeper and Study Commissioner Snyder, were in agreement; adding that next step “Open House” would be the “Public Meeting.”

Study Commissioner Wight adding; “that would be the time to have Dan or Ashley come, when we have the public here, they can go over what they did with us in training, and then what the different choices are, and what their options are.”

Chair Leeper and Study Commissioner Wight were in agreement; stating, we should not guide the people, we should provide the facts and let them guide their selves.

County Attorney Bradshaw interjected; the people are sovereign, and they will vote. The process is: fact find, not guiding in that; narrow down, by what is being promoted by the people; and then doing the recommendations, if there should be any; then the people vote.

Study Commissioner Wight questioned; if we could have the questionnaires and boxes ready for placement, after the April Study Commission Meeting; in order to collect data between April and May.

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Granite County Ex Officio McLure was in agreement in having MSU come to educate the public of the options available.

The following schedule was discussed:

- End of April: Speak with Commissioners, place boxes with questions to Community.
- May/June: Invite Dan Clark or Ashley Kent from MSU, for Public Meeting.

Chair Leeper questioned; if she should reach out to Mayor Reddish or Marty, and Dan Clark.

After discussion; Chair Leeper will reach out to MSU, first to inquire dates available for Dan Clark to come and present to the public.

Study Commissioner Snyder added; once his website is up, he will be taking the approach of teaching what’s available. Mr. Snyder stating; when coming across as teaching, you come across a lot of ideas that aren’t just right. Mr.

Snyder continued; of his approach, when speaking with the public and questioning with whom they need to listen as a government; further discussing and teaching the Montana Constitution, United States Constitution and providing Supreme Court Cases as reference. The more we know about it, the more likely to form an opinion that is more reasonable.

Chair Leeper interjected; everyone is going to have an opinion; you and I differ. She continued, she is not on this Board to try to make people believe the way she does.

Study Commissioner Snyder responded; neither am I.

Study Commissioner Wight interjected; what is the of the Local Government Review, that's were I keep wanting to go back to.

Mr. Snyder added; let's define Local Government, for fun tonight. Asking, what is Local Government? Gathering responses, then he further provided education regarding his views of the Montana Constitution and United States Constitution, in regards to Local Government.

Study Commissioner Wight interjected; though he may right in what he is presenting. Continuing, but is that not going beyond the scope of the Local Government Review.

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Study Commissioner Snyder responded; not really, after his review of the material and training, it has led him to the conclusion that the study review recommendation should be Self-Governing.

Chair Leeper interjected; she has to disagree. Ms. Leeper continuing; we do have to do certain things with the state, and that is not what this Study Commission is.

Study Commissioner Snyder stated; he has been researching Westlaw cases because of his position on the Study Review Board.

Discussion led to; what was taught and comprehended from in-person training. Study Commissioner Wight adding; if there was a need for Dan Clark to meet to the Study Commissioners, prior to meeting with the public. Ms. Wight continuing; there may be misunderstanding within the board.

County Attorney Bradshaw interjected; He agrees with the teaching aspect of having people understand, which should only be the basics, you can't stay in that mode. You have to move forward with the substantiated issues, the

philosophical issues aren't the substantiated issues. Attorney Bradshaw continued; get to what the people want and not guiding them.

Mr. Snyder added; he agrees. Continuing, but when said; what the people want, is it the facts or misguided information. He went on to detail; his review of his understanding of training he received for this study commission.

Study Commissioner Wight added; it will be during the time MSU provides training, which allows the public to learn what those facts are.

Discussion continued amongst the Study Commissioners and Attorney Bradshaw, with the consensus; it would be a good idea to record the training provided to the public, then place the recording on the websites.

Study Commissioner Snyder added; along with the amount of education we have already had, and what we are continuing to learn for this review process, and having the understanding on the Montana State and United States Constitution.

Chair Leeper added; the people also have the option of coming to the meetings and learning in-person.

Discussion was had whether or not the Philipsburg Mail is providing access to the recorded minutes on their website; which was confirmed by Mr. Ulatowski, they are not.

The Study Commissioners discussed, placement of the audio recordings of the Study Commissioner Meetings on the County website.

## **2) Study Commissioner Proper Communication**

Previous discussion, of joint MSU training led into; proper communication amongst Study Commissioners, how to communicate via email without constituting a quorum. Study Commissioners are to email Sarah Graham, Granite County Clerk and Recorder, at the Study Commission email that was established for the Local Government Review Process. Emails sent to the Review Board are then to be Bcc (blind copied) to all the Study Commission Board Members.

