

# Lincoln County Study Commission

## Final Report

2026

Adopted: June 17, 2026

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## Introduction

To the Citizens of Lincoln County:

The Lincoln County Study Commission, elected by the voters of Lincoln County, respectfully submits this final report for your review and consideration.

The purpose of the study commission, as defined in Montana law, is to study the existing form, powers, and structure of county government, and subsequently compare it with other forms of county government authorized by state law. Upon completion of this review, the study commission is charged with recommending whether Lincoln County should retain its current form of government, amend it, or adopt an alternative form of government for voter consideration.

Over the course of this review, the study commission sought broad and inclusive public participation through interviews with department heads, county employees, elected officials, consultation with key community informants, a county-wide community survey, public hearings, and community engagement events.

All meetings of the study commission were open to the public, and public comment was actively encouraged at every stage of the process.

The study commission's recommendation reflects the themes and concerns consistently raised throughout this study process, including the need for greater accountability and transparency, improved efficiency and coordination, enhanced access and responsiveness to the public, and stronger financial management.

After careful consideration of all information gathered, the Lincoln County Study Commission recommends that Lincoln County adopt the Commission Form of Government to be presented to the voters at the November 2026 General Election.

Respectfully submitted,



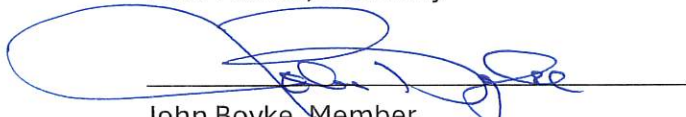
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Jennifer McCully, Chair



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Mike France, Secretary



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John Boyke, Member



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Greg Bruns, Vice Chair



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Ernie Anderson, Member

## Report Summary

The Lincoln County Government Study Commission (study commission), having thoroughly studied our present form of county government and the alternative forms of government available to counties under state law, recommends the following:

1. Lincoln County should adopt, effective January 2, 2027, the Commission Form of Government. The Commission Form of Government consists of an elected commission and other elected officers. This form of government will retain three county commissioners serving six-year overlapping terms of office. The current form, Elected County Officials Form (ECOF), and Commission Form of Government are structurally identical. The latter, however, carves an easier path forward should a majority of Lincoln County voters wish to make changes to government form and plan in the future.
2. The questions on the form of government shall be submitted to the voters of Lincoln County on November 3, 2026.

### a. Findings of the Study

After an extensive and deliberate study, the study commission concludes that Lincoln County's current governmental structure generally functions effectively and provides the essential services expected by county residents. Interviews, public comments, and survey responses indicate broad support for maintaining local accountability through elected officials while also ensuring that county government remains responsive to changing community needs over time. Input from interviews, public comments, and survey responses revealed several recurring themes:

- A desire for clear lines of accountability and responsibility in county decision-making;
- Concerns about inefficiencies in county operations and desire for efficient and coordinated county operations;
- Support for professional administration and effective management practices;
- The need for improved public access, responsiveness, and communication of elected County Commissioners;
- Concerns about long-term financial planning, budgeting, and fiscal oversight.

Across engagement methods, residents expressed a shared vision for a county government that is open, impartial, financially responsible, professionally managed, regionally fair and actively engaged with the public.

Additionally, throughout the study process, residents, elected officials, employees, and community stakeholders identified the importance of competent and professional management in maintaining efficient and responsive county government. The study commission finds that preserving professional administrative capacity is critical to ensuring effective service delivery and responsible stewardship of public resources.

Survey and interview findings are summarized in Appendix A and B and demonstrate broad support for maintaining local control while preserving flexibility for future governmental review and modernization. Additional records are available on file at the Clerk and Recorder's Office.

## **b. Key Provisions of the Proposed Form**

The proposed Commission Form of Government for Lincoln County includes the following key elements:

### **Commission Form of Government**

The proposed Commission Form of Government consists of an elected commission and other elected officers as authorized under Montana law. In practice, the Commission Form will retain the same basic governmental structure currently operating in Lincoln County, including elected commissioners and elected county officials.

### **Future Local Government Review Flexibility**

The primary benefit of adopting the Commission Form is that it removes Lincoln County from the statutory constraints associated with the Elected County Officials Form and provides greater flexibility for future local government review processes. Future study commissions and county voters would have broader authority to evaluate, consider, and propose modifications to the county's form and plan of government should circumstances warrant.

### **Professional Administration**

The study commission strongly supports the continued maintenance of qualified, professional county administration as a best practice for effective county government. Professional administration provides continuity, operational coordination, fiscal oversight, strategic planning, and consistent implementation of county policy.

### **Public Accountability and Transparency**

The proposed form maintains democratic accountability through elected officials while preserving opportunities for future structural improvements. It supports transparency,

responsiveness, and long-term adaptability without requiring significant changes to current county operations.

## Comparison of Existing and Proposed Forms of Government

The Commission Form of Government consists of an elected commission and other elected officers as provided in 7-3-432 through 7-3-442, MCA.

Under the existing ECOF form, Lincoln County government consists of a board of county commissioners and multiple independently elected officials, each with statutory authority over their respective offices. The ECOF Form of Government is the statutory basis (7-3-111, MCA) for the Commission Form of Government. This means that all sub options are predetermined in the ECOF form and cannot be changed. ECOF requires that County Commissioners be elected by qualified electors voting at large for candidates who reside in each district, which are apportioned by population (7-3-412, MCA), terms of commission members are overlapping (7-3-416, MCA) and that elections are conducted on a partisan basis (7-3-413, MCA).

For Lincoln County, adoption of the Commission Form would not result in significant operational or structural changes to the current organization of county government. The County would continue to be governed by elected commissioners and elected county officials, and existing administrative practices could continue unchanged.

The Commission Form of Government consists of an elected commission and other elected officers as provided in 7-3-432, MCA through 7-3-442. All legislative, executive and administrative powers and duties of the local government not specifically reserved by law or ordinance to other elected officers shall reside in the commission. The commission shall appoint the heads of departments and other employees, except for those appointed by other elected officials. Local governments that adopt this form shall retain general governing powers.

