TOWN OF ENNIS

Local Government Study Commission

Final Report June 2026

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I. Introduction

A. Letter to the Citizens of Ennis

To the Citizens of Ennis,

The Ennis Local Government Review Commission, elected by the voters on November 5, 2024, or thereafter appointed, presents this report to you, the citizens of Ennis. The purpose of the study commission, as defined in state law, is first to study the existing form and powers of our municipal government and procedures for delivery of local government services and secondly, compare them with other forms of government available under the laws of the state shown in Appendix F. After completing these two phases of the study it is the responsibility of the study commission to submit a final report recommending one of the following: 1) no change, 2) propose an amendment to the existing form of government or 3) offer an alternative form of government to the qualified electors. If change is deemed necessary, the study commission may submit such proposed change to the electors.

In every phase of this review, this study commission sought advice and information from as many people as possible. We solicited opinions and recommendations from current and former local government employees, elected officials, and citizens. All study commission meetings were open to the public. Commission members were available to explain the work of the commission and to hear viewpoints, ideas, and concerns. The study commission held two public hearings and conducted a survey of citizen attitudes to determine citizen opinion. These recommendations reflect the thoughts and opinions of those who participated in the public hearings, those who attended our regular meetings, and those who responded to the surveys and questionnaires, in addition to the independent efforts of this study commission.

In this report, we present our recommendation to adopt the Council-Manager structure of government while retaining self-governing powers and charter. We believe this change will provide consistent leadership and communication, and improve workflows to increase efficiency, responsiveness, and transparency to local citizens. By adopting the Council-Manager structure of government while retaining self-government powers and charter, the citizens of Ennis can expect improved governmental services both today and in the future.

The question of adopting this alternative form of government will be placed on the November 3, 2026 ballot.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ennis Local Government Study Commission

II. Report Summary

A. Findings of the Study Commission

The decision of the Study Commission to recommend changes to the Town of Ennis charter is the result of an in-depth study that included twelve public meetings, 2 public hearings, a community-wide survey, and a detailed questionnaire completed by both elected officials and town employees. The input gathered through these efforts consistently highlighted concerns around lack of oversight, communication breakdowns, and administrative inefficiencies.

The current Charter form of government with the Commission-Executive structure has been in place since Ennis adopted the charter in 1977. The mayor is expected to oversee all day-to-day operations, manage multiple departments, supervise employees, prepare budgets and agendas, and ensure compliance with state law, all while often holding a full-time job elsewhere. The increasing complexity of local government makes this model outdated and unsustainable.

Numerous examples were identified throughout the study to illustrate this strain. For example, the Town has experienced delays in planning and approving budgets[1], and year-over-year audit findings that remain unresolved[2,7]. Key responsibilities such as public notices and financial reconciliations have been missed or delayed, resulting in unnecessary costs to taxpayers[3,4,5,6]. High commissioner turnover was another recurring concern, often attributed to poor communication, inadequate preparation for meetings, and lack of access to necessary information.[8]

These issues do not stem from any individual's failure but rather from the limitations of a structure that no longer suits the size and demands of a growing town. With an increasing population, expanding service needs, and a growing municipal budget, Ennis requires a more professional and efficient system of governance.

A concern influencing the Commission's recommendation is the national and local decline in volunteerism. Consistent with this national trend, Ennis has the difficulty of finding qualified candidates willing to serve in elected and appointed roles.[9] Those who do volunteer often find themselves overwhelmed by the scope of responsibility. Relying on stipend or part-time officials to perform duties that increasingly resemble those of full-time professional administrators is no longer a viable strategy. The Council-Manager form of government addresses this by placing executive responsibility in the hands of a qualified professional, allowing volunteer commissioners to focus on policy making and community leadership without being overburdened.

Other areas of concern that emerged during the study include citizen and officials' responses concerning the town government's ability to manage growth and provide a long-term strategy for reliable services.[9] This, combined with a lack of continuous leadership and subsequent transparency and accountability, led the study commission to identify the following goals for the Town of Ennis:

- Consistent leadership among employees and the public
- Consistent communication among employees and the public
- Improve workflows to increase efficiency in delivery of services
- Increase education for elected and appointed officials as well as employees

To achieve these goals, the study commission recommends a charter change to the Council-Manager structure of government.

B. Key Provisions of the Proposed Form

Chief Administrative Officer

The town manager, a professional administrator hired by the commission on the basis of merit, is responsible for the administration of the programs and policies determined by the commission. Subject to the commission's general direction, the manager controls the hiring and firing of town personnel, directs and supervises the administration of all departments, prepares the budget, and oversees the business affairs of town government. The manager serves at the pleasure of the commission and may be replaced at any time with a majority vote of commission.

III. Comparison of the Existing Form of Government and the Proposed Form of Government

A. Existing Form of Government: Description of General Characteristics

Charter form with the Commission-Executive Structure

The present form, as set forth in Appendix A, provides the Charter with the Commission-Executive structure of government. The current form of government in Ennis has been the same since being adopted by the voters in 1977.

The five-member commission serves as the legislative body of the government, and commissioners are elected by the Ennis voters to four year overlapping terms. Each commissioner must reside within the Ennis town limits.

The Ennis Town Commission is responsible for setting policy, adopting budgets, and enacting local ordinances. They are also responsible for levying taxes and regulating the rates charged for services by a public utility. The commission can authorize borrowing of money or leasing/conveying any lands within the town.

Under Section 3.02 of the Ennis Town Charter, the mayor holds significant executive authority and serves as the chief executive officer of the town. The mayor is directly responsible to the voters for the administration of all municipal affairs and is tasked with enforcing laws, ordinances, and resolutions. They also supervise and manage all departments, implement the policies set by the town commission, and prepare both the commission agenda and the annual budget.

In addition to administrative duties, the mayor presides over commission meetings, makes recommendations to the commission, and represents the town in executing contracts and other official documents, subject to commission approval. Although the mayor participates in meetings, they do not vote, except through use of veto power over ordinances and resolutions—a veto which can only be overridden by a majority of the commission plus one.

The mayor also has appointment authority, including hiring and removing town employees and appointing the Town Clerk-Treasurer with commission approval. Furthermore, the mayor is empowered to establish advisory commissions and appoint their members. These combined powers highlight the substantial role and authority vested in the mayor within the commission-executive form of government. Currently, the mayor receives a stipend of eight hundred ($800) per month for these duties.

B. Proposed Form of Government: Description of General Characteristics

Charter form with the Council-Manager Structure

The proposed form as set forth in Appendix B provides for the Charter with the Council-Manager structure of government. The Town of Ennis would have a Council consisting of five elected members, one of whom is chosen by the Council to serve as Mayor. All governing powers are vested in the Town Council unless otherwise specified by law or the town charter. The Council meets at least once a month, with provisions for special meetings as needed, and a quorum is established with the presence of any three members, including the mayor.
Council meetings are open to the public, with limited exceptions as permitted by law.

