



Local Government Review Board 5/7/26

Agenda

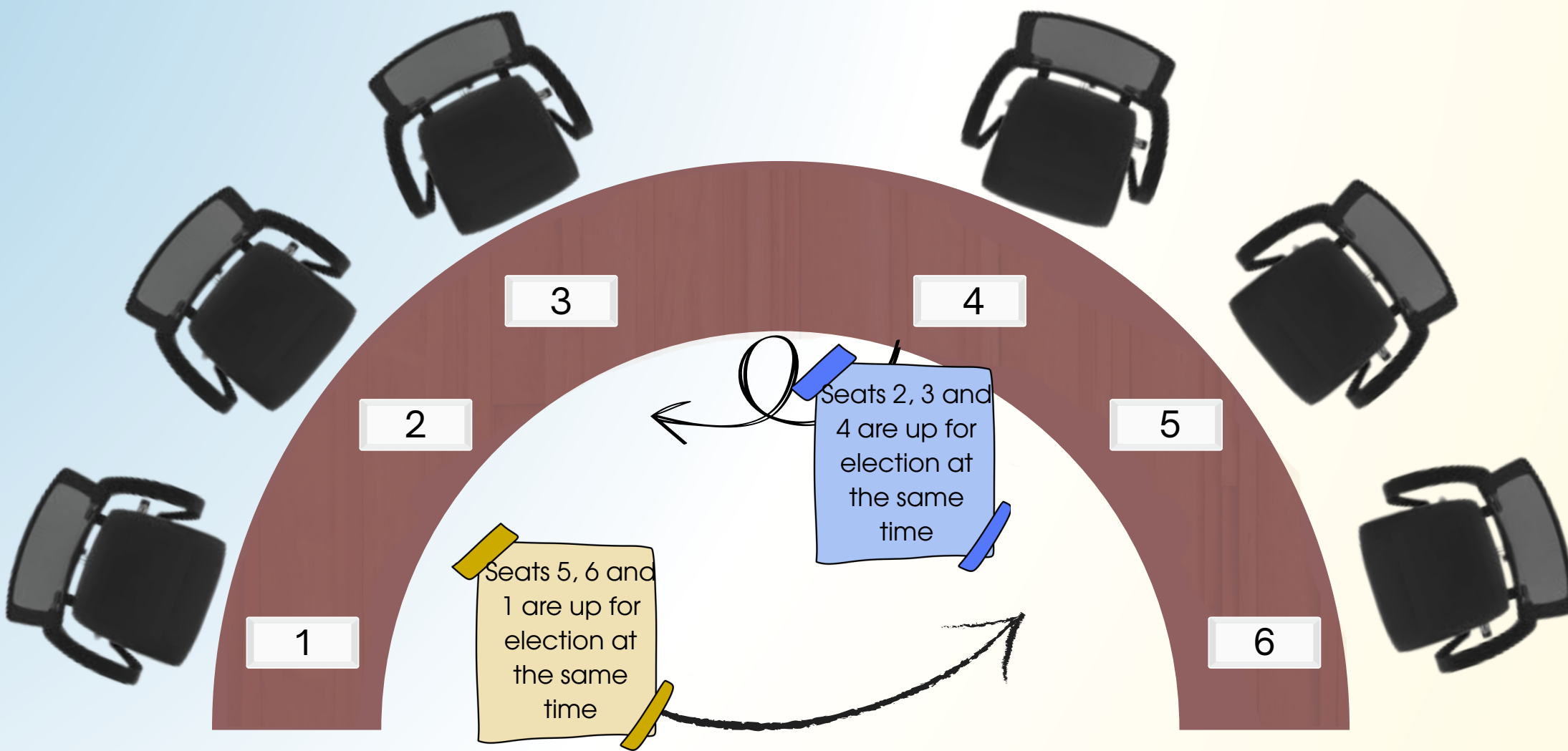
May 07, 2026 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order
2. Old Business
 - [a.](#) Ward Representation
3. New Business
 - [a.](#) March 5th, 2026 Meeting Minutes
 - [b.](#) April 9th, 2026 Training Meeting Minutes
 - [c.](#) Schedule Update/Special Meetings
 - [d.](#) General vs Self-Governing Powers
 - e. Recommendation for Tentative Report Items
4. Questions/ Comments from Public
5. Questions/ Comments from Board
6. Adjournment