The primary advantage of adopting the Commission Form is that it provides greater flexibility for future local government review. Unlike the ECOF, which is governed by statutory requirements that predetermine many structural elements, the Commission Form allows future study commissions and county voters greater opportunity to evaluate and modify the county's governmental structure if future needs or circumstances warrant such consideration.

The study commission further emphasizes the importance of maintaining qualified, professional county administration. Professional administration promotes effective coordination among departments, strengthens fiscal oversight, supports long-range planning, and enhances the county's ability to implement policies adopted by elected officials.

While the adoption of the Commission Form of Government does not require changes to current administrative practices, the Commission believes that maintaining professional administrative leadership remains an important best practice for ensuring efficient, transparent, and responsive county government.

**Comparison of Key Characteristics**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Existing ECOF Form</b>	<b>Proposed Commission Form</b>
Overall Structure	Elected commissioners and elected county officials	Elected commissioners and elected county officials
Day-to-Day Operations	Professional administration currently in place	Professional administration may continue
Elections	Partisan	Partisan or non partisan
Commission Structure	Three commissioners elected by district and at-large voting	Same unless modified through future review
Flexibility for Future Change	Restricted by statutory requirements	Greater flexibility through future local government review

**Recommendations and Reasons**

The Lincoln County Local Government Review Study Commission recommends that Lincoln County adopt a Commission Form of Government with a strong recommendation for maintaining a qualified, professional county administrator.

The Commission finds that this recommendation:

- Preserves the current governmental structure and continuity of operations;
- Maintains accountability through elected officials;

- Supports continued professional administration and effective management practices;
- Provides greater flexibility for future local government review and voter consideration;
- Allows future study commissions to evaluate and propose modifications if community needs change; and
- Positions Lincoln County to adapt its governmental structure over time while avoiding unnecessary disruption today.

The study commission further emphasizes the importance of maintaining qualified, professional county administration. Professional administration promotes effective coordination among departments, strengthens fiscal oversight, supports long-range planning, and enhances the county's ability to implement policies adopted by elected officials.

While the adoption of the Commission Form of Government does not require changes to current administrative practices, the Commission believes that maintaining professional administrative leadership remains an important best practice for ensuring efficient, transparent, and responsive county government.

The proposed change should be submitted to the voters of Lincoln County at the November 2026 General Election.

## Exhibit A: Certificate Establishing the Existing Plan of the Government of Lincoln County

If retained by the voters, the government of Lincoln County shall be organized under the following provisions of 7-3-111, MCA which authorize the Elected County Official form of government:

**7-3-111. Statutory basis for elected county official government.** (1) For the purpose of determining the statutory basis of existing units of local government after May 2, 1977, each unit of local government organized under the general statutes authorizing the elected county official form of government shall be governed by the following sections:

- (a) 7-3-401;
- (b) 7-3-402;
- (c) 7-3-412(3);
- (d) 7-3-413(1);
- (e) 7-3-414(1);
- (f) 7-3-415(2);
- (g) 7-3-416(2);
- (h) 7-3-417(2);
- (i) 7-3-418;
- (j) 7-3-432(1);
- (k) 7-3-433(1);
- (l) 7-3-434(1);
- (m) 7-3-435(1);
- (n) 7-3-436(1);
- (o) 7-3-437(1);
- (p) 7-3-438(1);
- (q) 7-3-439(1);
- (r) 7-3-440(1);
- (s) 7-3-441(1);
- (t) 7-3-442(1) if the county has elected an auditor;
- (u) 7-3-442(6) if the county has not elected an auditor;

(2) This form has terms of 4 years for all elected officials except commissioners who are elected to 6-year terms. The commission consists of three members.

These sections establish the following form of government which shall be called the COMMISSION FORM.

**7-3-401. Commission form.** The commission form consists of an elected commission (which may also be called the council) and other elected officers as provided in this part. All legislative, executive, and administrative powers and duties of the local government not specifically reserved by law or ordinance to other elected officers shall reside in the commission. The commission shall appoint the heads of departments and other employees, except for those appointed by other elected officials. Cities and towns which adopt this form may distribute by ordinance the executive and administrative powers and duties into departments headed by individual commissioners.

**7-3-402. Nature of government.** Local governments that adopt this form shall have general government powers.

**7-3-412 Selection of commission members.** (3) The commission shall be elected at large and nominated by a plan of nomination that may not preclude the possibility of the majority of the electors nominated candidates for the majority of the seats on the commission from persons residing in the district or districts where the majority of the electors reside.

**7-3-413 Type of election.** (1) Local government elections shall be conducted on a partisan basis.

**7-3-414 Chairman of commission.** (1) The chairman of the commission shall be elected by the members of the commission from their own number for a term established by ordinance.

**7-3-415 Administrative assistants.** (2) The commission may appoint one or more administrative assistants to assist them in the supervision and operation of the local government.

**7-3-416 Terms of the commission members.** (2) Commission members shall be elected for overlapping terms of office.

**7-3-417 Size of commission and community councils.** (2) The size of the commission, shall be three, and community councils to advise commissioners may be authorized by ordinance.

**7-3-418. Terms of elected officials.** The term of office of elected officials may not exceed 4 years, except the term of office for commissioners in counties adopting the form authorized by Article XI, section 3(2), of the Montana constitution may not exceed 6 years. Terms of office shall be established when the form is adopted by the voters.

**7-3-432 Legal officer.** (1) A legal officer (who may be called the county attorney) shall be elected.

**7-3-433 Law enforcement officer.** (1) A law enforcement officer (who may be called the sheriff) shall be elected.

**7-3-434 Clerk and recorder.** (1) A clerk and recorder shall be elected.

**7-3-435 Clerk of district court.** (1) A clerk of district court shall be elected.

**7-3-436 Treasurer.** (1) A treasurer shall be elected.

**7-3-437 Surveyor.** (1) A surveyor shall be elected.

**7-3-438 Superintendent of schools.** (1) A superintendent of schools shall be elected.

**7-3-439 Assessor.** (1) An assessor shall be elected.

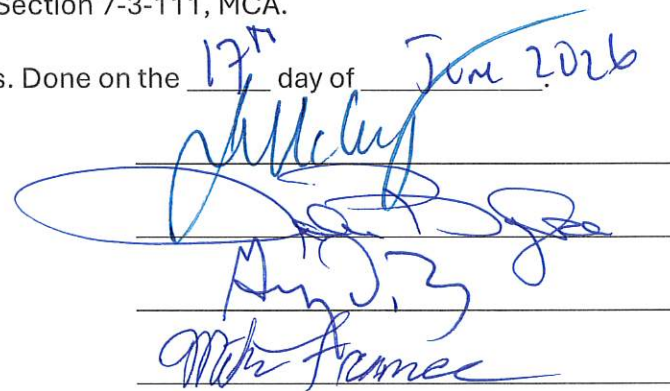
**7-3-440 Coroner.** (1) A coroner shall be elected.

