

**May 26, 2026**

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for special meetings on May 26, 2026, in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Duram, Commissioner Hammons, Commissioner Teske, County Administrator Matt Williams and Clerk and Recorder Corrina Brown.

Zoom Participation: Alaena Woody, Bree Dahl, Bri Hilyer, Bonnie Schull, cglatz, Crystal Denton, Dallas Bowe, Dan Torgison, Darren Short, Ellen Sullivan, Evan Comella, Jesse Haag, Jessica Jenson, Jodi, Katie Anderson, Laura Finley, Melanie Howell, Richard Hader, Roland Jorgenson, Sierra Gustin, Teri and Travis Sigea.

**09:00 AM Elections Department Personnel Meeting:** Present was Ann German, Brian Berreman, Dale Moahs, Darren Short, Jane Moahs, Jeff Koskela, Karen Edwards, Liam Chandlee, Melanie Howell, Scott Shindledecker, Stuart Crismore, Suzanne Resch, Tony Wickham, Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Wendy Dodson.

Commissioner Teske discussed confusion caused by mailed absentee ballot instructions issued by the Montana Secretary of State. He said the Elections Department sent the guidance as received, including information about signatures and birth years. He focused the discussion on how to handle signed ballots moving forward.

Melanie Howell, Election Administrator, said she confirmed with the Secretary of State's office that Lincoln County should continue following its existing ballot resolution process. She noted having called both SOS office and ten counties and that Lincoln County was the only county reporting issues related to this ballot signing notice. She added that only Flathead County altered the language and the others used the same SOS provided language. She advised that signed ballots occur in every single election and are handled through a long-standing resolution process, which the SOS office has confirmed. She explained this process includes spoiling and reissuing ballots, when possible, prior to the ballot preparation, which involves separating the affidavit envelope from the ballot contained in the secrecy envelope, making it unidentifiable and which she plans to begin May 28<sup>th</sup>. She advised that on May 28 and June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the three-person judge team on the resolution board will cross out the name and then transpose the ballot onto a clean ballot to be tabulated, as long as the intent of the vote is clear, as they have done in literally every single election. She clarified that the original marked ballots are retained as voided ballots in accordance with election retention requirements.

Marcia Boris, County Attorney, reviewed election statutes regarding signed or marked ballots. Discussion centered on Montana Code § 13-15-206 (counting votes and questionable ballots) and § 13-13-245 (resolve the ballot concerns) and § 13-15-201 states ballots containing identifying marks must be immediately rejected without notice to the elector. Melanie stated the Secretary of State's office advised duplicating signed ballots onto clean ballots, if voter intent was clear, was the correct process, though she has received no written guidance. Marcia advised that, absent legally defensible guidance from the Secretary of State, the plain language of the statute requires the rejection of signed ballots, despite her preference to count votes whenever possible.

Candidate Stuart Crismore stated that every effort should be made to avoid disenfranchising even a single voter. He asked if an Attorney General opinion or action could be sought regarding treatment of signed ballots. Marcia said she could explore that option and would also seek guidance from the Secretary of State's legal counsel. Stuart asked whether the number of rejected ballots could be documented and Melanie confirmed that reasons for ballot rejection are tracked. She noted the statistics sheet with rejection reasons are included in the election canvas report. Marcia noted there is also a legal remedy available through district court.

Ann German, voter, requested the full Secretary of State email referenced by Commissioner Teske as received by Melanie, be included in the record. She cited a source who said Melanie told them that the SOS office had emailed several options and she chose to mail the "Sign the Ballot" notice. Ann cited MCA regarding identifying marks on ballots and expressed concern that electors may have been misled by instructions related to signed ballots in that correction can be made through election day. Melanie advised that voters who have signed their ballots have to reach out to Elections.

Tony Wickham, voter, referenced a Western News article on ballot confusion and stated that the instruction sheet included with ballots clearly explained the voting process. He emphasized voter education aimed to prevent ballots from being invalidated by comments or identifying marks and supported continued public outreach on proper voting procedures.

Jane Moss, voter, questioned why the Secretary of State recommended insert was included with ballots, noting the standard ballot instructions were already clear. Melanie stated the insert was included because ballots looked different under new election laws and she relied on guidance from the state's head election official.

Marcia restated that under statute, ballots containing identifying marks are to be rejected without notice to the elector.

**10:15 AM Superintendent of Schools Budget Meeting:** Present were Brian Berreman, Don Clark, Suzy Rios and Tony Wickham.

Suzy Rios presented the Superintendent of Schools budget, noting wages and contributions were not yet finalized. She reported no significant changes to supplies, communications, travel, or rent expenses, clarified utility costs related to cell phone use and noted a slight overall decrease in the proposed budget.

**10:30 AM Sheriff's Office Budget Meeting:** Present were Brian Berreman, Darren Short, Tony Jenson, Tony Wickham and Veronica Bovee-Anderson.

Sheriff Darren Short reviewed the Sheriff's Department budget, noting an overall decrease of more than \$4,000 excluding wages and contributions, which are still pending. Discussion included adjustments to technology, training, transportation, and vehicle insurance costs, with technology expenses primarily budgeted through E911 and transportation increased for possible out-of-state prisoner transports. Commissioners requested a final budget update once wages and benefits are finalized. He also provided updates on the new patrol vehicle grant funding and reported the new body scanner had been installed and was awaiting training before becoming operational.

**10:45 AM Planning Department Budget Meeting:** Present were Brian Berreman, Jesse Haag, Tony Wickham and Veronica Bovee-Anderson.

Jesse Haag presented the FY 2026/27 Planning Department budget, noting most supply, communication, transportation, and travel line items remained unchanged while contractor service lines would be eliminated. His primary request was funding for an additional full-time planner to address increasing workload, coordination with other departments, subdivision reviews, floodplain administration and ongoing multi-year recovery efforts following the December disaster. He discussed increased planning revenues, anticipated grant funding and projected subdivision revenue to help offset costs, noting census data continues to show strong county growth. Commissioner Teske stated they would review the overall county budget and revisit the hiring request.

**11:00 AM Health Department/Landfill Budget Meeting:** Present were Brian Berreman, Kathi Hooper and Tony Wickham.

Kathi Hooper, Health Director, reported no significant changes to environmental health expenses aside from a modest increase offset by revenue and noted increased licensing inspection revenue due to state set fee adjustments. She confirmed receipt of a junk vehicle grant increase of \$10,000, making that program fully grant funded with no county match. She reported increased animal shelter expenses due to hiring a shelter manager, partially offset by increased service revenue and noted multiple public health programs (including Headwaters, behavioral health and prevention programs) remain fully grant funded or supported with in-kind match. Overall public health expenditures decreased slightly due to reporting adjustments and grant reallocation.

Kathi presented two solid waste options: continuing the current contract or transitioning to county-operated hauling. She outlined long-term cost comparisons showing slightly higher costs in early years if the county assumes operations, largely due to equipment leasing, staffing, insurance and startup costs (including replacement of green boxes and damaged infrastructure). She noted revenue from current fee structures would cover either option highlighting potential operational flexibility such as expanded service days in North Lincoln County. Final direction was left pending Commission decision.

**11:18 AM Adjourned**

**LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Brent Teske, Chairman

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