

August 19, 2026

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on August 19, 2026, in the Lincoln County Annex, Eureka, Montana. Present were Commissioner Teske, Commissioner Duram, Commissioner Hammons, County Administrator Matt Williams and Clerk and Recorder Corrina Brown.

Zoom participation: Alaena Woody, Alyssa Ruttenbur, Bree Dahm, Candice Comstock, Charlotte Peterson, Cherie Gunderson, Deb, Diane, Evan Comella, Harrison Dewhurst, Jacob Ohonich, Jeff Koskela, Jessica Jenson, John Stears, Katie Anderson, KS, Michael, Michal Miller, Neil R, Omar AlShafie, Patty Rambo, Ray Stout, Roland Jorgensen, RWCFLC, Scott Shindledecker, Sierra Gustin, Suzanne Resch, Thomas Bianco, Travis Sigea, Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Wendy Drake.

10:00 AM Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes. PILT Claims. Commissioners' Report. County Administrator's Report. USFS Schedule A Road Agreement. USFS Fire Project Modifications for LC Dispatch Assistance: Present were Cristie Silva, Judy DeLeon, Kerry Finley, Linda Hill, Linda Ralph, Mary Nelson, Mike Cuffe, Natalie Smith, Rosalie Warboys, Shawn Beers, Stuart Crismore, Tom Maxwell, Tony Wickham and Traci Street.

- Approval of regular meeting minutes: **Motion** by Commissioner Duram to accept the meeting minutes from August 12, 2026. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No public comment. Motion carried.
- PILT claims: None.
- Commissioners Report:
 - Commissioner Duram invited the public to attend the Lincoln County Fair, Thursday through Sunday, and congratulated those participating in 4-H at the fair.
 - Commissioner Teske reported that LCPA reopened bidding for a 2023 Tahoe after receiving bids below its value. Discussion continued regarding conveying Port land to the county for ARP storage and recreation. Chairman Jerry Bennett resigned after nine years of service.
- County Administrator's Report: Matt reported on election preparations, finalizing ballots and completion of district budget letters, encouraging districts to return their budgets promptly.
- The Commission discussed the 2026 USFS Schedule A Road Agreement, which allows the County to perform and receive reimbursement for maintenance and road work on Forrest Service roads. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve the 2026 schedule A Kootenai National Forrest road agreement with Lincoln County. Second by Commissioner Duram. Discussion of the West Fisher - Lake Creek Bridge, which will be repaired by the Forrest Service and transferred to the County afterward. No additional public comment. Motion carried.
- USFS Fire Projection Modifications for LC Dispatch Assistance: **Motion** by Commissioner Duram to approve both modifications. Second by Commissioner Hammons. Discussion of two USFS contract modifications for Lincoln County dispatch assistance, increasing reimbursement to \$1,200. Motion carried.

10:15 AM Public Comment Time Non-Agenda Items: Present were Cristie Silva, David Castro, Judy DeLeon, Kerry Finley, Linda Hill, Linda Ralph, Mary Nelson, Mike Cuffe, Natalie Smith, Rosalie Warboys, Shawn Beers, Stuart Crismore, Tom Maxwell, Tony Wickham and Traci Street.

Kerry Finley requested that Resolution 2026-19 be amended to require the County Election Administrator, Acting Election Administrator and Deputy Election Administrator to be registered voters in the county they serve. Commissioner Teske noted this request will be reviewed for compliance with state law.

Shawn Beers questioned the legal authority for Lincoln County to cancel the November election for county offices and declare candidates elected by acclamation, citing differences between Lincoln County's proposal and actions taken by Cascade County and the City of Great Falls.

John Stears requested that the biowaste feasibility study be placed on the agenda and that related materials be provided to the public before meetings. He also expressed concerns regarding the study process, state approval timelines and potential air-quality impacts.

Jacob Ohonich questioned whether the County would conduct an independent investigation regarding the shooting complex and requested a status update from the Forrest Service. Commissioner Teske reported that the Forrest Service is preparing a response, and that the County will determine next steps after receiving additional information.

