

Optional Forms of County Government News Release

Your current elected County officials – Clerk/Auditor Cliff Hayes, Assessor Mike McDowell, Treasurer Tom Malzahn and Coroner Deb Wilkey – offer this information to help voters weigh the merits of the November 6 ballot measure which the County Commissioners have proposed to replace the present county governance structure.

What is our current form of county government?

- Our state constitution established the structure of county government to balance the authorities and responsibilities among various elected offices (Commissioners, Clerk/Auditor, Treasurer, Sheriff, Prosecuting Attorney, Assessor, and Coroner), which are independent of each other. This was done to place checks and balances within the county government system. Those checks, which distribute authority among different independent elected officials, by nature are not as efficient as a single administrative head. That was not our state founders' purpose. They designed county government to be directly accountable to our citizens, with safeguards in place to protect the integrity of the system.

What effect would changing our current form of county government have?

- Appointing a county manager adds another layer to the county government structure. This would result in an additional cost while maintaining three full time commissioners funding their pay and benefits as well. This does not streamline the county organization. It will also reduce the accountability of county governance by taking away the voters right to choose who **they** want to represent them and provide the services now provided by our County Clerk/Auditor, Treasurer, Assessor, and Coroner.

What would changing the form of county government cost?

- This adds the additional cost of a county manager, whose annual salary would most likely be in excess of \$100,000 per year, plus benefits. Further, if the County Clerk/Auditor, Treasurer, Assessor, and Coroner positions are appointed they would have to be compensated at rates commensurate with other County department heads with similar responsibilities, like the Community Development Director, Information Systems Director, or Solid Waste Director, at an added cost of \$10,000 to \$20,000 per position annually.
- The current Board of County Commissioners would also like to have the sheriff and prosecutor appointed however they feel that the general public would reject such a radical change and would not pass this ballot measure. They did indicate that if they were able to get this resolution passed then those positions would be next.

Would changing the form of county government have any consequences?

- This proposal creates several conflicts of interest such as when a single County Manager would both potentially appoint the Board of Equalization Hearing Board and the County Assessor who must defend appeals to that same Board.
- Another point to consider is the consolidation of all of the county budget and fund distribution responsibilities under a single person. This removes all the independent review on the over \$79,000,000 annual budget. These responsibilities are now distributed among the Board of Commissioners, the County Clerk/Auditor, and the County Treasurer.
- In addition to the County's own budget transactions, we also disburse \$109 million to the taxing districts, another \$4.9 million to the state for DMV sales & use taxes, and about \$300,000 in impact fees, all annually. Any financial organization is at risk of fraud.

Centralizing fiscal control in one position as the Commissioners propose dramatically increases our risk for fraud. Is that the way we want to go?

Could there be another alternative solution for a different form of county government?

- Over the years the elected office where we've seen the greatest amount of instability is with our Board of County Commissioners. The majority on that Board can change every two years. A different proposal where we have 5 part time Commissioners and an administrator could have some merits. This could create more stability, and allow for a broader range of citizens the chance to serve on the Board. In our present economic climate that we have experienced over the past 5-years, a cost neutral plan should be the only possible consideration moving forward. Unfortunately we won't have the opportunity to choose this form of governance.

How many other counties in the State of Idaho have this alternate form of county government?

- There is a reason that in the 16 years since the "Optional Forms of County Government" statute was passed into law, that **none** of Idaho's 44 counties have enacted any form of an option. This has been addressed six times and has been turned away each time in favor of the present structure, where we select our elected officials by a vote of the people; where those elected officials have proper incentives to provide quality services to their constituents; where we have proper checks and balances within the system and at a significantly lower cost to our taxpayers.

How should I vote on this ballot measure?

- Your current elected Assessor, Treasurer, Clerk/Auditor and Coroner would encourage you to vote ***in favor of keeping our current county government structure*** in November on this ballot measure to maintain the checks and balances originally designed into County government and keep your right to choose who serves you. Remember, the proposal before you will increase the cost of your local government and will not make it more effective for you, the taxpayer.

Tom Malzahn
Kootenai County Treasurer

Mike McDowell
Kootenai County Assessor

Cliff Hayes
Kootenai County Clerk/Auditor

Deb Wilkey
Kootenai County Coroner