**7-3-441 Public administrator.** (1) A public administrator shall be elected.

**7-3-442 Auditor.** (1) An auditor shall be elected if the county has elected an auditor. (6) An auditor shall not be included in this form as a separate office if the county has not elected an auditor.

We, the Study Commissioners of Lincoln County do hereby certify that this is the existing Plan of Government as established by Section 7-3-111, MCA.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands. Done on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 2026

  
The block contains three horizontal lines, each with a handwritten signature in blue ink. The top signature is the most prominent and appears to be 'Mike Kelley'. The middle signature is less legible but seems to contain the number '13'. The bottom signature is 'Mike Frances'.



SEAL

ATTEST: Corrina Brown  
CLERK & RECORDER OF LINCOLN COUNTY

Eric Anderson

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSIONERS

## Exhibit B: Certificate Establishing the Proposed Plan of Government for Lincoln County

Upon approval of the majority of voters, the government of Lincoln County shall be organized under the following provisions of Section 7-3-111, MCA

**7-3-111. Statutory basis for elected county official government.** (1) For the purpose of determining the statutory basis of existing units of local government after May 2, 1977, each unit of local government organized under the general statutes authorizing the elected county official form of government shall be governed by the following sections:

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specifically reserved by law or ordinance to other elected officers shall reside in the commission. The commission shall appoint the heads of departments and other employees, except for those appointed by other elected officials. Cities and towns which adopt this form may distribute by ordinance the executive and administrative powers and duties into departments headed by individual commissioners.

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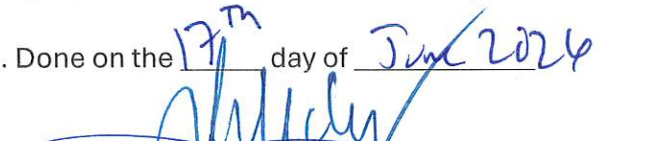




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**7-3-442 Auditor.** (1) An auditor shall be elected if the county has elected an auditor. (6) An auditor shall not be included in this form as a separate office if the county has not elected an auditor.

We, the Study Commissioners of Lincoln County do hereby certify that this is the Proposed Plan of Government approved by the study commissioners of Lincoln County.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands. Done on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 2024

  
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSIONERS



ATTEST: Corrina Brown  
CLERK & RECORDER OF LINCOLN COUNTY

## Exhibit C: Certificate Establishing the Election Date

The alternative form of government proposed by the Local Government Study Commission shall be submitted to the voters of Lincoln County at a special election to be held with the general election on November 3, 2026.

We, the Study Commissioners of Lincoln County do hereby certify that this is the date of the special election approved by the Study Commissioners of Lincoln County.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands. Done on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 2026



[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSIONERS

SEAL

ATTEST: [Signature]  
CLERK & RECORDER OF LINCOLN COUNTY

# Exhibit D: Certificate Establishing the Form on the Ballot

Instructions to voters: Place an "X" in the boxes which expresses your preference.

## OFFICIAL BALLOT

Shall Lincoln County adopt the Commission form of government authorized by Title 7, Chapter 3, Part 4, Montana Code Annotated, in place of its existing form of county government, as recommended by the Lincoln County Government Study Commission? Adoption of the Commission form of government will permit voters to alter Lincoln County's government plan in future elections. Under the current form of county government, alterations to plan cannot be made.

If the measure passes, the change to government form takes effect on January 1, 2027.

Vote for one:

- FOR adoption of Commission Form of government proposed for Lincoln County by the Lincoln County Study Commission.
- FOR retaining the existing Elected County Officials Form of government.

We, the study commission of Lincoln County do hereby certify that this is the official ballot approved by the study commissioner of Lincoln County.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands. Done on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 2026



[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSIONERS

SEAL

ATTEST: Corrina Brown  
CLERK & RECORDER OF LINCOLN COUNTY

# Exhibit E: Certificate Establishing the Election Dates for Officers of New Government If Proposal is Adopted

The effective date of the alternative form of local government of Big Sky County takes effect when the officers take office at 10 am, January 1, 2027.

We, the Study Commissioners of Lincoln County, do hereby certify that these are the dates of the special primary and general elections and the effective date of the alternative form of local government of Lincoln County approved by the Study Commissioners of Lincoln County.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands. Done on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 2026



[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSIONERS

SEAL

ATTEST: Corrinn Brown  
CLERK & RECORDER OF LINCOLN COUNTY

## Appendix A: Summary Survey Findings

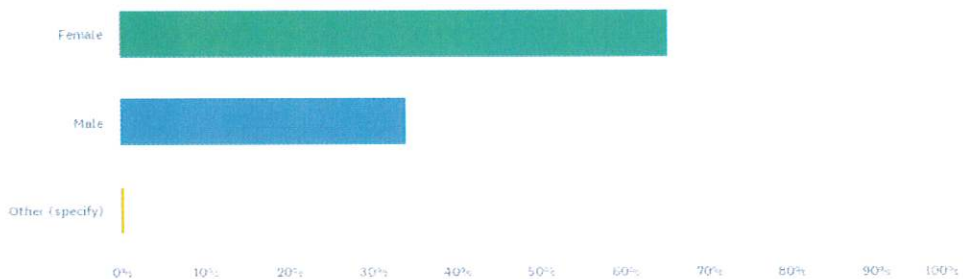
The purpose of this Lincoln County Government Study Commission research was to explore the philosophies and opinions of Lincoln County, Montana, residents as to the form, function, and power of their Lincoln County government. The participants of this study included residents of Lincoln County, Montana (N=18,257) who were 18 years of age or older. The United States Census Bureau (2024) estimated the population of Lincoln County to be approximately 22,184 residents as of July 1, 2024. Of the 22,184 residents of Lincoln County, 17.7% (3,927) were under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Therefore, the population of Lincoln County aged 18 and older is approximately 18,257 residents.