10:30 AM Public Hearing – Intent to Create the West Kootenai Rural Fire District: Present were Alicia Merriman, Amanda DeLeon, Carol Johnson, Chad Merriman, Cristie Silva, David Castro, Delbert Miller, Dennis Yoder, Destini Parker, Forrest Spence, Jean Sanders, Joel Young, John R. Jett, Josh Letcher, Judy DeLeon, Judy Hall, Justin Burich, Kerry Finley, Linda Hill, Linda Ralph, Marietta Miller, Mary Duram, Mary Nelson, Mike Cuffe, Natalie Smith, Rosalie Warboys, Shawn Beers, Stuart Crismore, Thomas Lane, Tom Maxwell, Tony Wickham and Traci Street.

Commissioner Duram read the public hearing notice for the proposed creation of the West Kootenai Rural Fire District. Commissioner Teske referenced Intent Resolution 2026-18 and called for public comment.

I'm Stuart Crismore, I'm chairman of the board of trustees for Fisher River Valley Fire Service Area. We're just here with moral support for the West Kootenai. We'd like to see them achieve their goals. So, we just want to throw our name in as saying we support their endeavor.

Forrest Spence, I would just like to say first of all thanks to the fire department for serving our community and the board for the time that they volunteer for us in the community. It is time consuming. I am familiar with it. I was on the board at one time. So, it is a lot of work. But in my opinion, I don't believe that we're at that point yet of becoming a fire district. The call volume is just not where it should be. Back in which I have here, I'll pass this around. Back in 2022 and 23 our fundraising numbers were in the 50, a little above \$50,000 range. So, we were doing well. What happened after that after I left, you know, I'm not real sure. I don't see it being a, you know, our taxes are, property taxes are going to go up. Property taxes are already going up. They came back down actually. I think mine came down a little bit, but property values are going to continue to go up. Property taxes continue to go up. And I don't believe what people don't understand is once you impose a tax, normally there's only one way for a tax to go. And that's up. And I hear people talking all the time about, you

know, complain about their property taxes, how, you know, how they're going up. You know, some people are having to sell in some places in the state because they can't afford their property taxes or having to move to other places, move out of state. I would probably be more for this if there was monies. I know the state of Montana probably, you know, the way money is budgeted had a \$2.2 billion surplus last year and I mean it's like okay surplus, you know, there could be a way, you know, I would think governmentally that that money could be funded or could be used to fund projects like this. I just feel like that, our tax money is not being used properly and therefore that's why we're not able to fund projects like this. And then it comes back to us the taxpayer. I do appreciate what the fire department does. Having them there, I do, it does help with my insurance. We do get a break on our insurance for them being there, but I just don't think we're at that point yet. I would think if our community continues to grow and the call volume goes up, I could see possibly in the future, but if there was another way to fund it, that's what I would like to see.

Judy Hall, I spoke last time we had a meeting and a couple of things I'd like to address. One is that \$50,000 is that he mentioned. Part of that's grant money. That's not money that was actually coming in from the community. Okay. So, that needs to be considered. Another thing is again without a tax base; we do not have a tax base. We don't have the ability to get a lot of government money because we do not have tax base. That is such a small amount that that board is asking for. It covers the bare necessities. That's all that they're asking for. And call volume down. Credit the fire department. They have worked very very hard to educate people about fire safety, about having items removed from around their houses. They've worked with the county and Carolyn and Gene and I. There's several of us that have gone out and actually done assessments for people in their homes saying this can help you if we get a wildfire. We've educated them about not burning brush. We have people calling all the time, hey, can I burn today? Well, it's really windy. Probably you shouldn't burn. Those things are accredited to the fire department. And to be asking for enough money to meet their basic needs is commendable. If I were on the board, I'd be asking for more.

My name is John Jett, I've been a resident of West Kootenai for many, many years and since 96, actually. But this 50,000 40,000 whatever it may be donation wise has been covered by very few people let's say myself including donations of fair amount of money. I think it should be spread out amongst all the people through a tax base so that everybody's covering this not just a few people through bigger donations or medium donations in my case probably, but it just doesn't make sense that a few people should carry for everybody who's going to get benefited. I have a double wide, one of the few on the West Kootenai, mine's gone in 15 minutes probably. So, they're not even the fire department probably won't even get to me, but still on the wildfires and different things. They might get there to help me in time. But this should be covered by everybody that lives there. And it should be based on something like a tax base, how much your property or whatever is worth. And to me, that's fair. That's what it should be. These guys do a lot of work that are all volunteers that you can't beat this deal for us. So, to me it would be it's just irresponsible not for everybody to pick up a part of the bill.