Hybrid Council System

This half of the table is ward elected city council members

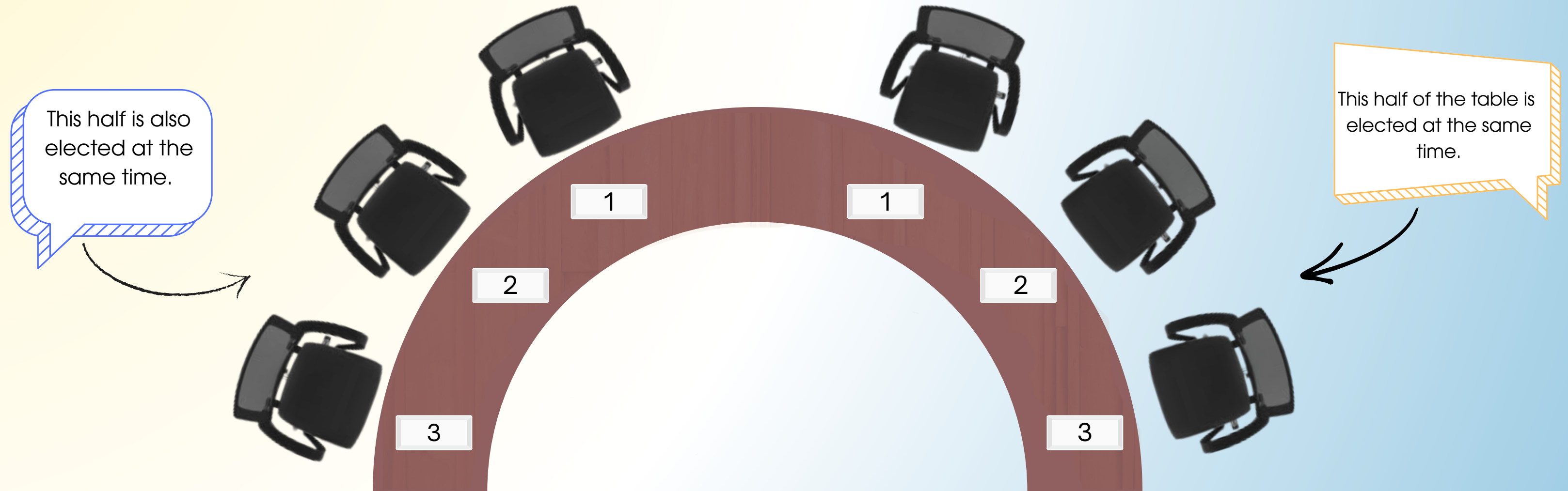
This half of the table is at large elected council members



One at-large seat shares a term cycle with two wards.
Two at-large seats share a term cycle with one ward.

This creates a stable 3-and-3 rotation every two years.

Ward Council (Current) System



In our current system we have two ward members elected by wards. One from each up for election every two years. This creates a stable 3-and-3 rotation every two years.



Local Government Review Board 3-5-26

Minutes

March 05, 2026 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order

Chair Sergeant called the Local Government Review Board meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Board Present: Sergeant, Mayer, Whiteman

Others Present: Mayor Norby, Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin, Kali Buxbaum, Gary Schoepp, Karen Schoepp, Duane Mitchell, Jamie Larson, Madison Miller and Tess Hurley.

2. New Business

a. January 8th, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve.

Motion made by Whiteman, Seconded by Mayer.

Voting Yea: Sergeant, Whiteman, Mayer

b. Public Hearing on the Change of Form of Government-Mayor/Council vs City Manager/Council

Mrs. Sergeant read the rules and procedures for the public hearing, stating the proponents for tonight's public hearing will be those in favor of changing the form of government and opponents will be those wishing to speak against changing the form of government, including those who wish to retain the current form but would like to speak for or against the City Administrator recommendation. Mrs. Sergeant opened the public hearing at 5:31pm and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin gave her staff report on the forms of government and the option for the recommendation.