A random sample of Lincoln County residents, aged 18 years or older, were asked to complete the survey. The survey opened on September 2, 2025, and was closed on January 22, 2026. The sample (n=363) includes 363 participants who successfully completed the survey during this timeframe. A participant was disqualified from the research if they did not meet the research requirements and/or did not successfully complete the survey. To achieve a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of  $\pm 5\%$ , the goal of this research, the analysis of 362 successfully completed surveys was required. Therefore, this study's sample of 363 successfully completed surveys meets this goal and effectively reduces the margin of error to  $\pm 4.99\%$  at a 95% confidence level.

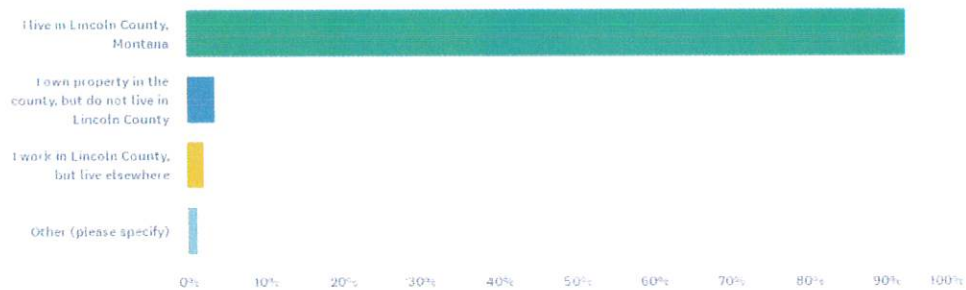
### Descriptive Statistics

The first area of this descriptive statistics section analyzes the sample's demographics. Age, gender, approximate household income, residency, and voting status were captured by the survey. Of the 363 participants, 223 (65.4%) were female, 116 (34%) were male, and 22 participants chose not to answer the question. See Q25 below. The participants' ages were widely distributed from the 18-24 age group to the 75+ age group. A large majority (64%) of the participants were aged 55 or older. See Q24 below. The participants' average household income was also widely distributed, ranging from little or no income to some reporting incomes of over \$200,000 per year. Half (49%) of all participants reported income in the range of \$25,000 and \$74,999. See Q26 below. The vast majority (92.8%) of participants live in Lincoln County, and most (92.9%) are registered voters in the county. See Q17 below and Q19 below. The distribution of successfully completed surveys originated from the following areas within Lincoln County: Libby (49.3%), Troy (19.78%), Eureka (16.2%), Rexford (3.6%), Fortine (3.3%), Trego (2.5%), and Stryker (1.1%).

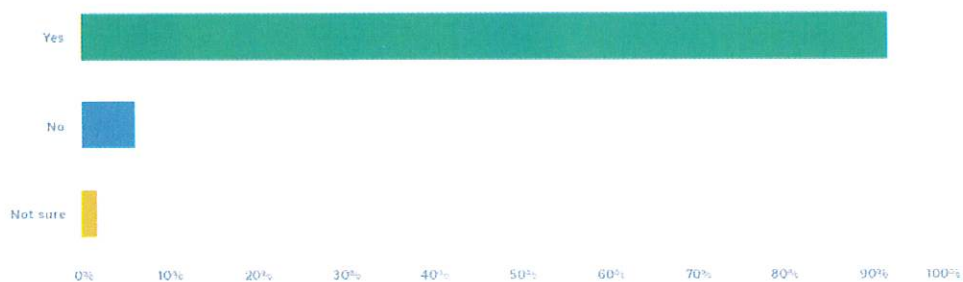
### Q25 What is your gender?



### Q17 Residency

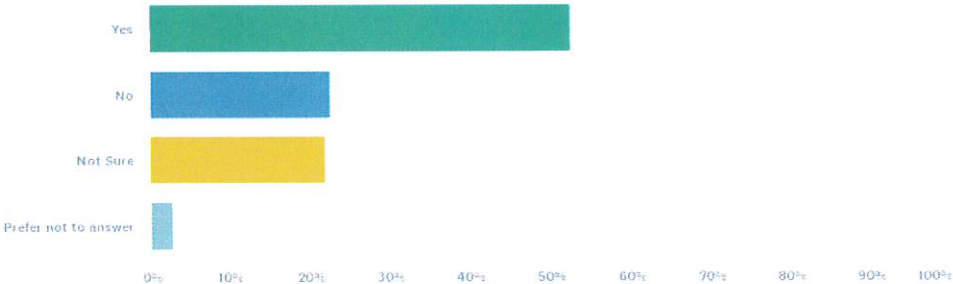


### Q19 Are you a registered voter in Lincoln County?



In the first section of the survey, the study commission examined whether participants favored creating the Commission during the 2024 primary election. A majority (52.6%) of participants favored the creation of the Commission, while 22.6% were averse to it. See Q1 below.

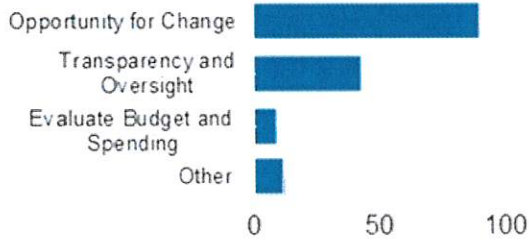
Q1 In the 2024 primary election, did you vote in favor of creating the Lincoln County Government Study Commission?



Respondents who answered positively to Q1, “Did you vote for the Study Commission,” were directed to Q2, “Why did you vote for the Study Commission?” Most responded within the study’s framework, noting that the government form should be evaluated to ensure it keeps pace with changing needs and county demographics. Others touted that the study offered the opportunity for citizen involvement with the government review process, living up to Montana’s Constitutional ideals. More specifically, some pointed to the need for non-partisan elections and better representation, while a few opined that the review was, in essence, “a good idea.”