Josh Letcher, West Kootenai resident. I have been on the West Kootenai most of my life. I submitted you guys a letter a while back, made a couple changes to that. My opposition isn't against the steady funding of a fire department through some sort of tax revenue. It's the avenue that they've chosen to go down. Most of the West Union residents didn't know that they had a choice between a fire service area or a fire district. You know, one of the biggest differences between the two of them is the fact that in a fire district, people who get paid, fire service area, volunteers remain volunteers. And second biggest difference is the way that it's taxed. So, fire service area can set a flat fee, and Fisher River would know how that goes because when Fisher River was looking at doing a fee in what seven or eight years ago, Mark Peck was still commissioner then. They sent it back to them and said, "Well, I think you guys have residences that aren't being taxed." And sure enough, there was like 200 and some structures that they needed to go back and reassess. And by reassessing the flat fee, they ended up with more money than they would have if they had got the fee increase that they were asking for. And so, under the district, you're assessed based on the value of your home. In the service area, you can have a flat fee for every home. So, every home pays equally. Like John said that everybody should pay equally. I don't see why somebody that's got a new home with new electrical, new insulation, new windows, new wood stove. Maybe not necessarily propane little cadet heater type propane heaters that are dangerous should pay more. Those guys that are on not on foundations are going to pay less. Those guys that are in double-wides, modulars, little cabins on blocks are going to pay considerably less, even though they're more of a fire danger than somebody in a new home with new electrical, new windows, new all of that stuff. So, to be fair, I think it needs to be a fire service area, not a fire district. And because some guys I know were looking to pay it \$300 and some dollars based on the numbers we were given and some guys are looking at paying \$12. The fire department's going to respond to both of them the same. But it's unfair the way that the one guy who's probably never going to get a response because he's got a modern home on a foundation with modern heating and modern electrical is paying the brunt of the bill. And most of the West Kootenai residents didn't know they had a choice. I think it should be sent back to the fire board, and they should have more meetings not only to educate the differences between the two, but to get an opinion from the community because I think most in the community would actually rather have the fire service area than the district if they know what the real issue is.

Hi, my name is David Castro, and I live in the community, been there for about 14 years. And Justin Burich came to our house; my wife and I heard the presentation and that was on April 16th. Had a few questions after we had a chance to review all the paperwork and obviously look into some things a little bit further and then actually Justin and Tom came by my house to visit with myself and my neighbor with some questions and one of the things that I haven't gotten clarification on is the final authority for the rural fire district is it in the hands of the trustees or is it in the hand of the commissioners. Now, from what I've been able to research, the Montana code says it's in the hands of the commissioners, but Justin was reading something in our meeting that said it was in the hands of the trustees, the final say on the annual budget. So, that's a question that I have. And then another question that I have is, has Lincoln County done an assessment on the West Kootenai Volunteer Fire Department? In other words, we know what the folks locally are asking for, what they're projecting for budgets and things that equipment replacement, those kinds of things, but we don't know what Lincoln County feels about that. We'd like to see what the county saying is what condition is the fire department in now versus what our folks are saying. So, that should be reconciled. So, we know we got two people saying the same thing on what the actual expenses are going to be because as folks have brought up here, there's going to be some ramifications with taxes. And I like the service idea, by the way. That sounds interesting. And then another thing I haven't been able to find final determination on is Montana code, who is allowed to vote. So, there's been people that are just homeowners, I understand, that have voted on this in the community, but is it a requirement for them to be state of Montana registered voters? Commissioner Duram clarified that both homeowners and registered voters were allowed to sign the petition.

David Castro, Okay and then the follow-up question is what process did Lincoln County do to verify the eligibility of the voters? Commissioner Duram advised we quantified that through the clerk and recorder's office as well as the elections office, both places.