Mrs. Sergeant called for any proponents, three times, with none coming forward to testify.

Mrs. Sergeant called for any opponents, three times, with the following coming forward to testify.

Kali Buxbaum stated she is opposed to the change of form of government but would like to see the city pursue the City Administrator under the Mayor. She stated she feels this will increase the city's capacity to meet concerns heard recently with currently especially with the Downtown Master Plan, Growth Policy and Local Government Review. She stated she feels we could build better programming to meet the public's needs, expand capacity with grant management and the structure within the city would be better suited with this change.

Duane Mitchell stated he is opposed to the change of form of government, he feels if it is not broke, you don't fix it. He stated we have had a Mayor for forever and we are not that big. He stated money is tight and everyone upset about the taxes, how would you go about paying for an Administrator that would cost more than the Mayor position costs. He thanked the LGRB for sitting on the board and reiterated he feels it should be left alone.

Gary Schoepp stated he and his wife have been to all of the LGRB meetings and he agrees with Mr. Mitchell, it is not broke so don't fix it and leave it like it is.

With no further testimony Mrs. Sargent closed the public hearing at 5:38pm and the LGRB had no further questions at this time.

c. Survey #1 Results

Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin reviewed the survey results. Mr. Mayer asked for clarification on what the weighted scores of survey question on how the City is doing means and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated the numbers for the weighted average fall between Slightly Effective and Moderately Effective on a scale of 1-Not Effective at all, 2-Slightly Effective, 3-Moderately Effective, 4-Very Effective and 5-Extremely Effective. Mr. Mayer also asked for Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin to clarify her thoughts on the survey results for question 8 on ranking what is more important and the results for the self-government powers. Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated the way it is ranked the highest for most important but because of the way it is worded it could have been deceptive. She stated posing the question in Richland County about giving more local control will always lean towards yes, but there is a lot more intricacies in becoming self-governing powers which is why she is hoping the training in April will be beneficial for the public and the board on this topic.

3. Old Business

a. Recommendation on Change of Form of Government

Motion was made to keep the Mayor-Council form of government.

Motion made by Mayer, Seconded by Whiteman.

In discussion Mr. Mayer stated he agrees and can understand the concept if its not broke, don't fix it, but he also feels we should always strive to get better and how, rather than just stay even keel like Mrs. Buxbaum stated about the Administrator and he feels that is certainly one way the Council could look into being better. He stated the survey results of less than moderate effective show the public that responded feel we could have a more effective government, but to switch to switch does not feel right. He further stated he did not have a lot of members of public reach out to him on this topic.

Mr. Whiteman stated he agrees with Mr. Mayer and that a lot of the comments and survey results show room for improvement and the administrator position should be explored.

Voting Yea: Sergeant, Whiteman, Mayer

Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin asked for clarification on if a formal recommendation to the City Council for looking into the administrator position would be being made and Mr. Mayer asked if that should be at the end of the review in one or today and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated it could be handled either way. Mr. Whiteman stated he feels leaving it open for more discussion might be best and Mr. Mayer stated considering it was not an option not everyone new of and the information getting into the public, he is of the opinion to wait until the end and do one final recommendation to the Council.

b. Discussion on Council Composition:

Council size / membership — how many council members there are (currently 6)

Representation structure — how those members are elected (by ward, at-large, or hybrid)

Ward apportionment — how many members represent each ward (currently 2 represent 3 wards)

Electoral system — e.g., ward-based, at-large, or mixed at-large/ward

Elected at Large — e.g., ward-based representation, at-large voting

Rotation of Election -- e.g., every 2 years 3 council members are elected, 1 from each ward (current)

Mrs. Sergeant stated staff has provided a staff report with further information on the Council composition but there are some items we cannot change without changing to self-governing powers, such as changing from non-partisan, creating term limits or changing from the 4-year term lengths.

Mr. Mayer stated one area we can look into changing would be the representation structure and asked how that change would be and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated via ballot change. Mr. Mayer asked if the 6 Council members, 3 wards, 2 representing each

ward is representative of other municipalities for our size and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated yes and for populations up to 15,000. Mr. Whiteman asked how any changes would affect current council members and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated any changes made in the review process cannot affect current terms, so if it was switched to all at large, for example, as their terms end they would have to run again as at large instead of by ward. She further stated that Ms. Cross provided a list of Montana municipalities that have at large representation and their population size and form of government. She stated generally when the Council is at large, it is a small community and Mr. Mayer stated White Fish is interesting being at large with only 3 Council members and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated they are self-governing chartered so they are a unique situation.