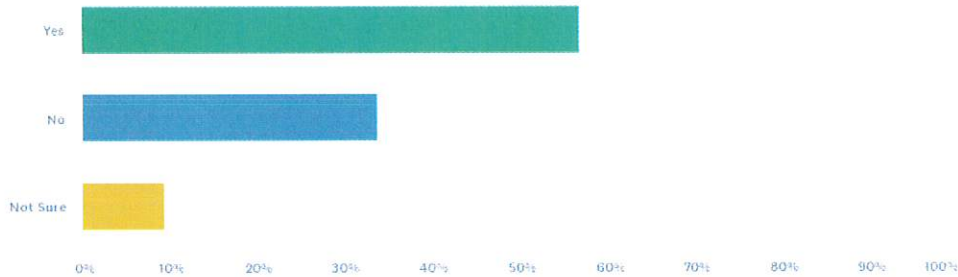
Furthermore, approximately half of the survey respondents stated they voted for the study for reasons outside the Commission’s scope. The most frequent reason given was a lack of government “transparency” and the need for accountability to ensure that government officials comply with applicable laws. Some also indicated that the Commission allowed county citizens to conduct a budget and/or spending audit, in the hopes that light would be shed on any irregularities. See Q2 below (the chart number reflects the number of responses collected for each category).

**Q2: Why did you vote for the Study Commission?**



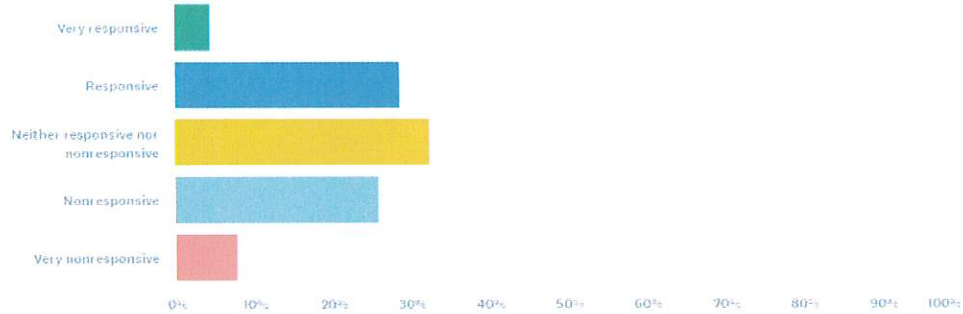
The next section of the survey explored whether participants felt they had access to county leaders or decision-makers, and whether the Lincoln County government was responsive to their individual needs. The majority (57%) of participants agreed they had access to county leaders, while a third (33.7%) said they did not. A small portion (9.4%) of the respondents were unsure. See Q3 below.

**Q3 Do you feel that you have access to county leaders or decision makers?**



When asked about the responsiveness of the county government, the participants' responses were evenly distributed. One third (33.4%) of respondents felt the Lincoln County government was responsive or very responsive, one third (34%) felt the Lincoln County government was nonresponsive or very nonresponsive, and one third felt the county government was neither responsive nor nonresponsive. See Q4 below.

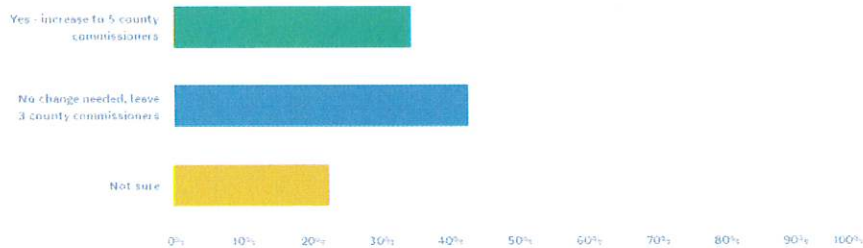
Q4 How responsive do you feel the county government is to public input?



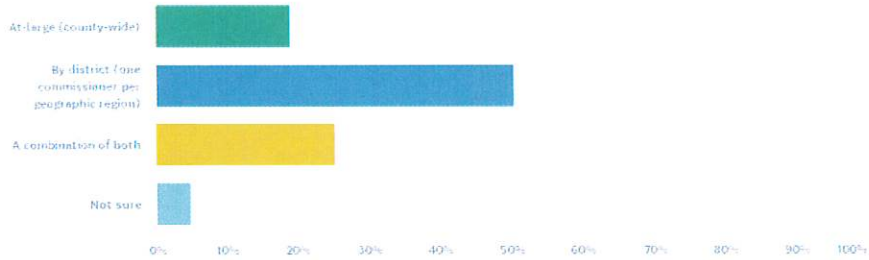
The next section of the survey addressed participants' considerations regarding the county commissioners. When given the option to choose the optimal number of county commissioners, nearly half (42.8%) reported the current number of commissioners (3) was sufficient, while a third (34.5%) of the respondents expounded that the number of county commissioners should be increased to five. A quarter (22.6%) of the respondents were unsure. See Q5 below. A majority (50.6%) of the participants believe that the county commissioners should be elected by district, a minority (19%) preferred election at-large, and one in four recommended a combination of both methods. See Q6 below.

When asked whether the county commissioner elections should be partisan or non-partisan, a majority (57.2%) preferred non-partisan elections, one-third (32%) preferred partisan elections, and a small fraction (10.8%) of participants were unsure.

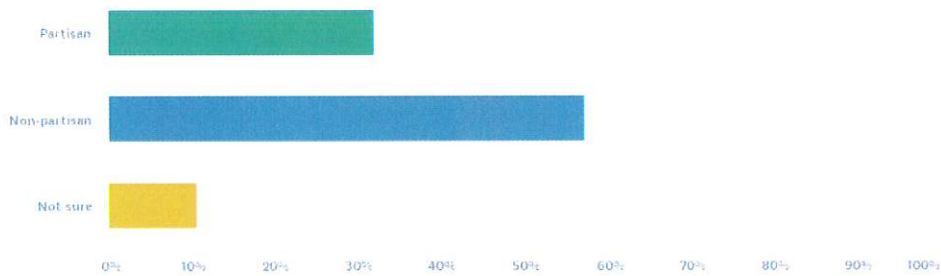
Q5 Should the number of county commissioners be changed? (There are currently 3 county commissioners)



Q6 How should the Lincoln County Commissioners be elected?