David Castro, So that's already been taken care of. Okay. Great. And then another comment that I have or I spoke with David Robinson who's the chairman of the board of trustees for the Bad Rock Fire Department. They have been a volunteer rural fire department since 1959. And they do about 365 calls a year. About one a day is their average. And I've been asking the question, but it seems like we only get two a month or something like that. Is that correct? So that would be nice to know too that weighs too in on the decision to support.

John Stears, I wanted to agree with what Mr. Letcher just said, and it's because we have the same assessment where I live here in Michigan. I've got a place in the Indian Springs development, but it is not fair for one person to pay one amount and another person to pay another when you have the same response going to each one. It just and you know, you can argue it all you want, but I support the fire department 150%. I think this needs to happen, but that is the only fair way to make it happen. I also caution everybody who's thinking about this is that as he mentioned, our taxes are or somebody mentioned are just going to go up and up and up. So, we only have so much that we are going to be able to bear whether it be for the new jail, for the new county building, for everything that we need to do with fire because fire is obviously our number one concern in the county. And so that when other projects are brought forward, we need to go ahead and take care of our bases like having an ambulance service with somebody there at the station that just goes and picks up people. So, all these things I really hope that people are, you know, amalgamating into one and understanding that our taxes are not going to go down. So, if we start going as, oh, let's do another \$100 million project because with this incinerator, you just can't afford it. We can't afford it. So that's about all I have to say. Again, I appreciate everything that our emergency responders do and the ambulance, the firefighters throughout the county. They deserve much more than they get. We should always be thinking about compensating them more and supporting them privately, but I think that a one fee one set tax for this department is going to be best way to go. Thank you.

Judy Hall, again and I just have a statement about the district versus the service area. If we're charging, let's say \$200 per house, great. The problem is my house on one property has three outbuildings. My house on our other property has two outbuildings. So that's what four, five, six, seven buildings, but I'm only paying for the two houses. Now, we have a shop that's bigger than my house. We have a barn that's twice as big as my house. If we're only paying for the house that's sitting there, and I believe that on the service area, it also that house is a mobile home that is on blocks, not on a foundation or if it's a bachelor's cabin, those guys don't pay anything according to what it was a few years ago when we looked into this. So basically, you're saying by having a service area instead of a district you're asking the fire department to go based only on the houses that meet the criteria and then it's only houses. It's not any of the shops. It's not any of the outbuildings. It's strictly you're paying based on a house, and I don't think that's equal either.

Stuart Crismore, can I comment on that? With our FSA, the way it's written in the Montana code annotated is structured property will be assessed. So, it doesn't define a barn or a shed, but it says structured. So, just to clarify.... no, it's a structured property. It's a property that has a structure or 10 structures or whatever you pay a flat fee...

Judy Hall, Oh, actually the person that has got several outbuildings is getting more protection for their money than a person with a 1400-foot house.

I have one other comment. The question was asked about call volume. I mean as commissioners and this is this is Forrest Spence again by the way. That's important for you guys to know and be aware of before this was kind of even proposed and know okay, we're about to form a taxable entity here and that call volume I mean if they're answering one call a month two calls a month, I mean you got to remember...does that articulate enough calls for taxpayer money to come forward.

Josh Letcher, I want to add one other thing, one of the other issues is we have a lot of people in RVs as well and an RV isn't going to pay anything, but if it's on fire, fire department still got to respond and through the fire service area you have an avenue to be able to put a fee for those properties in there. So, they're going to be paying as well.

Hi, my name is Justin Burich. I serve as the current board of director or president of the board of directors of the fire department or the fire protection company. One question I had for Mr. Crismore is you said structured properties were assessed. Does that mean that bare land is not paying for anything that district here? How does that work? Could you explain.

Stuart Crismore, Yeah, that is and this has to be changed on a state level. We've tried to get clarification of what's considered structure- is infrastructure structure. So, if they bring power in that's infrastructure should it be considered structured and then be assessed. So, we're working on that that has to be changed through the MCAs at a state level.

Justin Burich, what you're saying is that right now you are not getting any money.