Council members are elected at large on a nonpartisan basis and serve four-year overlapping terms. The commission sets its own compensation by ordinance and is responsible for filling any vacancies, initially through appointment and later by election for the remainder of the unexpired term. The mayor is chosen annually by a majority vote of the Council from among its members and serves primarily as a ceremonial and presiding officer.
The mayor has equal voting power with other council members and does not possess veto authority. In the absence of a town manager, the mayor may assume temporary administrative duties when requested by the council.

Under a new section of the Ennis Town Charter, the Town Manager is appointed by the Town Council and serves as the chief executive and administrative officer of the municipality. The manager is tasked with implementing and enforcing the ordinances, resolutions, and policies set by the commission; effectively acting as the administrative arm that carries out the decisions made by the elected governing body. This structure ensures that executive authority is not concentrated with a single elected official, but instead is balanced across the commission, promoting a more equitable distribution of power and reducing the risk of unilateral decision-making.

The Town Manager's responsibilities include administering day-to-day operations, preparing the budget for commission approval, overseeing town departments and personnel, and advising on long-term planning and economic development. The manager also appoints, suspends, and removes employees, with some actions requiring coordination with department heads and consultation with the commission. The position is governed by a formal contract and the manager may only be removed by a majority vote of the council. This system reinforces the role of the council as the primary policymaking body while entrusting professional administration to a non-political executive. This ensures consistent leadership, communication, accountability and continuity in town governance.

C. Comparison of Specific Characteristics of the Existing and Proposed Forms of Government

The following chart compares characteristics of the existing form of town government with the proposed form of government. The last column, titled Evaluative Comments, includes short summaries explaining why the study commission is proposing some changes in each area.

CHARACTERISTIC	PRESENT FORM	PROPOSED FORM	EVALUATIVE COMMENTS
Form of Government	Charter with Commission-Executive structure	Charter with Council-Manager structure	The elected commission determines policy. Manager hired to administer policy and appointed based on experience. The manager would provide consistent leadership, communication, and continuity.
Powers	Self-governing powers	Retain self-governing powers (No change)	Self-governing powers allow Ennis' local government the power to act in the town's own best interests and flexibility in shaping government structure.
Governing Body	5 member Commission with 4 year overlapping terms	Retain 5-member council with overlapping terms (No change)	
Governing Body Election	Non-partisan	Retain non-partisan elections (No change)	
Governing Body Duties	Commission is the legislative policy-making body. The mayor is the executive body and administers all departments.	Council is the legislative body and hires a professional manager to administer all departments.	Distributes the executive power throughout the commission and reduces the risk of one person making unilateral decisions for the town.

Comparison of Specific Characteristics of the Existing and Proposed Forms of Government, continued

CHARACTERISTIC	PRESENT FORM	PROPOSED FORM	EVALUATIVE COMMENTS
Chief Administrative Officer	Mayor	Town Manager	Consistent leadership and communication is more available offering clear lines of authority and responsibility.
Appointment Powers	Mayor appoints department heads, members of boards, commissions, special districts, subject to commission approval. Appoints and removes employees.	Council appoints and removes the manager, members of boards and commissions. Manager appoints and removes all department heads and employees.	Manager appoints department heads based on qualifications based on their administrative role.
Budget Preparation	Mayor prepares the budget. Modified and/or approved by commission.	Manager prepares the budget. Modified and/or approved by council.	Manager can balance priorities set by council with available resources while balancing needs of individual departments with overall needs and resources of the town.
Service Delivery Structure	Services performed by departments/employees and administered by the mayor.	Services performed by departments/employees under manager's supervision. Collaboration with other government entities is possible.	Departments have supervision of a professional manager allowing for consistent leadership and communication leading to improved efficiency in workflows.

D. Recommendations and Reasons

The Town of Ennis Local Government Study Commission, having thoroughly studied our present town charter and the alternative forms and structures of government available to towns under state law, and having studied the future governmental needs of this town, recommends the following:

1. The Town of Ennis should adopt effective January 1, 2030, the amended Charter with the Council-Manager structure of government retaining its self-governing powers.

2. The Town of Ennis Charter should be amended in the following manner:
   A. Add section for Town Manager.
   B. The Town Manager shall be hired by the Town Council.
   C. The mayoral position will be selected from and approved by the seated commissioners.
   D. The commission member selected shall serve as mayor for one year unless selected for an additional term by the commission.
   E. The mayor may be removed by four (4) council member votes, whereupon a new mayor shall be selected by the council.
   F. The mayor shall be the presiding officer of the council, shall vote as other council members, and may not veto measures approved by the council In the absence of the mayor, the council shall appoint one of the council members present to serve as presiding officer.
   G. The mayor shall be the ceremonial officer of the town and shall have no additional duties or responsibilities except when required by the council, and in the absence of the Town Manager, the mayor shall perform all administrative duties.
   H. If the office of mayor shall become vacant upon death, resignation, or removal from office by any method authorized by law or this charter, a successor mayor shall be appointed by the commission.
   I. The Town Council shall appoint a Town Manager who shall serve under contract as the chief executive and administrative officer of the Town.
   J. The Town manager shall have the duties outlined in MCA 7-3-304.

The Council-Manager structure of government provides a range of benefits that make it particularly well-suited for small and growing communities like Ennis. One of the most significant advantages is the presence of professional management. Under this system, a trained and experienced manager is appointed by the council to oversee the day-to-day operations of the town. This professional oversight brings a level of

expertise and non-political decision-making that leads to more consistent leadership, improved communication, and overall efficiency in municipal services.

Because the manager is not an elected official and serves by direction of the council, the structure encourages a more administrative approach to governance. This reduces the potential for political interference in routine operations and promotes consistency in how policies are implemented. The continuity provided by a professional manager helps ensure stable operations even as elected officials rotate through their terms.

The elected council sets the overall direction and priorities for the town, while the appointed manager carries out those directives. In this model, the mayor is typically chosen from among the commissioners and acts primarily as a presiding officer rather than a separate executive authority. This creates a governing body focused on policy making and oversight.

Another benefit of this structure is the built-in system of checks and balances. By distributing executive authority across the entire council, rather than one elected position, the town reduces the risk of unilateral decision-making and ensures broader accountability.

Finally, the Council-Manager structure offers adaptability, which is especially important for small and mid-sized towns. As communities grow and their needs become more complex, having a skilled administrator in place allows local government to respond effectively. The manager can take on responsibilities that would otherwise overwhelm part-time or volunteer officials, helping the town operate more efficiently and strategically over time.