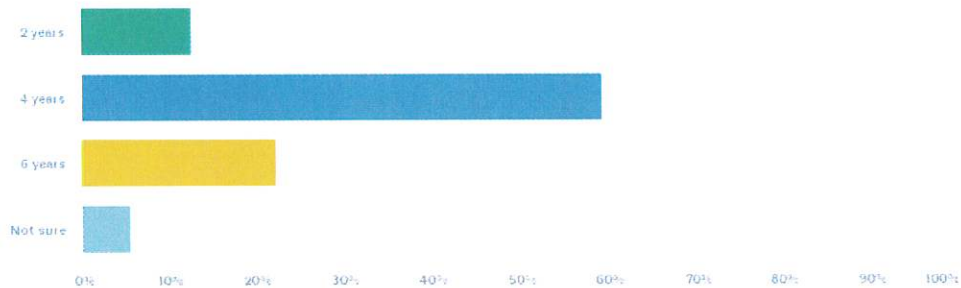


Q7 Lincoln County Commissioner elections should be (elections are currently partisan):

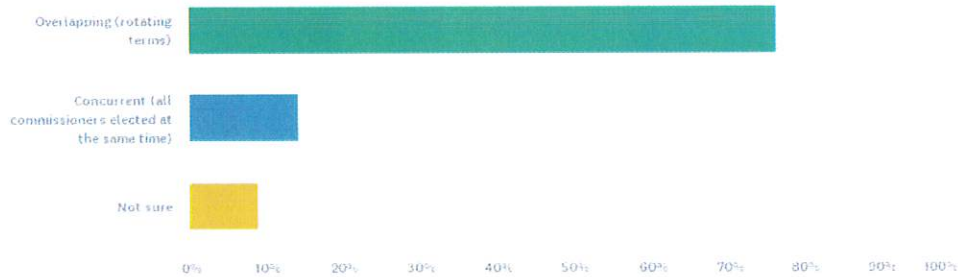


When examining the term length of the county commissioners, an overwhelming majority (72.1%) of participants expressed that the current six-year term was excessive. A clear majority (59.4%) of participants preferred a four-year term, a significant minority (12.7%) preferred a two-year term, and one in four preferred a six year term. See Q8 below. Furthermore, a vast majority (76.5%) of the respondents recommended that the county commission terms remain overlapping. See Q9 below.

Q8 The term of office for Lincoln County Commissioners should be (current term is 6 years):

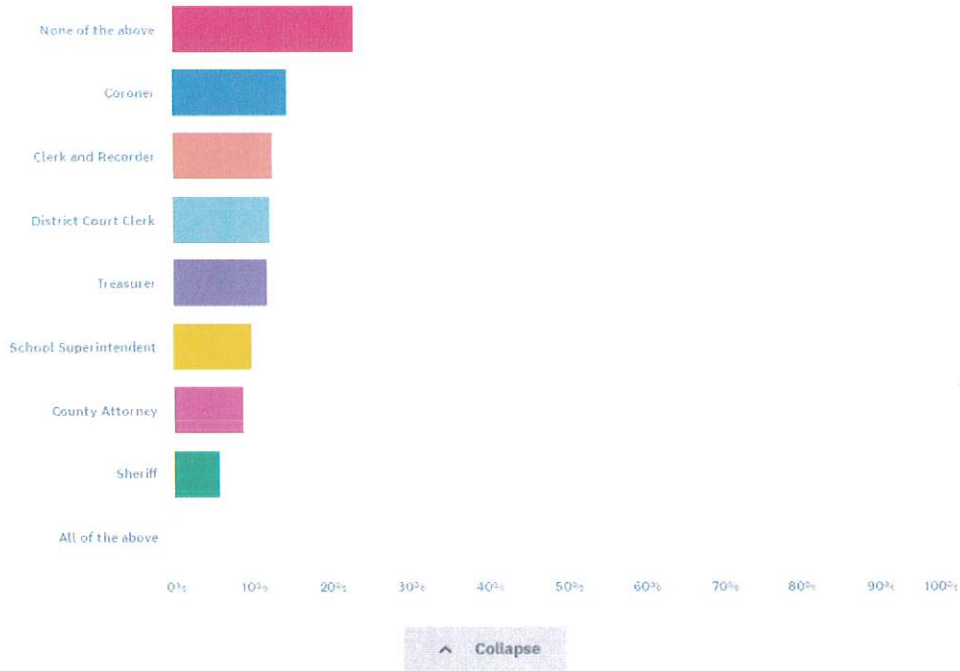


Q9 Lincoln County Commissioner terms should be:



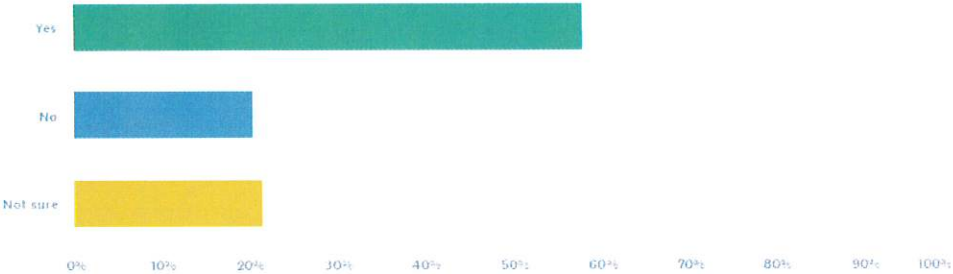
The next section of the survey addressed elected positions other than county commissioner seats. Respondents were asked whether other positions in Lincoln County should be appointed rather than elected. A quarter (23.4%) of the participants answered that none of the positions should be appointed. A moderate portion believed the coroner (14.6%), the clerk and recorder (12.7%), the district court clerk (12.3%), the treasurer (12%), the school superintendent (10.3%), and/or the sheriff (5.9%) should indeed be appointed. See Q10 below.