Stuart Crismore, right now, we do not get any money from...if they've got a well or power into their property and they bring a RV out. We don't get we don't get assessment on an RV sitting there all summer long. And that's where our biggest exposure lies in Montana.

Justin Burich, I just wanted to check on that, we do have a lot of just bare land outside again but then on top of that we do have, like Mr. Letcher brought up, a lot of RV lots and stuff like that. One thing just in regard to the petition process we were talking about homeowners versus voters like that. I oversaw a lot of the petition gathering and I only presented petitions to actual property owners. And if you reviewed as the clerk and reporter's office did, it was only homeowners that we received those petitions for, I promise you it was done with the utmost importance of making sure it was on legality. Then again just to reiterate that we are asking for the bare minimum, and I understand too to check and see if those numbers. I have we're very transparent. I believe that we provided the most accurate numbers that we could, but again, we are asking for the bare minimum because I still plan on doing my best to fund raise in the community to go for every grant that we can get our hands on to do what's best. I am not a proponent of unreasonable taxation whatsoever. But again, to make sure that we have access to government grants and other avenues of money that we have missed in the past. The other thing that was brought up is the few calls that we do get in our area. I tend to believe that we are supposed to be prepared for the worst-case scenario. Saying that we're only going to get a couple calls a month and then one time we get a month where we get multiple calls...or we have a large disaster. Our job is to be prepared for the absolute worst thing that can happen at any point in time and that's what we're trying to achieve. Make sure that we can respond for people of West Kootenai.

Tom Lane, I have one quick question. From the perspective of the FSA, and it was brought up by you, somebody stated it, and I just want to clarify. When these evaluations happen of the structures, who's responsible for doing that? Is it the fire

district? Is the fire service area the one that goes in and evaluates all of these individual structures and turns them in? What is the manpower hours that goes into that? And who keeps that up to date? Are we the bad guy because we have to go out and say, "No, your RV's there. We're going to have to charge you for that RV." Or that substructure or that temporary. And how many times do you get push backs from that? Oh, it's only here for a couple of weeks. It's only here for a couple of months. And then two years later, same thing's there, but they keep giving you the same response over and over. You're putting a lot of burden on an FSA to self-manage taxation. And that is not something that West Kootenai Fire Department has the manpower, has the background, or has the capability to do on its own under those rules. That's why we're skipping the middleman and saying, "Look, we're going to put this on the property value, not on an individual structure based on the who's and what's and where's. We are not taxing people. We are not people that want to be responsible for that. And I certainly want don't want to have to put together letters every year saying, "Hey, your structure has been here for more than 6 months. You now are going to have to be taxed for it."

Forrest Spence here, mentioning the call volume and being prepared. I don't think with what we have currently and if we could acquire more equipment through either the FSA or whether they stay a volunteer fire department. Preparedness is a frame of mind, right? It's also using your funds to get what you need that you have, and you can be prepared. It's all in the way that you uh there's no need to basically be taxed on this. I'm not the greatest speaker here but due to the call volume that we do have there's nothing. I appreciate again the fire department, and you know basically with the way it is even with the fire district we're not looking at an increased response to calls because it is still a volunteer fire department. You know, it may take 15 or 20 minutes to get on scene, which we know that's, you know. But, uh, anyway, I just wanted to make that point. Preparedness is of the mind. Train, train, train, and get the equipment you need and be prepared.

Amanda DeLeon, I currently serve on the board, and I just want to say I've seen our budget. I know what it is and I see every penny that we have to nitpick to get. I'm at every event that we have and the ones that are saying that they're supporting us, we haven't seen them there, nothing. So, I do see all the money that's coming in. I do see what is there. And when we go to an event and I'm sitting there giving, you know, "hey, can you buy a ticket" and we get five bucks, I'm excited. So, I mean, we really need the support because we're not getting it as everybody is saying.

David Castro, back to Justin's comment about being the maximum amount of preparedness. Aren't we, isn't the West Kootenai Fire District getting support from other fire districts when there is a large emergency? Don't we get other fire districts? They make a call and other folks come to help out. So, we're not out there on our own.