The Study Commission recognizes that one of the most common questions surrounding the adoption of a Commission-Manager form of government is: *How will the Town afford a professional manager?* While there is not a designated fund currently set aside for this role, we believe the cost of a town manager may be offset if not fully recouped through the operational efficiencies they bring. “Many local governments have reduced their overall costs after hiring a professional manager. Savings can come from decreased operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, and effective use of technology. The economic health of the community may also benefit from the implementation of improved business development and retention strategies.” A skilled manager can streamline workflows, eliminate redundancy, modernize outdated processes, and ensure compliance with best practices, all of which contribute to more cost-effective and transparent governance. In some Montana communities, these efficiencies lead to long-term savings because of the investment in professional leadership.[11]

IV. Appendix

Exhibit A:

Certificate Establishing the Plan of the Existing Form of Government for the Town of Ennis:

CERTIFICATE
ESTABLISHING THE RATIFIED
PLAN OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE
TOWN OF ENNIS

As ratified by the voters on November 2, 1976, the government of the Town of Ennis shall be organized under this plan of government (Charter) in accordance with Section 47A-3-208, Revised Codes of Montana:

Article I

General Provisions
Section 1.01 Powers of the City

(1) The City of Ennis, Montana, shall have all powers not prohibited by the Constitution of Montana, the laws of Montana, or this Charter.

(2) The City of Ennis may levy an amount not to exceed the maximum amount, including the general mill levy and all special levies, allowable to a general power local government unit by the State of Montana.

(3) There shall be no new kinds of taxes levied without affirmative vote of the people.

Section 1.02 Interpretation of Power

The powers and authority of this self-government unit shall be liberally construed. Every reasonable doubt as to the existence of a city power or authority shall be resolved in favor of the existence of that power or authority.

Section 1.03 Intergovernmental Relations

The city may exercise any of its powers or perform any of its functions and may participate in the financing thereof, jointly or in cooperation, by contract or otherwise, with any one or more states or civil divisions or agencies thereof, or the United States or any agency thereof.

Section 1.04 Oath of Office

Before entering upon the duties of office, all elected city officials shall take and subscribe to the oath of office as follows: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of the State of Montana, this Charter, and that I will discharge the duties of my office, so help me God."

Article II
City Commission

Section 2.01 Composition, terms, election, qualifications, compensation, removal, filling of vacancies, meetings.

(1) The City of Ennis shall have a commission composed of five (5) members.

(2) Members of the commission shall be elected for terms of four (4) years. These terms shall be overlapping. (Election, November 1980)

(3) Elections for the commission shall be non-partisan.

(4) Commissioners shall be elected at large, as provided by state law.

(5) Only qualified voters of the city shall be eligible to hold the office of Commissioner.

(6) The commission shall determine the annual salary of commission members, and the mayor, by ordinance. No ordinance increasing such salary shall become effective until the date of commencement of the terms of commission members elected at the next regular election, provided that such election follows the adoption of such ordinance by at least six (6) months.

(7)(a) The office of commissioner shall become vacant upon his/her death, resignation, removal from office by any method authorized by law, or forfeiture of his/her office.

(b) A commissioner shall forfeit his/her office if he/she:

(i)loses his/her eligibility for election to his/her commission seat.

(ii)violates any expressed prohibition of this charter.

(iii) without commission approval, fails to attend two (2) consecutive, regularly scheduled meetings or absences himself/herself from the city continuously for thirty (30) days without consent of the commission.

(iv) is convicted of a felony or other offence involving moral turpitude,

(8) In the event of a vacancy, the commission shall by majority vote of the remaining members, appoint a person, eligible to hold such a commission seat, to fill the vacancy until the next regular city election at which time the remainder of the term shall be filled as provided by law.

(9) The commission shall meet regularly at least once a month at such times and places as the commission may prescribe. Special meetings may be held on the call of the mayor or four (4) members of the commission, or by ten percent (10%) of the eligible voters. Such meetings shall be public and, whenever practicable, upon twenty-four (24) hours notice. The commission may recess for the purpose of discussing in a closed session, limited to its own membership, any matter which would tend to defame or prejudice the character or reputation of any person, provided the general subject matter for consideration is expressed in the motion calling for such session and that final action thereon shall not be taken by the commission until the matter is placed on the agenda.

Section 2.02 Powers and Duties

The city commission shall be the legislative and policy determining body of the city. All powers of the city shall be vested in the commission, except as otherwise provided by law or this charter, and the commission shall provide for the exercise thereof and for the performance of all duties and obligations imposed on the city by law.

Section 2.03 Ordinances

In addition to other acts required by law or by this charter to be done by ordinance, those acts of the commission shall be by ordinance which:

(1) Adopt or amend an administrative code or establish, alter or abolish any city department, office or agency;

(2) Provide for a fine or other penalty or establish a rule or regulation for violation of which a fine or other penalty is imposed;

(3) Levy taxes, except as otherwise provided by law or this charter;

(4) Grant, renew or extend a franchise;

(5) Regulate the rate charged for its services by a public utility;

(6) Authorize the borrowing of money;

(7) Convey or lease or authorize the conveyance or lease of any lands of the city;

(8) Amend or repeal any ordinance previously adopted, except as otherwise provided in Article VI with respect to repeal of ordinances reconsidered under the referendum power.

Section 2.04 Prohibitions

(1) Neither the commission nor any of its members may dictate the appointment or removal of any employee whom the mayor or any of his/her subordinates are empowered to appoint.

(2) Except for the purpose of inquiry or investigation under this charter or city ordinances, the commission or its members shall deal with city employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the mayor solely through the mayor.

Article III City Mayor

Section 3.01 Qualifications, Term, Election, Removal, Filling Vacancies, Meetings

(1) Only qualified voters of the city shall be eligible for the position of mayor.

(2) The mayor shall be elected for a term of four (4) years.

(3) Election of the mayor shall be non-partisan.

(4) The mayor shall be elected at large, as provided by state law.

(5)(a) The office of mayor shall become vacant upon his/her death, resignation, removal from office by any method authorized by law, or forfeiture of his/her office.

(b) The mayor shall forfeit his/her office if he/she:

(i)loses his/her eligibility for election to his/her position;

(ii)violates any expressed prohibition of this charter;

(iii) without commission approval, fails to attend two (2) consecutive regularly scheduled meetings or absences himself/herself from the city continuously for thirty (30) days without consent of the commission;

(iv) is convicted of a felony or other offence involving moral turpitude.

(6) In the event of a vacancy, the commission shall by majority vote, appoint a person, eligible to hold the mayor position, to fill the vacancy until the next regular

city election at which time the remainder of the term shall be filled as provided by law.

(7) The mayor shall preside at all meetings of the commission.

Section 3.02 Powers and Duties of the Mayor

(1) The mayor shall be the chief executive officer of the city; he/she shall be responsible to the electors for the administration of all city affairs placed in his/her charge by this charter, law, ordinance, or resolution.