Q10 The county would benefit if the following positions were appointed rather than elected.  
(Check all that apply)

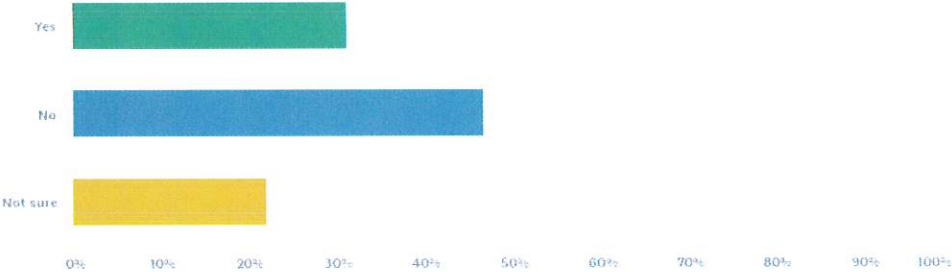


The survey then queried whether Lincoln County would benefit from hiring a professional to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and prepare budget recommendations. A significant proportion (58%) recommended the county add the position in question, a minority (20.4%) were opposed, while others (21.6%) remained unsure. See Q11 below. When asked if Lincoln County would benefit from electing an executive to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and hold veto power over the commissioners, nearly half (46.7%) were opposed, a third (31.2%) were in favor, while others (22.1%) remained unsure. See Q12 below.

Q11 Lincoln County would benefit by hiring a professional to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and prepare budget recommendations.



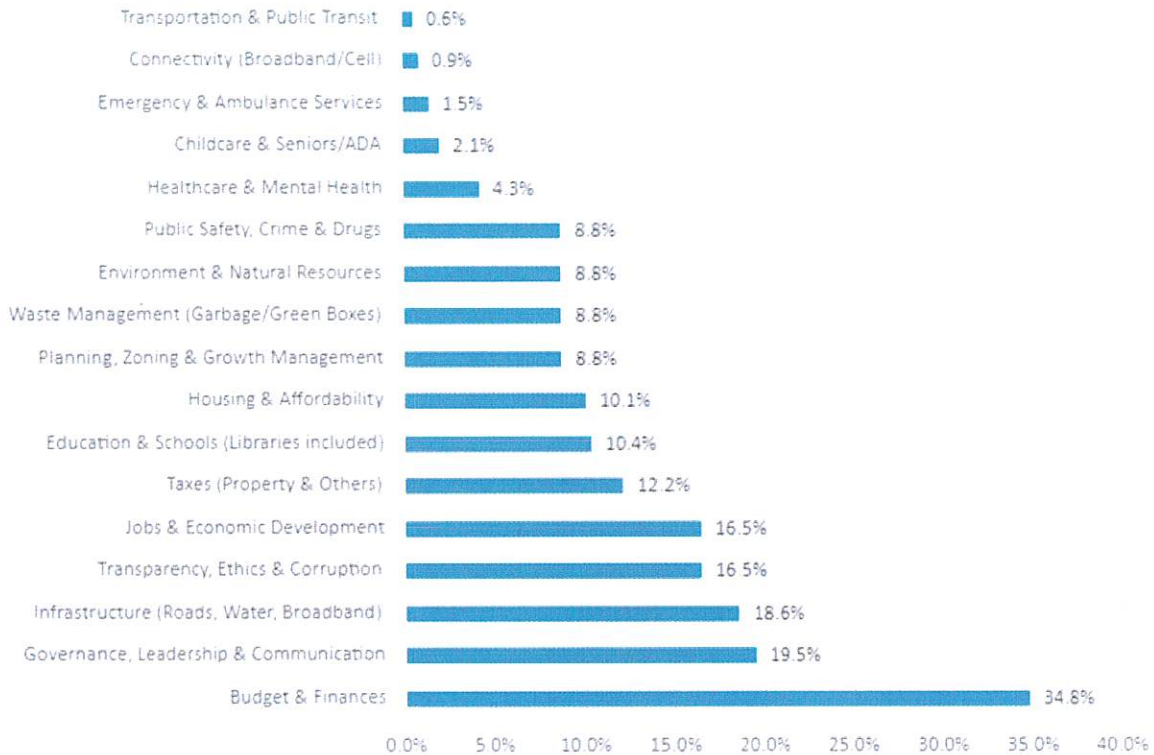
Q12 Lincoln County would benefit from electing an executive to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and hold veto power over the commissioners.



The next section of the survey offered the participants an opportunity to answer several open-ended questions. Numerous responses were received when asked about what they perceived as the most pressing issues the Lincoln County Government faces. See Q13 below for common themes.

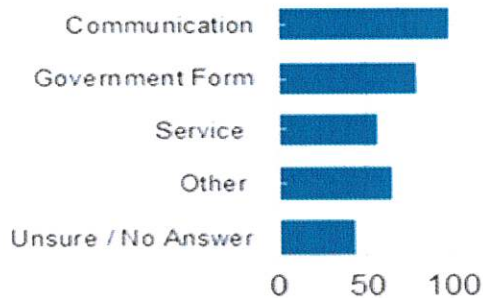
### Q13

What are the most pressing issues the Lincoln County government faces?



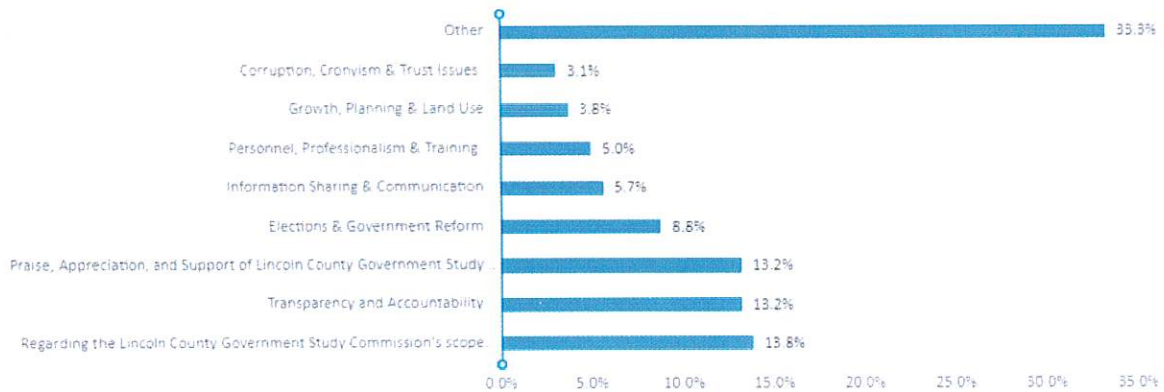
Question 14 asked respondents to identify a single government function that they would like to see changed. Perhaps the broadest category is Communication and Accountability. This category covers, in addition to what is stated, a perceived lack of transparency and, in some cases, the need for more oversight to minimize alleged ethical misconduct by governing officials. Other respondents suggested specific changes to the form and plan would benefit the county as well. The hiring of a County Administrator and the instatement of non-partisan elections for county commissioners were the most common responses. (NOTE: Due to the open-ended nature of the question, answers fell into any number of categories; however, the chart below attempted to compile answers into a more limited number. The chart number reflects the number of responses collected for each category)