Destini Parker, I would just the only comment that we have for my family because they can't be here is that, just the way that the is assessed because people who are fortunate enough to have larger parcels are essentially, lack of better words, subsidizing those who have little parcels or you also have to look at who actually manages their property and who doesn't. those who don't manage their property well is a bigger fire risk than those who don't. So those would be the two comments that we would have for you to consider.

Judy Hall again, the 2017 Caribou fire. My husband was fire chief then and he's not here because he's in Washington. But he was told Sunday night; the fire was Saturday. He was told Sunday night at 10:00 p.m. and Brett was the county...knows him-he was told he can have 10 units come and cover all of the houses because the Forest Service does not cover houses. He can bring 10 in. He calls the state emergency line. We are not a fire district. We are not a fire area. They did not accept the fire company even though it's a state recognized one. We did not get one single engine in. My husband and his assistant chief spent the night putting together another one. He called all of the fire departments that we know. Marian came, TFS came, Bull Lake came, they all brought engines free. They never got a penny. Because we they didn't get paid a penny for helping us because we were not a district or an area. They had teams there for three or four days yet not getting a penny for helping us. Commissioner Teske, that was that was an issue with the state mutual aid that I hope they've gotten resolved.

Judy Hall any mutual aid is a minimum of 45 minutes away whether they come from the Yaak, whether they come from TFS, whether they come from Eureka they've got a minimum 45 minutes. The Forest Service needs 45 minutes to bring us a tanker which they have done on several occasions when we've had large fires.

I'm Tom Maxwell. I'm the treasurer of the fire company right now. Been in this position for like 10 years, I think. So, I've seen a lot. And I just want to let the board know that as a board and as a group of residents out there, we've gone through and really done our best to follow the code. We evaluated fire service areas and fire districts, knowing that we had to move from private company version to some of those and put a lot of effort into that. I'm available as the board decides how you want to vote on this and with any kind of questions on income or anything to do with the treasury part of it, I can provide that information. So again, we've spent a lot of a lot of consternation about what's best for us and we respect the rights of everybody to speak for themselves, but we really think the fire district is the way to go.

Josh Letcher, one more thing on the assessments. I think it's better that the community is involved in the fees and the assessing of properties than the state of Montana's assessment office. I don't know if anybody's had a problem with their property assessment, but I think the county roads have issues with property assessments all the time. I think it'd be better to handle it in the community. It's not going to be an overall burden for the fire department. Fisher River, does it seem to do a good job. I think they could lead the charge on that.

Commissioner Teske noted several items for further consideration and explained that the next step would be consideration of a resolution to form the fire district.

11:15 AM **Resolution to Remove Unopposed Races from Ballot for November General Election. Resolution**

Related to Election Services, Locations, and Hours: Present were Cristie Silva, Kerry Finley, Linda Hill, Linda Ralph, Mary Nelson, Mike Cuffe, Natalie Smith, Rosalie Warboys, Shawn Beers, Stuart Crismore, Tony Wickham and Traci Street and Zach Maassen.

County Administrator Matt Williams read Resolution 2026-24, declaring unopposed candidates for the November 3, 2026, General Election elected by acclamation and canceling the applicable unopposed races. Commissioner Teske read guidance from the Secretary of State's Office confirming that one-candidate races may be canceled by governing body resolution, with limited exceptions for judicial retention races. **Motion** by Commissioner Duram to adopt Resolution 2026-24. Second by Commissioner Hammons. Commissioner Duram expressed concerns about canceling the unopposed races and supported keeping the candidates on the ballot to provide community awareness and allow voters to participate in the process. He noted that candidates would be able to see the level of community support they received.