(2) The mayor shall:

(a) enforce laws, ordinances, and resolutions;

(b) perform other duties required of him/her by law, ordinance or resolution;

(c) direct, supervise and administer all departments, agencies, and offices of the city except as otherwise provided by law or this charter;

(d) carry out policies established by the commission;

(e) prepare the commission agenda;

(f) preside at all meetings of the commission;

(g) make recommendations to the commission;

(h) call a general town meeting during the second quarter of the Fiscal Year to report on the affairs and financial condition of the city;

(i) execute bonds, notes, contracts and written obligations of the commission subject to the approval of the commission;

(j) report to the commission as the commission may require;

(k) attend, preside over, and take part in commission meetings, but may not vote;

(l) prepare and present the budget to the commission for its approval and execute the budget adopted by the commission;

(m) appoint a City Clerk-Treasurer with the approval (Majority plus one) of the commission;

(n) appoint, suspend, and remove all employees of the city except as otherwise provided by law, this charter, or ordinance. Employees appointed by the mayor and his subordinates shall be administratively responsible to the

mayor;

(o) have the power to veto ordinances and resolutions, subject to override by a majority plus one of the whole number of the commission;

(p) have the power to form Advisory Councils and appoint members to Advisory Councils and appoint members to Advisory Councils whom from and after June 1, 1997, all such members of the local Advisory Councils shall be bona fide residents within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Town of Ennis during the period of their service on said Advisory Councils. (Election, November 1996)

Article IV
Elections and

Nominations

Section 4.01

Elected City

Officials

The procedure for the nomination and election of all city elected officers shall be as prescribed by state law for non-partisan elections.

Section 4.02 Date of Holding Elections

The procedure for holding regular elections and special elections shall be as prescribed by state law. Publication of notice of election shall be had in a newspaper of general circulation in the Town of Ennis by the Town Clerk, according to the laws regulating the election of local officials according to the provisions of the Montana Code Annotated. (Election, November 1996)

Article V
Initiative, Referendum

and Recall Section 5.01

Initiative and

Referendum

The people of Ennis shall retain the right to exercise initiative and referendum powers according to provisions of state law.

Section 5.02 Recall Provision

Any or all of the elected officials provided for in this charter may be removed from office by the electors. The procedure to effect such removal shall be as prescribed by state law.

Article VI Employees

Section 6.01 Residency

From and after June 1, 1997, all employees of the local government of the Town of Ennis shall be bona fide residents within the boundaries of Ennis during the period of their employment by the Town of Ennis.

This requirement shall not apply to any employee: who has been recommended by his or her supervisor as having particular or special qualifications for employment; and whose employment has been approved by a super majority of the full council of the Town Commissioners. A super majority shall equal four (4) out of five
(5) Town Commissioners. (Election, November 1966)

Article VII
Amendment of Charter, Effective Date

and Separability Section 7.01

Amendment of Charter

The people of Ennis retain the right to amend this charter as prescribed by state law.

Section 7.02 Effective Date

This charter shall become effective on May 2, 1977.

Section 7.03 Separability

If a part of this act is invalid, all valid parts that are severable from the invalid part remain in effect. If a part of this act is invalid in one or more of its applications, the part remains in effect in all valid applications that are severable from the invalid applications.

Article VIII
Transition
al
Provisions
Section 8.01 General Transition

The present city commissioners shall provide for transition to this charter by ordinance.

Section 8.02 Election Transition

On April 5, 1977 a general election shall be held to elect one (1) Mayor and five (5) Commissioners. Terms of office for the city commission shall be determined by drawing lots as prescribed by state law, The three (3) Commissioners drawing the largest lots shall serve a two (2) year term and the two (2) commissioners drawing the smallest lots shall serve a one (1) year term. These terms are for the first election only.

Exhibit B.

CERTIFICATE ESTABLISHING THE AMENDED CHARTER AND PROPOSED PLAN OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE TOWN OF ENNIS

Introductory Certification

If ratified by the voters at the election held on November 3, 2026, the government of the Town of Ennis shall be organized under this amended charter and proposed plan of government in accordance with Montana Code Annotated, Title 7, Chapter 3, including MCA §§ 7-3-103, 7-3-114, 7-3-149, 7-3-192, and 7-3-193.

Article I — General Provisions

Section 1.01 Powers of the Town

1. The Town of Ennis, Montana, shall have all powers not prohibited by the Constitution of Montana, the laws of Montana, or this Charter**.**

2. The Town of Ennis, may levy an amount not to exceed the maximum amount, including the general mill levy and all special levies, allowable to a town by the State of Montana.

Section 1.02 Interpretation of Power

The powers and authority of this self-government unit shall be liberally construed. Every reasonable doubt as to the existence of a town power or authority shall be resolved in favor of the existence of that power or authority.

Section 1.03 Intergovernmental Relations

The town may exercise any of its powers or perform any of its functions and may participate in the financing thereof, jointly or in cooperation, by contract or otherwise, with any one or more states or civil divisions or agencies thereof, or the United States or any agency thereof.

Section 1.04 Oath of Office

Before entering upon the duties of office, all elected town officials shall take and subscribe to the oath of office as follows: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of the State of Montana, this Charter, and that I will discharge the duties of my office, so help me God.**”**

Article II — Town Council

Section 2.01 Composition, Terms, Election, Qualifications, Compensation, Removal, Filling of Vacancies, Meetings

1. The Town of Ennis shall have a council composed of five (5) members.
2. Members of the council shall be elected for terms of four (4) years. These terms shall be overlapping.
3. Elections for the council shall be non-partisan.
4. Council members shall be elected at large, as provided by state law.
5. Only qualified voters of the Town of Ennis shall be eligible to hold the office of Town Council Member.
6. The council shall determine the annual salary of council members, and the mayor, by ordinance.
7. The office of council member shall become vacant upon his/her death, resignation, removal from office by any method authorized by law, or forfeiture of his/her office.

a. A council member shall forfeit his/her office if he/she:

I. loses his/her eligibility for election to his/her council seat;

II. violates any expressed prohibition of this charter;

II. without council approval, fails to attend two (2) consecutive, regularly scheduled council meetings or absences himself/herself from the town continuously for thirty (30) days without consent of the council; or

IV. is convicted of a felony or other offense involving moral turpitude.

8. In the event of a vacancy, the council shall by majority vote of the remaining members, appoint a person, eligible to hold such council seat, to fill the vacancy until the next regular town election at which time the remainder of the term shall be filled as provided by law**.**

9. The council shall meet regularly at least once a month at such times and places as the council may prescribe. Special meetings may be held on the call of the mayor or four (4) members of the council or by ten percent (10%) of the eligible voters. Such meetings shall be public and, whenever practicable, upon forty-eight (48) hours notice:

a. The council may recess from an open meeting and convene in closed session only during the time that discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy, and only if the presiding officer first determines on the record that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure.

b. Before closing the session, the motion or statement calling for the closed session must identify the general subject matter to be considered with sufficient particularity to inform the public of the nature of the matter, without disclosing the private information that justifies closure.

c. If the individual whose privacy is the subject of the discussion waives the right of individual privacy, the discussion must be conducted in open session unless another lawful basis for closure independently applies.

d. Attendance in the closed session must be limited to council members and any persons whose presence is reasonably necessary for the council's consideration of the matter. The council may not use the closed session to discuss matters beyond the stated lawful basis for closure.

e. No final action may be taken in closed session. Any final action on the matter must be taken only after the matter has been placed on the agenda for an open meeting and the council has reconvened in open session.

f. Nothing in this section limits the council's authority to close a meeting for any other purpose expressly authorized by Montana law, including discussion of litigation strategy when an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public agency, except where closure is prohibited by law.

