

**February 18, 2026**

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on February 18, 2026, in the Lincoln County Annex, Eureka, Montana. Present were Commissioner Teske and Commissioner Hammons.

Zoom participation: Commissioner Duram, Administrative Assistant Nikki Fox, Clerk and Recorder Corrina Brown, Amanda Eckart, Brian Berreman, Dallas Bowe, Darren Short, Dave Kemmerer, Feleisha Storkson, Jesse Haag, Linda Ralph, Melanie Howell, Ray Stout, Roland Jorgenson, Sierra Gustin, TJ Boswell, Travis Sigea and Tony Wickham.

**10:15 AM Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes. PILT Claims. Commissioners' Report:** Present was Traci Street.

- Approval of meeting minutes. Resolution 2026-07 authorizing the special purpose district election. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve February 9, 2026, commission meeting minutes. Second by Commissioner Duram. No public comment. Motion carried.
- Approval of regular session commission meeting minutes. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve the regular commissioner meeting minutes for February 11, 2026. Second by Commissioner Duram. No public comment. Motion carried.
- Approval of special meeting minutes with legal counsel regarding Torgison vs Lincoln County. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve February 12, 2026, meeting minutes. Second by Commissioner Duram. No public comment. Motion carried.
- PILT claims; Commissioner Duram requested Administrative Assistant Nikki Fox verify the approval and status of the Noble Construction fairgrounds project claim.
- Commissioners' Report:
  - Commissioner Duram advised he's attending the MACo midwinter Conference, where forest counties and related projects were discussed, noting strong representation from senators and representatives.

**10:30 AM Public Comment Time Non-Agenda Items:** Present were Mike Cole and Traci Street.

Mike Cole, on behalf of the Tobacco Valley Rodeo Association, presented a check to the Commission and invited them to tour the fairgrounds and view recent and ongoing improvements, including an additional skybox under construction, a new loading chute and a completed vendor hill area. He noted significant investment in the facility, upcoming maintenance and lighting upgrades, expressed appreciation to the Commission and reported that the association was named Rodeo of the Year. He emphasized continued efforts to enhance the venue and spectator experience. (Note: Check #6437, \$16,250)

Tony Wickham expressed his support for Melanie's request for an additional staff member to support elections due to increased state mandates and requirements for election integrity and efficiency. He acknowledged budget constraints but emphasized the importance of adequately resourcing this core function, suggesting the County consider either hiring or repurposing existing staff to meet the need.

Linda Ralph supported Tony's comments, stating that the Elections Office is grossly understaffed, which has created ongoing challenges and prevented staff from attending training in Helena which is required by law.

**10:45 AM Ballot Box Discussion:** Present was Traci Street.

Commissioner Teske re-introduced last week's discussion regarding Election Administrator Melanie Howell's request to eliminate ballot drop boxes at both the Troy Police Department and Libby Sheriff's Office lobbies while retaining the Eureka dispatch location, citing statutory interpretation and associated staffing costs estimated at \$18,680. He noted this statute was brought to the county attorney 06-24-2025 and she'd advised the EA that having looked at the statutes, the places of deposit need to be manned on Election Day only. He noted this reduces her anticipated expenses. Commissioners discussed the possibility of closing those drop boxes on Election Day and directing voters to nearby polling locations, as well as considerations of after-hours convenience, security, cost savings and consistency among communities. He advised they could move forward with a resolution or resolve the issue and took comments.

Melanie stated... "I had also sent that same email to the State, and the State did not interpret it that same way. They advised that if we were going to do it, we should probably be doing it properly and then re-represent that to the legislation to have it corrected as Commissioner Teske just mentioned a few moments ago. So that is up to the Election Administrator, but I didn't want to move forward doing anything without working together with the three of you to come to a common solution here to better suit the needs of the voters..."

She emphasized that ballot cost is a factor, yet the biggest constraint is staffing availability. She noted challenges securing election judges, describing concerns raised by a Eureka judge about long hours, limited facility access and inadequate accommodation. She confirmed having judges at the drop box in Eureka on election day. Adding this is where she got the count of 106 ballots for Troy and that she received similar information from a gentleman that worked at the courthouse sheriff's lobby. Discussion of the after-hours voter convenience of the Libby Sheriff lobby drop box vs office hours only availability at the Election office with established 24/7 monitoring by dispatch. Melanie noted legislation changes every cycle and highlighted available voting options, including in-person voting at polling locations, mailing ballots and the Election Office-where Saturday hours are newly required for certain elections.

Tony Wickham commented that removing certain ballot drop boxes could streamline costs while maintaining ballot security and voting options. He noted that voters have alternatives, including mail-in ballots and early in-person voting, and supported removal citing concerns about potential ballot tampering or fraud.

Linda Ralph, election judge, noted challenges associated with remote ballot drop boxes, including manning those sites and the need for the police department to deliver ballots on Election Day. She stated that eliminating underused boxes, particularly the Troy location, would streamline operations, reduce costs and have minimal impact on voters.

Mayor Boswell, City of Troy, expressed that he does not support removing the Troy ballot drop box, citing constituent calls, convenience for residents and 24/7 access. He noted the location is secure, with no prior issues as per Sheriff Short, and that 106 ballots were dropped there in the last election. He supported closing the box on Election Day and transferring ballot drop services to the nearby polling location at the Troy Activity Center, offering Troy PD assistance to the Sheriff's Department as needed with transport. He supported following the County Attorney's statutory interpretation and awaiting legislative guidance before making further changes.

Brian Berreman stated he supported keeping the Troy ballot drop box, citing concerns about mail service reliability and the need to accommodate elderly residents who may prefer to physically drop off their ballots locally.

Commissioner Duram confirmed he **moved** to close the Troy and Eureka ballot drop boxes on Election Day while keeping them open at other times and to close the Libby Sheriff lobby drop box, redirecting ballots to the Elections Office. Commissioner Hammons seconded. No vote was taken. Commissioner Teske advised they will draft a resolution recognizing the location and time changes. Melanie requested delaying action for a week due to state certification obligations. The Commission agreed to draft a resolution reflecting the changes for consideration at the March 4th commissioner meeting. No further public comment was received.

11:05 AM **Adjourned**

**LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Brent Teske, Chairman

**ATTEST:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Corrina Brown, Clerk of the Board