**Q14: What is the one thing you would change about the county government?**



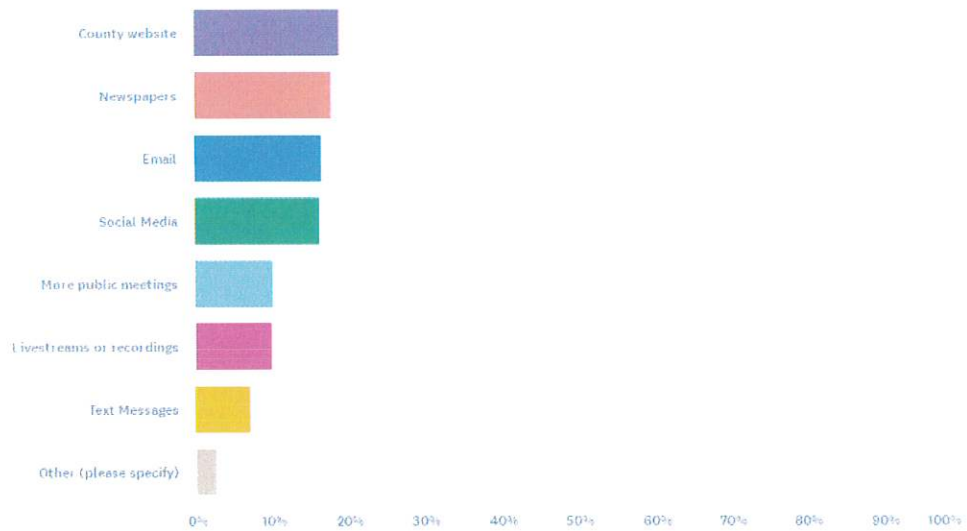
The final open-ended question queries whether the participants had anything else to add to the Lincoln County Government Study Commission’s scope. The themes of the responses are evident in Q15 below.

**Q15 Regarding the Lincoln County Government Study Commission's scope (government form, power, and plan), is there anything else you wish to add?**



And finally, the survey participants were asked to indicate their preferred mode or medium of receiving updates from the Lincoln County government. These modes/mediums included the county website (19%), newspapers (17.9%), email (16.7%), social media (16.3%), more public meetings (10.2%), live streams or recordings (9.8%), text messages (7.2%), and others (2.8%). See Q16 below.

Q16 Given multiple options, how would you prefer to receive Lincoln County updates?  
(Select all that apply)



### Reference

U.S. Census Bureau (2024). QuickFacts Lincoln County Montana.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lincolncountymontana/PST045224>

## Appendix B: Summary of Interviews

### County Personnel Interviews

As part of its effort to guide any needed changes to county government plan, form, and power, the study group conducted 26 interviews with various county officials, to include all three Commissioners. The results of these interviews, which took place from April to July 2025, provided a baseline on the county government’s efficacy prior to gathering public input.

#### Key Takeaways

**Plan:** Most interviewed were in agreement that the general plan of Lincoln County’s government allows it to run effectively. However, some expressed reservations that partisan elections are necessary, particularly for County Clerks and Treasurer offices. Similar sentiments were also made that positions such as these should be appointed rather than elected to help ensure they are staffed by professionals with relevant experiences and/or education. A counter point to this, most often shared by the elected personnel themselves, was that “people should know what they’re getting” in regards to partisan elections and also offered rationale for why the positions are elected. The primary reason given for the latter is that elected offices provide independence from Commissioner oversight, thereby shielding them from potential coercion.

**Form:** Interviewees claimed that the current Elected County Officials Form of government was functioning. A great plurality, however, also voiced support of reinstating the County Administrator position. Personnel offered that the Administrator filled a crucial leadership vacuum by acting as a sounding-board between departments and Commissioners, ensured departments were regularly communicating with one another, and provided a troubleshooting resource to solve a myriad of issues that frequent in similar-sized organizations. Personnel also mentioned that the Administrator maintained a sense of organizational continuity as Commissioners came and went, adding stability to county leadership and managerial functions.

**Power:** The Lincoln County government is limited to general governing powers. The vast majority did not see a need to adopt self-governing powers, adding that current laws and statutes granted by the State Legislature were adequate for the county to accomplish its mission.

### Key Informant Interviews

Four interviews with key informants (i.e. State Capitol delegates and city officials) took place in early 2026. A range of perspectives regarding the county’s current governmental

structure and potential areas for change arose. While views differed on the need for structural change, similar themes emerged.

#### Key Takeaways

**Governance Structure:** Perspectives varied regarding the overall structure of county government. One viewpoint supported moving toward nonpartisan elections and appointing a county administrator to improve coordination and strengthen partnerships with municipalities. Conversely, at least one interviewee expressed satisfaction with the current structure and did not identify a need for significant change. These differing views suggest that while some see opportunities for change, others believe the existing system is functioning effectively.

**Administrative Coordination and Alignment:** Several comments pointed to the importance of organizational alignment and clarity in roles. The suggestion to establish a county administrator reflected interest in improving coordination across departments and enhancing the county's ability to partner with cities.

**Accessibility:** A contrasting but equally strong theme emphasized the strengths of the county's current small-town approach. Interviewees noted the value of face-to-face interaction with frontline staff and the ability for residents to easily identify where to go for assistance. This accessibility was described as a meaningful strength of the current structure. Some suggested that even more direct, in-person engagement could further strengthen public trust and responsiveness.

**Role and Authority of Elected Officials:** Another perspective raised questions about the balance of authority between elected County Commissioners and administrative departments. One interviewee suggested that Commissioners could exercise greater power and oversight over departments.

**Public Engagement:** Across comments, there was interest in improving resident engagement, particularly earlier in decision-making processes. This theme suggests a shared value around transparency and community involvement, regardless of preferred structural model.