10. Section 2.02 Powers and Duties

The town council shall be the legislative and policy determining body of the town. All powers of the town shall be vested in the council, except as otherwise provided by law or this charter, and the council shall provide for the exercise thereof and for the performance of all duties and obligations imposed on the town by law.

Section 2.03 Town Mayor

1. The mayoral position shall be selected from and approved by the seated council members.
2. The council member selected shall serve as mayor for one year unless selected for an additional term by the council.
3. The mayor may be removed by four (4) council votes, whereupon a new mayor shall be selected by the council.
4. The mayor shall be the presiding officer of the council, shall vote as other council members and may not veto measures approved by the council. In the absence of the mayor, the council shall appoint one of the council members present to serve as presiding officer.
5. The mayor shall be the ceremonial officer of the town and shall have no additional duties or responsibilities except when required by the council, and in the absence of the Town Manager, the mayor shall perform only those administrative duties expressly delegated by ordinance, resolution, or written policy of the council, consistent with the Council-Manager form of government and the authority of the Town Manager.

6. The office of mayor shall become vacant upon death, resignation or removal from office by any method authorized by law or this charter, and a successor mayor shall be appointed by the council**.**

Section 2.04 Ordinances

In addition to other acts required by law or by this charter to be done by ordinance, those acts of the council shall be by ordinance which:

1. Adopt or amend an administrative code or establish, alter or abolish any town department, office or agency;
2. Provide for a fine or other penalty or establish a rule or regulation for violation of which a fine or other penalty is imposed;
3. Levy taxes, except as otherwise provided by law or this charter;
4. Grant, renew or extend a franchise;
5. Regulate the rate charged for its services by a public utility;
6. Authorize the borrowing of money;
7. Convey or lease or authorize the conveyance or lease of any lands of the town; and
8. Amend or repeal any ordinance previously adopted, except as otherwise provided in Article VI with respect to repeal of ordinances reconsidered under the referendum power.

Section 2.05 Prohibitions

1. Neither the council nor any of its members may dictate the appointment or removal of any employee whom the manager or any of his/her subordinates are empowered to appoint.

2. Except for the purpose of inquiry or investigation under this charter or town ordinances, the council or its members shall deal with town employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the manager solely through the manager.

Article III — Town Manager

Section 3.01 Appointment of Manager

1**.** The town council shall appoint a town manager who shall serve under contract as chief administrative officer of the town.

2**.** The town council shall enter into a contract with said town manager which shall specifically outline the conditions of employment. Said contract shall be for an initial term of not less than three (3) years and not more than five (5) years and may be extended by majority vote of the town council.

Section 3.02 Duties of the Town Manager

The manager shall:

1. enforce laws, ordinances, and resolutions;
2. perform the duties required by law, ordinance, or resolution;
3. administer the affairs of the town;
4. direct, supervise, and administer all departments, agencies, and offices of the town except as otherwise provided by law or ordinance;
5. carry out policies established by the council;
6. prepare and publish the council agenda pursuant to MCA § 2-3-103;
7. recommend measures to the council;
8. report to the council on the affairs and financial condition of the town;
9. execute bonds, notes, contracts, and written obligations of the council, subject to the approval of the council;
10. report to the council as the council may require;
11. attend council meetings and may take part in the discussion but may not vote;
12. prepare and present the budget to the council for its approval and execute the budget adopted by the council;
13. appoint, suspend, and remove all employees of the town except as otherwise provided by law or ordinance; and
14. appoint members of temporary advisory committees established by the manager**.**

Section 3.03 Removal of Town Manager

The town manager may be removed from office by a majority vote of the whole number of the town council, subject to the terms of the manager's employment contract and applicable law.

Section 3.04 Employees of Council-Manager Government

1**.** Employees appointed by the manager and the manager's subordinates must be administratively responsible to the manager.

2**.** Neither the council nor any of its members may dictate the appointment or removal of any employee whom the manager or any of the manager's subordinates are empowered to appoint.

3**.** Except for the purpose of inquiry or investigation under this title, the council or its members shall deal with the town government employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the manager solely through the manager, and neither the council nor its members may give orders to the employee, either publicly or privately.

Section 3.05 Appointment to Boards

All members of boards, other than temporary advisory committees established by the manager, must be appointed by the manager with the consent of the council.

Article IV — Elections and Nominations

Section 4.01 Elected Town Officials

The procedure for the nomination and election of all town elected officers shall be as prescribed by state law for non-partisan elections.

Section 4.02 Date of Holding Elections

The procedure for holding regular elections and special elections shall be as prescribed by state law. Publication of notice of election shall be had in a newspaper of general circulation in the Town of Ennis by the Town Clerk, according to the laws regulating the election of local officials according to the provisions of the Montana Code Annotated.

Article V — Initiative Referendum and Recall

Section 5.01 Initiative and Referendum

The people of Ennis shall retain the right to exercise initiative and referendum powers according to provisions of state law.

Section 5.02 Recall Provision

Any or all of the elected officials provided for in this charter may be removed from office by the electors. The procedure to effect such removal shall be prescribed by state law.

Article VI — Amendment of Charter, Effective Date and Separability

Section 6.01 Amendment of Charter

The people of Ennis retain the right to amend this charter as prescribed by state law.

Section 6.02 Effective Date

This amended charter and plan of government shall become effective on January 1, 2030.

Section 6.03 Severability

If a part of this act is invalid, all valid parts that are severable from the invalid part remain in effect. If a part of this act is invalid in one or more of its applications, the part remains in effect in all valid applications that are severable from the invalid applications.

Article VII — Transitional Provisions

Section 7.01 General Transition

The Study Commission shall prepare an advisory plan for the orderly transition to this amended charter and plan of government, consistent with MCA §§ 7-3-157 and 7-3-193. If the amended charter and plan of government are approved by the voters, the Town Commission shall provide for implementation by transition ordinance before the effective date.

Section 7.02 Election Transition

At the conclusion of the term of the separately elected mayor serving under the Town of Ennis Charter dated May 2, 1977, the separately elected mayoral office shall be eliminated. Thereafter, the mayor shall be selected from among the seated council members as provided in this amended charter. The transition ordinance shall specify the allocation of executive and administrative duties during the period between voter approval and the January 1, 2030 effective date.

Exhibit C

Certificate Establishing the Date of the Special Election at Which the Amended Plan of Government Shall Be Presented to the Electors of the Town of Ennis

The amended charter proposed by the Local Government Study Commission shall be submitted to the voters of the Town of Ennis at a special election to be held with the general election on November 3, 2026.
We, the Study Commissioners of the Town of Ennis, do hereby certify that this is the date of the special election approved by the Study Commissioners of Ennis.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands.