Commissioner Hammons commented that the additional cost of printing a two-page ballot would not be excessive. Matt Williams clarified that his role is to advise the County Commissioners, as required by statute, of unopposed races and to present the resolution. He stated that he did not take a position on the resolution and did not intend to do so. Stuart Crismore provided information regarding the legal distinctions related to the proposed resolution and expressed concerns about removing seven Republican candidates from the November ballot. He noted that doing so could reduce voter interest and turnout, potentially affecting other races on the ballot. He also expressed concern about candidates being declared elected “by acclamation” rather than through the regular election process and how that could be perceived by voters. He suggested the process could be further refined outside of an ongoing election cycle. Natalie Smith raised questions regarding the findings and timeline related to Melanie Howell’s administrative leave, election training requirements, and the qualifications and selection process for Matthew Williams as County Administrator and Interim Election Administrator. She also questioned the authority, policies, procedures, and safeguards governing election administration, including potential conflicts of interest, changes in election duties, public notice and input, and the training and potential role of other staff. Kerry Finley asked about the availability and retention of archived election records, including past candidate filings and ballot records and how the public can access this information. She noted that the Secretary of State’s Office directed her to local election officials for records of past candidates. It was noted that resolutions are recorded and stored as public records. Senator Mike Cuffe spoke in support of keeping unopposed candidates on the ballot, noting the value of voter participation, candidate visibility and knowing the level of support received in the general election. He expressed concerns that removing candidates could reduce voter turnout, affect other races, and create unfavorable public perception. He stated that the current process has worked for years and encouraged the Commissioners not to adopt the resolution. Commissioner Duram read a public comment from Jennifer Curtiss, who opposed Resolution 2026-24 and the removal of unopposed candidates from the November 3, 2026, ballot. She expressed concern that the resolution would limit voters’ ability to participate in selecting their preferred candidates and could negatively affect turnout in other races. She urged the Commissioners to vote against the resolution. Tony Wickham spoke in opposition to Resolution 2026-24, noting that keeping candidates on the ballot provides voter input, supports turnout and gives candidates valuable election data. He also advised Montana law 13-1-403 requiring county commissioners appearing on the general election ballot. Cristie Silva, election judge, noted that having additional races on the ballot does not increase the time required to count ballots. She questioned why some unopposed candidates, including Marcia Boris, did not appear on the primary ballot. Shawn Beers noted that keeping candidates on the ballot would provide voters an opportunity to participate without additional ballot costs. She also questioned Matthew Williams’ voter eligibility and whether information regarding Melanie Howell would be made public. The Commissioners said they would review the concerns. Resolution 2026-24 unanimously failed to pass. All unopposed candidates will remain on the November 3, 2026, General Election ballot.

Resolution 2026-25 was deferred due to time constraints.

11:40 AM **Biomass Feasibility Study Presentation with Public Comment:** Present were Christie Silva, Linda Ralph, Mary Duram, Mary Nelson, Mike Cuffe, Rosalie Warboys, Tony Wickham, Traci Street and Zach Maassen.

Zach Masson of HDR Engineering presented the draft Biomass Feasibility Study and Fatal Flaw Analysis. The study evaluated the feasibility of a biomass-to-energy facility to address Forrest fuel reduction and wildfire mitigation, create jobs, and provide economic and community benefits. HDR reviewed Forrest fuel loads, municipal solid waste, air-quality requirements, population trends and available technologies. HDR concluded the concept is viable, with cost being the primary challenge. HDR recommended a proven reciprocating-grate combustion system focused initially on woody biomass, with an estimated preliminary cost of approximately \$30 million. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) technologies were also evaluated, but HDR recommended focusing on woody biomass initially, with the possibility of considering MSW in the future. The study identifies potential funding sources and public-private partnerships. The County and public will have approximately one month to review the draft before a follow-up meeting to address comments and determine whether to proceed with an RFP. Commissioners discussed the recent \$6 million landfill expansion, future landfill capacity, Forrest fuel accumulation, potential electricity generation and possible industrial uses for process steam. Discussion also addressed the potential for state and federal funding and the project's potential to create jobs and encourage the return of Forrest-products industries to Lincoln County.

Senator Mike Cuffe expressed support for continuing to explore the project, citing his experience with Forrest-products jobs and biomass energy. He discussed potential state and federal funding, job creation, wildfire mitigation benefits, and the possibility of attracting Forrest-products industries back to Lincoln County.

John Stears expressed concerns about the limited time available to review the draft report before the meeting and requested extensive future public involvement. He questioned the potential inclusion of municipal solid waste, oversight of materials entering the facility, environmental safeguards and the potential location of the facility. He requested several public meetings involving community members, state legislators and EPA before the project proceeds.

12:09 PM **Adjourned**

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Brent Teske, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Corrina Brown, Clerk of the Board