Mr. Mayer stated another option would be to have the Council represent wards but be elected at large and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated yes but this is mostly common in County Governments and not in municipalities but she has not found anything that prohibits posing the question to the constituents to change to that form. Mr. Mayer asked for the survey results again for going to at large and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated 58% were in favor, 42% not. Mr. Mayer asked if they are looking for a formal recommendation tonight and Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated no, she is looking for more detail on what direction they would like to go to gather more information, such as another survey or call for a public hearing on one or more of the specific topics.

Mr. Mayer stated he feels the 3 wards feels right for Sidney and same for the 6 council members, but have kicked around the hybrid of having 1 council member represent each of the 3 wards and 3 at large, allowing for direct representation for each ward but allowing for more people to run, but in theory that could result in 4 council members being in one ward. Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated she has found no information that shows that a Montana municipality currently has this system and she feels getting more information on this at their training with the Local Government Services is a good idea, as she does not know the why no one is. Mr. Whiteman stated he does agree with there being benefits of having at large representation and Mr. Mayer stated also to have ward representative. Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated the only way she has seen the hybrid model in practice is to have 8 council members, 6 by ward and 2 at large, but that does not necessarily mean it is the only way it can be done, just is the only way currently she could find. Mr. Mayer stated when looking back most races are uncontested or from an appointment so adding 2 Council members might not be feasible.

Mr. Mitchell stated we have a representative form of government and although as an elected official in a small community you are pulled everywhere, you are still tasked with representing your ward and assisting them with issues. He stated he is not necessarily comfortable that 4 of the Council members, or a majority, could be from one area and have an agenda. Mr. Mayer stated that is a possibility but he was trying to find a hybrid model to service all needs without increasing the Council size, as more is not always better. Mr. Mitchell asked what happens when there is a tie with an even number and

Clerk/Treasurer Chamberlin stated the Mayor is the tie breaker and Mayor Norby stated he has never had to break a tie.

Mr. Mayer stated he feels getting more information from the training is needed to continue the conversation and the LGRB agreed. Chair Sergeant stated the training will be April 9th at 5:30pm at City Hall and the public is welcome to attend and gain knowledge along with them.

4. Questions/ Comments from Public

None.

5. Questions/ Comments from Board

None.

6. Adjournment

Next meetings:

Training Meeting: April 9th, 2026 at 5:30pm

Regular Meeting: May 7th, 2026 at 5:30pm

Adjourned at 6:00pm.



Local Government Review Board 4-9-26

Minutes

April 09, 2026 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order

Chair Sergeant called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

2. New Business

a. Training with the Local Government Center

The Local Government review board held a virtual training with Dan Clark of the Local Government Services. Topics covered included representation in wards and how the hybrid way of 3 wards, 6 council members, 3 representing wards and 3 at large, would work. The LGRB also learned about self-governing powers and charters, Chief Administrative Officers or City Administrators and what their timeline and final report should look like.

3. Old Business

Nothing.

4. Questions/ Comments from Public

Nothing.

5. Questions/ Comments from Board

The LGRB discussed the timeline presented and the need for all topics remaining to be discussed on the May agenda, and possibly two special meetings to set and hold a public hearing on a tentative report so the final report can be passed and ready for ballot before July 31st.

6. Next Meeting: May 7th, 2026 at 5:30pm

Adjournment

at 7:05pm.

LGRB May-July 2026

What	Date	Time
May		
Scheduled Meeting	5/7/2026	5:30 PM
1. Discussion on Ward Representation		
2. Discussion on Powers		
3. Tentative Report Items/Recommendation		
Draft Tentative Report Drafted	5/22/2026	5:00 PM
Special Meeting to approve Tentative Report	5/28/2026	5:30 PM
June		
Notice to public on PH	6/3/2026, 6/10/26	
Public outreach on report items	Social Media throughout	
Public Hearing on Tentative Report	6/18/2026	5:30pm
July		
Scheduled Meeting	7-2-26 at 5:30pm	
1. Adopt Final Report		
Ballot Items to Election Office	7-31-26 at 5:00pm	

In Montana, cities operate under one of two systems:

1. General Governing Powers:

A city can only do what state law specifically says it is allowed to do.