Done at Ennis Town Hall this _____day of _____.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Study Commissioners, Kelly Elser, Brittney Hirsch

Ex-Officio, Karen Ketchu

Seal

Attest:

_____

Brennah Bench, Ennis Town Clerk

Exhibit D.

Certificate Establishing the Official Ballot for the November 3, 2026

Special Election Instructions to Voters:

Place an "X" in the box which expresses your preference.

OFFICIAL BALLOT

BALLOT ON THE AMENDED PLAN OF ENNIS TOWN GOVERNMENT

Vote for One.

▢ **FOR** adoption of the amended Charter providing for Council-Manager structure of government proposed by the Ennis Study Commission.

▢ **FOR** retaining the existing Charter with the Commission-Executive structure of government.

We, the Study Commissioners of the Town of Ennis, do hereby certify that this is the official ballot approved by the Study Commissioners of the Town of Ennis. In testimony whereof, we set our hands.

Done at Town of Ennis Hall this _____day of _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Study Commissioners, Kelly Elser, Brittney Hirsch

Ex-Officio, Karen Ketchu

Seal

Attest:

_____

Brennah Bench, Ennis Town Clerk

Exhibit E.

Certificate Establishing The Effective Date of The Proposal If Approved (§ 7-3-156)

The effective date of the alternative plan of local government of The Town of Ennis takes effect 12:01 am, January 1, 2030

We, the Study Commissioners of the Town of Ennis do hereby certify this is the effective date of the alternative plan of local government of the Town of Ennis approved by the Study Commissioners of the Town of Ennis.

In testimony whereof, we set our hands.

Done at Ennis Town Hall this ___ day of 2026.

_____

_____

_____

Study Commissioners, Kelly Elser, Brittney Hirsch

Ex-Officio, Karen Ketchu

Seal

Attest:

_____

Brennah Bench, Ennis Town Clerk

F. References

[1] October 15, 2024, meeting minutes: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1DXvYfFiMImx3jIMs4e3hrOeVT3M2pFhh

[2] 2022 Audit Findings. Full audit: https://www.ennismontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ENNIS-TOWN-2022-AUDIT. pdf

TOWN OF ENNIS
SCHEDULE OF FINDINGS AND RESPONSES
For the Year Ended June 30, 2022

2022-001. SEGREGATION OF DUTIES

Criteria: Duties should be segregated to provide reasonable assurance that transactions are handled appropriately.

Condition: There is a lack of segregation of duties among personnel.

Effect: Transactions could be mishandled.

Cause: There are a limited number of personnel for certain functions.

Recommendation: The duties should be separated as much as possible, and alternative controls should be used to compensate for lack of separation. The governing board should provide some of these controls. The following internal control over utility accounting should be implemented:

- On a monthly basis, aged accounts receivable and adjustment/write-off reports for utility accounts receivable should be submitted to the Mayor and Town Council for review and approval.

Response: This is an ongoing issue for the Town of Ennis. The Town works to ensure the Commission and Mayor are involved in the day to day operations of the Town. Monthly financial reports are supplied to and reviewed by the department heads. The commission reviews all claims prior to the claim being paid. All checks require two signatures. The bank statements are currently reconciled by the clerk as we do not have a deputy clerk. The Mayor reviews the bank statements against the accounting reconciliation reports for accuracy. Monthly cash reconciliation records are reviewed at this time in the same manner as the bank reconciliation reports.

2022-002. AUDITOR PREPARED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Criteria: As part of its internal control structure, it is the government's responsibility to prepare its financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP).

Condition: The government does not have the expertise to prepare or evaluate the selection and application of accounting principles and resulting disclosures and presentations within the auditor prepared financial statements.

Cause: The government is a small organization with limited resources.

Effect: It is common for a small organization to rely on the audit firm to prepare the financial statements; however, an audit firm cannot be considered part of the government's internal control by professional standards currently in effect. Since some presentations and disclosures may be material to the financial statements, this weakness in internal control would be classified as material.

Recommendation: While it may not be cost effective to do so, we recommend the government consider hiring a qualified person to evaluate the auditor prepared financial statements.

Response: The Town of Ennis, having limited resources, is relying on the Mayor to review monthly financial statements with the Clerk/Treasurer. Quarterly statements are to be presented to the Commission for review. The annual financial statement is prepared by our auditor's office and reviewed by the Clerk/Treasurer to check the quality of the document.

2022-003. TOTAL OTHER POST-EMPLOYMENT BENEFIT LIABILITY NOT RECORDED

Criteria: U.S. generally accepted accounting principles require the total OPEB liability and related expense be recorded in the financial statements.

Condition: The government did not record the total other post-employment benefit (OPEB) liability and related expense (GASB Statement No. 75) in the financial statements.

Cause: The government did not engage an actuarial firm to assist in determining the total OPEB liability and related expense as of and for the year ended June 30, 2022.

Effect: The governmental activities, the business-type activities and the proprietary funds' liabilities are understated, net position is overstated and expenses would change.

Recommendation: The government should engage an actuarial firm to determine the total OPEB liability and related expense.

Response: The Town of Ennis has found that the cost outweighs the benefit.

2022-004. BANK RECONCILIATIONS

Criteria: Strong internal controls dictate bank reconciliations be completed monthly. Part of the reconciling process includes identifying and resolving unreconciled differences.

Condition: Bank reconciliations for fiscal year 2022 were not timely and unreconciled differences were not resolved, but instead were carried from month to month.

Cause: Unknown.

Effect: General ledger account balances were incorrect.

Recommendation: Bank reconciliations should be completed monthly. Unreconciled cash differences should be identified and resolved immediately.

Response: The Town is working on methods to see that bank reconciliations are completed in a timely manner. As noted earlier in this response, the Town is currently short staffed so existing staff and officials are assisting where they can.

2022-005. EXPENDITURE BUDGET OVERSPENT

Criteria: Section 7-6-4005, MCA, requires that expenditures be limited to appropriations for each budgeted fund.

Condition: The Ennis Planning and Health Insurance-Employer Contribution funds were overspent for the year ended June 30, 2022.

Effect: Non-compliance with state law.

Cause: Procedures are not in place to monitor budgeted expenditures.

Recommendation: Procedures should be developed to ensure that expenditure budgets are not overspent.

Response: The expenditure budget will be reviewed monthly and if it is found that there is, or will be, overspending, the matter will be taken to the Town Commission for consideration of a Resolution of Budget Amendment.

2022-006. BIDDING

Criteria: Per Section 7-5-4302(1), a contract for the purchase of any automobile, truck, other vehicle, road machinery, apparatus, appliances, equipment, or materials or supplies or for construction, repair, or maintenance in excess of $80,000 must be let to the lowest responsible bidder after advertisement for bids.

Condition: The town contracted paving for an amount in excess of $80,000 without going through the formal bid process.

Cause: Department heads misinterpreted the specific bidding requirements for this expenditure.

Effect: Noncompliance with state procurement statutes.