Study Commissioner Snyder asked; for a motion amongst ourselves of proper contact for communication, due to the mishap of February's cancelled meeting due to illness and lack of proper notification. Mr. Snyder requested; for a list of the proper line of communication.



Study Commissioner Snyder, further requested; in a phone conversation with Sarah Graham, information as to what constitutes an open meeting according to the law. He also requested; a personal meeting with Sarah Graham, Granite County Clerk and Recorder, wanting to negotiate who, what and how to interact with the commissioners.

Chair Leeper interjected; that is why you have a commissioner as an Ex Officio, the Ex Officio purpose is to take questions to the commissioners.

Attorney Bradshaw clarified; formal items to discuss with the commissioner would go through the Ex Officio Blanche McLure. Continuing; email notices, website placement are separate matters. Then stating; the Study Commission Review Board needs to communicate through the chair.

The following process was discussed:

- Commissioner Contact: process through Ex Officio Blanche McLure.
- Email Communications: process through Clerk and Recorder Sarah Graham.
- Granite County Website Postings: process through Granite County Commissioners Assistant Miranda.

Study Commissioner Snyder made note that out of his studies, there are three Study Commissioners in the Granite County Study Commissioner Review Board. Then referencing, Study Board Members Leeper and Wight; a hard and fast rule was made that we can't contact one another, talk to one another or do anything outside the meeting.

Chair Leeper interjected; because that would make a quorum.

Study Commissioner Snyder stated; that may be a quorum, but that doesn't mean we are doing business.

Chair Leeper responded; Dan and Ashley would 100% disagree with you.

In which, Mr. Snyder stated; good because he has materials that will disagree with them. We have three people that are commissioners, we are to work together toward: first of all, educating the voters; secondly, learn what our local government really truly is, referencing when calling requesting a meeting and hearing nothing back it destroys the commission and the commissioners.

Chair Leeper interjected; we are just going to disagree on that.



Attorney Bradshaw added; Government is imperfect, it will take some patience to get started, and we will figure it out.

In which, Mr. Snyder responded; but how do we improve it.

Chair Leeper added; the hardest thing is too, that Robin and I work together on a daily basis.

Study Commissioner Snyder interjected; I know, that's a problem.

Heated discussion continued, resulting in Chair Leeper adding; that is why we have person to go to because of our working relationship outside of this elected board.

Study Commissioner Wight interjected; if she might read from the training information, citing and reading portions of Conditions of Study Commission Business...Specific Legal Requirements you must follow when conducting meetings...MCA 7-3-181 and 182. Further reading the Chair will decide the date and time and place of your regular meeting; meeting announcements should be publicized well before the meeting, check with your Municipal Clerk or County Clerk and Recorder for proper meeting notice procedures...accommodate public access, participation MCA 2-3-103. Study Commissioner Wight stated; what she heard was, they are to go through the Clerk and Recorder. Then asking, if that is what the others heard.

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Study Commissioner Snyder responded; what you read was the mechanism of these meetings, by which they should operate. It says nothing about how we as commissions, are to do intra personally.

Study Commissioner Wight added; your concern a moment ago, was not being properly noticed that the meeting was cancelled, right?

Mr. Snyder responded; that was number one.

Ms. Wight continued; the answer to number one would be Sarah Graham, as far as I read it; would you agree?

Mr. Snyder responded; yes, as far as you have read it, but I am going to Sarah Graham and I am going to talk to her and say, Sarah, is this what you are comfortable with.

County Attorney Bradshaw interjected; I would encourage you to do that through the chair, I do not think that is proper for you to do that individually.

Study Commissioner Snyder responded; there I am going to disagree, again.

In which, County Attorney Bradshaw stated; no, I am giving you that legal opinion, you have got to do that.

Mr. Snyder further stated; I am still disagreeing with you. Then adding; his basis is from the case law that he has read regarding open meetings.

County Attorney Bradshaw added; you may disagree with me, but you've got follow that one, okay?

Study Commissioner Snyder stated; okay, will see.

County Attorney Bradshaw restated; go through the chair.

For clarification, Chair Leeper stated; the chair will take items to Sarah for meetings. Miranda is posting the agenda, both hard copy posting and placement on the County website.

If there is communication breakdown with Sarah; the chair will go back to Sarah to verify items are addressed in a timely manner. Chair Leeper added; that the meeting was cancelled two days prior, and that there could have been a snafu. Continuing; none of us are perfect we can do better, but we have to go by MCA code.

The Study Commissioner Board Members can email Sarah; Sarah will forward those emails to the additional Study Commissioners.