2. Self-governing Powers:

A city can do anything that is not specifically prohibited by state law or the Constitution.

Sidney currently operates under **general governing powers**.

Some cities and counties have chosen to adopt **self-governing powers** because it gives them more flexibility to solve local problems.

Note we cannot override state law.

What would this do: give community more control

What this does NOT do: give the city unlimited authority. It only allows Sidney to make decisions without needing special permission.

Some areas that might be able to change under self-governing:

- Regulation and Ordinances
 - Local business regulations (licensing, hours, nuisance rules)
 - Create local business licensing systems beyond state minimums
 - Noise, public safety and community behavior ordinances
 - Rental housing standards (unless preempted)
 - Local environmental or nuisance controls
 - Whitefish's watershed protection ordinances
 - Missoula's ban on certain types of wood burning stoves
 - Regulation of short-term rentals (Airbnb/VRBO) if not preempted
 - Local fees for services not otherwise regulated
 - Tourism or event fees
 - Development/Structural fees (vacancies)
 - Could develop unique zoning ordinances or stricter land and disposal regulations

- Service expansion i.e. expanding solid waste service areas to meet local needs
- Greater authority to dispose of public lands

- Revenue
 - Special assessments
 - Service fees
 - Certain local taxes (if not expressly prohibited)
 - Creative revenue mechanisms for local services
 - Power to Prohibit Door-to-Door Solicitation

- Structure and Admin Authority
 - Reorganize departments
 - Create or modify administrative offices
 - Create new positions to manage growing business
 - Delegate authority in ways not explicitly listed in statute
 - Adopt local ethics rules or administrative procedures
 - Missoula adopted stricter ethics rules for elected officials.
 - Bozeman created local disclosure requirements beyond state minimums.

- Public Services
 - Local transportation services
 - Senior and disability programs
 - Recreation and cultural programs
 - Local health or social service initiatives
 - An example of this was Helena enacting the smoke ban back in 2002- Sidney would be able to do similar actions.
 - Passing ordinances to prohibit smoking, consumption, or display of substances like medical marijuana in public places as well as public property bans.

- Creating stricter zoning regulations and prohibition zones for dispensaries near schools, jails, and pre-release centers.
- Mandatory Seatbelt Ordinance
- Local Development Code to Regulate Sale of Alcoholic Beverages
- Economic development programs
 - City of Butte and County of Silver Bow operate an electric and natural gas utility within and outside the boundaries of its jurisdiction.
- Require All Residents to Connect to City Water Supply
 - Finance Future Expansion of City Water and Sewer System through System Development Fees

Cannot:

- **Taxation:** Cannot authorize a tax on income or sale of goods/services (except for specific authorized taxes like a resort tax)
- Extraterritorial activity: Cannot regulate private activity beyond geographical limits
- **State-controlled areas:** Cannot enacts standards less stringent than state las in areas of “affirmatively subjected” to state control, such a professional licensing or public education
- **Specific regulated industries:** cannot regulate gambling, lotteries, or gift enterprises.

Self-governing powers give Sidney the ability to say:

“If state law doesn’t forbid it, and it helps our community, we can do it.”

Instead of:

“We can only do what state law specifically lists.”

It is simply a broader toolbox for local problem solving.

Important to note: With broader authority and fewer restrictions, local governments may face legal challenges or adopt inconsistent policies, which can create confusion or controversy. Additionally, the Legislature can still pass laws that override local decisions.

Article XI. Section 6. SELF-GOVERNMENT POWERS. A local government unit adopting a self-government charter may exercise any power not prohibited by this constitution, law, or charter. This grant of self-government powers may be extended to other local government units through optional forms of government provided for in section 3.

https://mca.legmt.gov/bills/mca/title_0000/article_0110/part_0010/section_0060/0000-0110-0010-0060.html

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