Recommendation: A contract for any purchase in excess of $80,000 should be formally advertised for bid in accordance with Section 7-5-4302(1), MCA.

Response: The Town has made sure that all Department Heads know that a purchase in excess of $80,000 has to be put out for bid and have given them Section 7-5-4302(1), MCA for reference.

2021-001. SEGREGATION OF DUTIES

Status: This finding is unresolved and is repeated as finding 2022-001 for the year ended June 30, 2022.

2021-002. AUDITOR PREPARED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Status: This finding is unresolved and is repeated as finding 2022-002 for the year ended June 30, 2022.

2021-003. TOTAL OTHER POST-EMPLOYMENT BENEFIT LIABILITY NOT RECORDED

Status: This finding is unresolved and is repeated as finding 2022-003 for the year ended June 30, 2022.

2021-004. EXPENDITURE BUDGET OVERSPENT

Status: This finding is unresolved and is repeated as finding 2022-005 for the year ended June 30, 2022.

[3]August 22, 2024 meeting minutes

b. Resolution 607-2024 A Resolution of the Town of Ennis Commission Adopting and establishing the mills to be levied and the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2025- Discussion and Vote: With discussion on It the Mayor experienced her want for a time set apart to fully break down It and comparing multiply companies. Commissioner Way makes a motion for a continuation of the discussion.

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1DXvYfFiMImx3jIMs4e3hrOeVT3M2pFhh

[4]January 16, 2025 meeting minutes

I. Contract with Montana League of Cities and Towns for Clerk Services: The contract was not originally included in the budget; however, the solution is to reallocate funds from other line items to cover the cost. Initially, the training will be conducted online. Following that, the budget will be reviewed to assess the possibility of in-person training. This contract provides a training opportunity for the Town clerks, focusing on cash reconciliation processes. Judy Campbell, who works closely with utility billing, will be training Brennah, and Judy Rogers will be training Ginger. During this training, the 2023 and 2024 cash reconciliations will be reviewed. Brittney Hirsch inquired about how the training would proceed if the trainers do not have access to the Town's software. Mayor Haas will explore the possibility of granting them access. Further discussion and a vote will happen on January, 23rd 2025 at 6:15 pm.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12bPEokJJY3b-F6RsCbtbE9ja-o4m7Jnj

[5]January 23, 2025 meeting minutes

d. Contract with Montana League of Cities and Towns for Clerk Services- Discussion and Vote: Commissioner Abernethy motioned to approve the contract with Montana League of Cities and Towns for Clerk Services. Commissioner Hardy seconded the motion. Commissioner Way expressed a desire for training to be provided to all staff in the front office, not just Ginger. Commissioner Abernethy requested additional verbiage be added to the contract to include a post-training report card, confirming that the training was effective and that the clerks fully understood the material. Ginger noted that such a report may already be part of the training process, but she would confirm with the League to ensure documentation of training progress would be provided. There was no further discussion. Mayor Haas called to vote, all commissioners voted aye. M/S/C, unanimous vote.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12bPEokJJY3b-F6RsCbtbE9ja-o4m7Jnj

[6]Contract for Reconciliation and Financial Services and Clerk Training for $4,000

THIS AGREEMENT is made and entered into by and between the **MONTANA LEAGUE OF CITIES AND TOWNS, HELENA, MONTANA,** a 501(c)(4) non-profit association organized and existing under the laws of the State of Montana, 700 West Custer Avenue, Helena, Montana 59602, hereinafter referred to as "MLCT," and **TOWN OF ENNIS**, a municipal corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Montana referred to as "Town," 328 W. Main Street, Ennis, MT 59729, collectively referred to as "Parties."

In consideration of the mutual covenants and agreements herein contained, the receipt and sufficiency whereof being hereby acknowledged, the parties hereto agree as follows:

1. **Effective Date and Term:** This Agreement is effective upon execution by both parties and will terminate on December 31, 2025. Any extension of the term of this Agreement must be set forth in writing and signed by both parties.

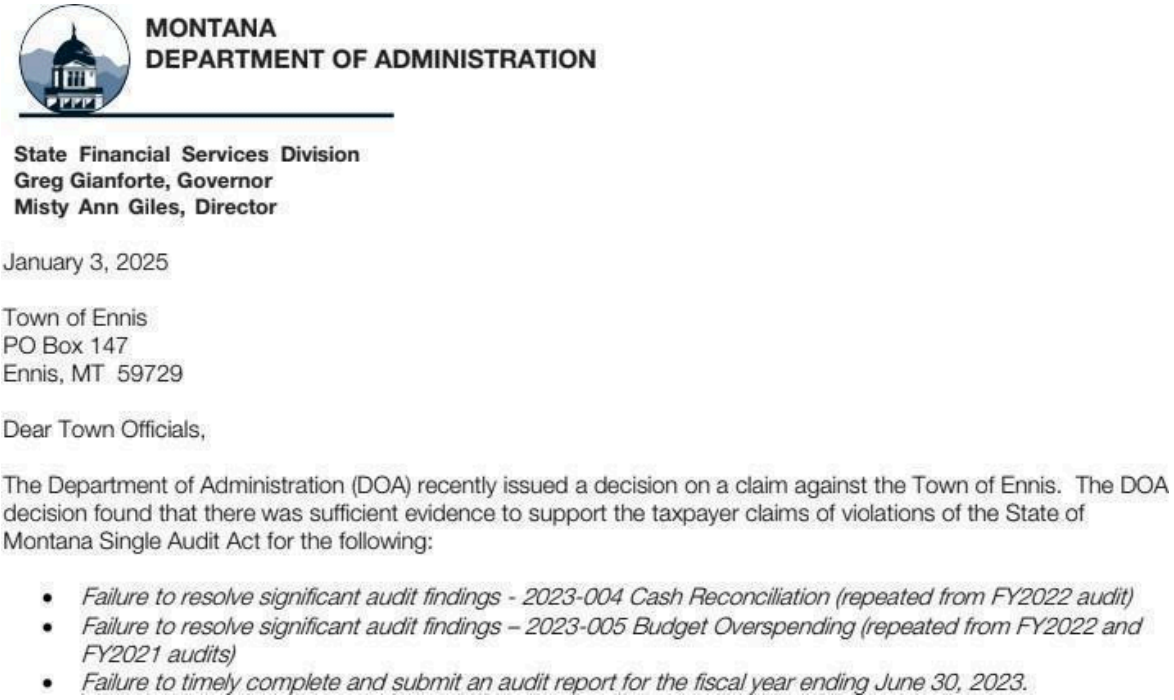
2. **Scope of Services:** MLCT will perform the work and provide the services in accordance with the specifications and requirements as follows:

   • Monthly reconciliation (Bank Reconciliation)-Balance bank statements to computer system. This includes Investment interest posting, redeeming payroll and claims checks, journal vouchers, revenue vouchers, and cash receipts all kinds. Accounts receivables and payables including taxes receivable reports to county reports.

