

**August 7, 2024**

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on August 7, 2024, in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Teske, Commissioner Hammons, and Lincoln County Administrative Assistant Jennifer Brown.

Meeting allows for Zoom appearances. Present online were Ray Stout, Chanel Geer, Brian Philips, Noel Duram, Melanie Howell, Scott Shindledecker, Noah Pyle, Maranda, Road Department #1, Diane Hansen, Kathleen Sheffield, Evan Comella, Roland Jorgenson, Michelle Byrd, Kerri Teisberg, Aleana Woody, TVN Staff, Linda, Taylor and Guest.

Commissioner Teske opened up with the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

In the absence of Commissioner Letcher, Commissioner Hammons motions to appoint Commissioner Teske as chair for today's meeting, seconded by Commissioner Teske. There are no additional comments, and the motion is carried.

**9:45 AM Nordic Way Final Plat:** Personally present were Planning Director Jesse Haag, Brett McCully, Veronica Bovee-Anderson, and Ben Scott.

Planning Director, Jesse Haag, explains developers intend to create 10 lots for this 70-acre parcel located 1.5 miles south of Libby with the possible future division of lots 9 and 10. An acre of land will be dedicated to parkland for parking and trail access to area recreation. Original preliminary plat approval was granted October 13<sup>th</sup> of 2021 along with 14 conditions of approval. Thinning work has been done but there are still outstanding piles to burn. The recommendation is to bond out the work. An SIA has been drafted and a \$1,500 bond check has been provided. The developer has submitted a check in the amount of \$1,266 for cash in lieu which will be reimbursed upon parkland dedication trail completion.

Commissioner Hammons motions to approve the Nordic Way final plat with the bond agreement, seconded by Commissioner Teske. There are no additional comments, and the motion is carried.

**10:00 AM USFS:** Personally present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Sam Martin.

Three Rivers District Ranger, Sam Martin, reviews upcoming projects and current status of existing projects. Currently with Trojan Defense, the preliminary road layout is being worked on. A road use permit will be given from an adjacent landowner for the term of 10 years. A minor road relocation will increase costs but is the best option.

There are 2 upcoming projects, Ruby Snacks and King Kong Fuels CE. Ruby Snacks is a project of treatment and thinning in old plantations from the 60s and 70s. The goal is to improve the forest with a more fire and insect resilient species. The King Kong Fuels CE is a project on the north side of the Kootenai Falls. The purpose is primarily to improve wildlife habitat but also reduce fuels. There will be a lot of prescribed burning.

The FS had been on a strict hiring freeze but now has authority to hire again with the determination to be made by the regional office.

The Black Ram appeal is making its way through the courts. A hearing date on the Knotty Pine project has not been determined yet. It is anticipated that briefs will be filed later this fall.

It has been a quiet fire season so far but there was a smoke report this morning west of Sylvanite. Verification is still pending.

**10:30 AM Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes. Request from VFW to Increase Burial Contribution:** Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Melanie Howell, Sierra Gustin, and Lorrene Henson.

- Minutes of July 31, 2024, regular meeting for approval: Motion to approve the July 31, 2024, minutes by Commissioner Hammons, seconded by Commissioner Teske, with no further discussion or comment the motion is carried.
- With increasing burial costs, the VFW has requested a \$25.00 increase of burial contribution from county. Motion to increase the burial contribution to \$100 to VFW Post 1548 by Commissioner Hammons, seconded by Commissioner Teske. There are no additional comments, and the motion carried.

**10:45 AM Public Comment Time:** Present were Melanie Howell, Sierra Gustin, Dustina Deans, Doug Davies, Lorrene Henson, and Veronica Bovee-Anderson. No public comment was made.

**11:00 AM Decision to Separate Elections from Clerk and Records Office:** Present were Melanie Howell, Sierra Gustin, Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Doug Davies, Deb Burrell, Vanessa Williamson, Lorrene Henson, Jeffrey Zwang, Robin Benson, and Dallas Bowe.

Deputy County Attorney, Jeffrey Zwang advises the board there isn't much legal authority on the matter. He says statute allows for a separate election administrator which is how Lincoln County is currently operating. He asks the board to take into account several practical considerations such as would this be creating a new department, who would oversee the election administrator, would the clerk and recorder need to hire additional employees to replace the election staff, human resources and budgeting would need to be looked at, and would clerk and recorder employees continue to help in

elections during an election. Mr. Zwang recommends that if the commissioners are going to be the EA supervisor, they all need to be trained and certified in elections but also questions a politically driven elected official overseeing elections.

Commissioner Hammons makes a motion to separate elections from the clerk and recorder, seconded by Commissioner Teske and opens the matter for further discussion.

Commissioner Hammons states he has had all the same concerns that Mr. Zwang has brought up and is not willing to oversee an elections department because of the stated concerns.

Commissioner Teske agrees with Commissioner Hammons and adds that the job description for the EA falls under the supervision of the clerk and recorder. Commissioner Teske states he does not have the time to become an election professional. He also states he briefly spoke with Commissioner Letcher about the matter and knows he also opposes separating the departments.

Doug Davies states he believes there is a lack of communication on a congenial level. He believes the clerk and recorder and the EA should create a written checklist and timeline to run an election. He also believes election work should remain in the annex year-round.

Robin Benson states it is a myth that there is nothing to do during the off season. She believes the clerk and recorder and the elections staff need to closely communicate and be cohesive for the voters of Lincoln County.

Election Administrator, Melanie Howell, asks the commissioners to communicate with other commissioners whose counties have separated the two departments to see how they transitioned and interact with the election department.

Deb Burrell states she believes election staff should remain in the annex to avoid hauling records back and forth to the main courthouse. Robin Benson agrees.

During a vote to separate elections from the clerk and recorder, Commissioner Teske and Commissioner Hammons are opposed.

**11:15 AM Crisis Team Medicaid Billing Discussion:** Present were Vanessa Williamson, Deb Burrell, Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Dallas Bowe.

Vanessa Williamson states the county may now bill Medicaid for crisis services instead of solely using grant funds. Lincoln County is the first county to try this process out and has become a Medicaid provider for the county. Billing would be done through a clearinghouse for a 6% fee. There would be no contract but a month-to-month agreement. Commissioner Teske requests Vanessa check with Wendy and the procurement policy to see if the county is allowed to enter into an agreement without a contract.

Commissioner Hammons makes a motion to allow the crisis team to bill Medicaid, seconded by Commissioner Teske. Motion carried.

**11:30 AM Adjourned**

## **LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Brent Teske, Chairman

**ATTEST:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Jennifer Brown, Administrative Assistant