Study Commissioner Snyder made comment; as to his understanding, the Study Commissioners were to work independently, if that is not true, he requested clarification within the constitution. Further stating; every ten years the constitution is to elect a group, adding that these people are not to be part of Local Government.

Clarification by Chair Leeper and Study Commissioner Wight was made; the individual elected are not to be part of the Local Government being studied, which neither Leeper or Wight are. As both Leeper and Wight, work within the municipality of Drummond; not Granite County.

Chair Leeper reiterated; she had checked into the plausible conflict long before running for the Granite County Review elected position.

Study Commissioner Snyder responded; that he will be checking into it, because he reads the law.

County Attorney Bradshaw interjected to Study Commissioner Snyder; he needs to focus on the issues, not the legal issues. "That you've got to focus on getting the job done, if you're going to continue just doing this doing this, then you're going to be removed."

At which, Mr. Snyder responded; "then remove me, start it right now."

County Attorney Bradshaw added; "you've got to focus on working together, not fighting people."

Mr. Snyder responded; "if that's what you want to do, then you go right ahead. Continuing; because, I intend to operate from what I've earned here, and what the Constitution of Montana says," as he gestured to the study material.

County Attorney Bradshaw added; "what they are doing is legal."

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Mr. Snyder responded; he wasn't questioning legality. At which, the County Attorney and both Study Commissioners Leeper and Wight disagreed.

Further discussion was made amongst the Study Commissioners and County Attorney, regarding the legality of Local Government working as Study Commissioners. Followed by, individuals vs Study Commission, approaching Granite County in reference to the Local Government Study Review Board.

Granite County Attorney followed with; it is his legal opinion, that everyone on the Study Commission Board is legally on this commission, and it will go forward.

Chair Leeper brought the Commissioners back to focus; as to proper contact communication line.

- Miranda will be placing items on the Granite County website.
- Communications between the Study Commissioner will go through Sarah.

- Legal opinions and questions will go through the Chair, the Chair will direct those items to the County Attorney.

## **B. Old Business**

### **1) Time Line**

Presentation: None

Public Comment: None

Discussion led by Chair Leeper between the Study Commissioners; amended timeline previously set.

Clarification was made of who will be placing legal notices in the paper, which will be the Study Commissioners.

Local Government Review Timeline was amended from first draft, with posting dates set.

Meeting time changed from 5:00PM to 7:00PM, for the foreseeing meetings.

Chair Leeper will provide the Clerk and Recorder the revised timeline.

Study Commissioner Wight will place notice in the Philipsburg Mail.

#### Next Steps

- April - Set up boxes with questionnaires
- May - Local Government come provide public training
- June - Public Hearing for the public to address questions and concerns.

### **2) Commission vs Individual response**

Presentation: None

Public Comment: None

Comments pertaining to citizens questions; if legal, need to go through the chair to which will be brought to the County Attorney, the County Attorney will address the citizens' concerns.

### **3) Zoom Access**

Presentation: None

Public Comment: None

Discussion was had regarding Zoom availability for the Granite County Local Government Review Board; as addressed in prior meetings, it is not required by law to hold these board meetings on Zoom. Citizens are always welcome to come attend the Local Government Review Board meetings in-person.

### Member Communications/Proposals for next Agenda

1. Review prior to meeting: questionnaire for Local Government being studied.
2. Review prior to meeting: questionnaire for citizens.

Discussion was made, as to providing boxes for the Local Government vs interviewing the Local Government individually.

These questionnaires, are for individual completion for the Local Government Review Board to gain a better understanding of both the Local Government being studied and the public perspectives of Granite County Local Government.

**Agenda Items requested to be to Granite County Point of Contact, Miranda, by April 10<sup>th</sup> in preparation for the February Meeting Agenda.**

**Next Meeting: Thursday, April 17, 2025 at 7:00 PM; Granite County Courthouse, 220 N. Sansome, Philipsburg, MT 59858.**

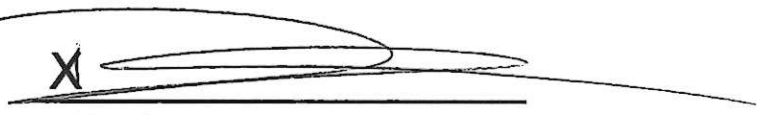
### Adjournment

There being no further business before the study commission, Gary Snyder moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:31p.m. Robin Wight seconded the motion; all yeas, none opposed.

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Gail Leeper  
Study Commissioner, Chair



Robin Wight  
Study Commissioner, Secretary