3. **Payment:** Town agrees to pay the MLCT $65.00 per hour and to pay actual costs for travel, lodging, and meals with the total amount due under this Agreement not to exceed Four Thousand ($4,000.00) Dollars. MLCT will send a monthly invoice for hours worked, to be billed at the beginning of each month, due in 30 days.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dX1TwxL9nmGBlo-8MXPPkyRTHBzFP9uT4-iN14JtLu4/edit?usp=sharing

[7]Montana Department of Administration Decision Letter Finding Claims of Violations



MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

State Financial Services Division
Greg Gianforte, Governor
Misty Ann Giles, Director

January 3, 2025

Town of Ennis
PO Box 147
Ennis, MT 59729

Dear Town Officials,

The Department of Administration (DOA) recently issued a decision on a claim against the Town of Ennis. The DOA decision found that there was sufficient evidence to support the taxpayer claims of violations of the State of Montana Single Audit Act for the following:

- *Failure to resolve significant audit findings - 2023-004 Cash Reconciliation (repeated from FY2022 audit)*
- *Failure to resolve significant audit findings – 2023-005 Budget Overspending (repeated from FY2022 and FY2021 audits)*
- *Failure to timely complete and submit an audit report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023.*

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Tn2GC5JlFm5zd7WUdURlB1LUNVfdN-yd

[8]Town Commissioner Status, collected from records kept by the Town of Ennis

Commissioner	Appointed	Elected	Resigned
E. Abernethy	x		
Nihan	x		
Way	x		
Hardy		x	
Cselle	x		
Hankins		x	x
Palmerton		x	x
C. Abernethy		x	x
Bancroft		x	
Roberts		x	
Schroeder	x		
Allison	x		
Ranson		x	x
Vincent		x	x

[9]Summary of current/past employee and elected official questionnaire.

Timestamp	Which one of the following are you?	What are the top 3 challenges you face or faced in your position?	What changes, if any, would help you and/or other town officials/employees deal with these challenges?	Which, if any, of the town's departments or services can be made more efficient by cooperation or consolidation with other units of local government? Please explain your answer.	What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve service or efficiency?	Please provide any other comments you feel would be helpful to the Local Government Study Commission.	Thank you for providing you input. If you would be comfortable with the Study Commission following up with you regarding your answers please provide your contact information.
15:31	Current or Former employee	4/22/2025 Funding, employee retention and communications	Long term planning, higher wages, more than a part time mayor	Sharing of equipment or people, law enforcement co-op w/county	city manager to oversee departments aren't so compartmentalized and provide continuity, employ a grant writer, separate water-sewer from public works and maintenance	a city manager may not have to be full time to be effective; 3/4 time may work	
4/22/2025 18:32	Current or Former elected official	Lack of leadership and communication. Poor management skills regarding employees, duties and repercussions. Negligence of including commission members on important topics and decisions.	City manager will help and hold employees accountable	PD should be dissolved and contract with Sheriff department. No sense in having a PD budget of 200K to patrol 1 mile of town limits. MCSO has deputies trained as SRO so I find myself asking why our Chief of police is still at the school daily. Savings would also be reflected in dissolving court costs.	It's hard to find a qualified mayor that has the backbone to run a business, town manager is a great option. Maybe there are grants available to assist in budgeting for the change?	Great job and thank you all for your hard work in getting this review moving quickly and effectively.	Nikki Hankins-Bottle Barn
4/23/2025 9:20:0	Current or Former employee	As the Deputy Clerk, my top 3 challenges are: 1. It's tough to track down unregistered dogs and some people comply, while others openly ignore the rule. 2. Convincing people they need a new meter reader. 3. Since I work with the public works department, it gets difficult when there is only one worker. Some of the work orders have to be pushed back due to low staffing issues.	Better employee retention and for the residents to learn about the Town's codes.	I strongly believe that collaboration and coordination across all town departments is essential to our collective success. Departments like Zoning and Public Works often interact on overlapping issues, and when we work together as a unified team, we can serve the community more effectively and efficiently. By fostering better communication and alignment across departments, we not only streamline operations but also build a stronger, more responsive town government. When we support one another, we elevate the entire town — and together, we can achieve truly great results.	During my time working for the Town, I've observed that a significant number of residents, roughly 50%, who visit the office are looking to speak with the Zoning Administrator. It can be challenging when we're unable to connect them with someone immediately, as it often results in delays or repeated visits. Having a zoning representative available more consistently would greatly improve the experience for residents, help ensure their questions are addressed promptly, and support more timely processing of permits. I believe this would be a valuable step toward improving overall efficiency and public satisfaction.	Thank you for taking the time to share important information with our residents — it's essential that they have the tools to make informed decisions about the future of their local government. I know how much pride the people of Ennis have in their Town, and I'm truly committed to doing the best job I can to serve them.	bbench@ennismontana.org
4/23/2025 11:13	Current or Former employee	There is a noticeable lack of support from the Town Commission, compounded by limited understanding of departmental operations among Commissioners. Additionally, some Commissioners appear to be operating outside the scope of their legislative authority, often failing to seek clarification on the rationale behind established practices and procedures.	Mandatory training and education for all elected officials from MMIA and the Local Government Center including annual refresher training.	Overall, the Town operates efficiently and effectively when employees are empowered to perform their duties without undue interference or pressure from the Town Commission. Most departments are functioning well under their current structures. However, decisions—such as replacing a single, long-serving attorney with two separate attorneys at two to three times the cost—raise concerns about fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency.	Empowering employees to carry out their responsibilities without undue interference allows for more effective operations. The Commission's role is best fulfilled through policy direction, rather than direct involvement in day-to-day management or employee directives that may fall outside legal or procedural boundaries.	The Local Government Review appears to be guided by a specific agenda. The phrasing of the questions in the public survey suggests that certain conclusions may have been predetermined by the Commission. As it stands, the process resembles more of a 'steering committee' effort than a genuinely impartial review of local government operations.	

Timestamp	Which one of the following are you?	What are the top 3 challenges you face or faced in your position?	What changes, if any, would help you and/or other town officials/employees deal with these challenges?	Which, if any, of the town's departments or services can be made more efficient by cooperation or consolidation with other units of local government? Please explain your answer.	What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve service or efficiency?	Please provide any other comments you feel would be helpful to the Local Government Study Commission.	Thank you for providing you input. If you would be comfortable with the Study Commission following up with you regarding your answers please provide your contact information.
4/24/2025 8:53:1	Current or Former elected official	Informational flow/communication. If the Town has a problem, I wanna hear about it. Social media. The town needs to have solid presence for rumor control Zoning: our town needs enforceable rules clearly spelled out Knowledge. It took me several years to get to the point where I actually became somewhat comfortable with the process. Maybe suggest a shadowing program for commissioners that are being replaced or budget funds for immediate use on taking an online course for government.	Town manager	I believe cooperation would be a mandatory component between the sheriffs department and our police department. Putting aside differences and focusing on the greater good is of the utmost importance. Outsourcing SOME of both public works and IT department responsibilities. Both of these departments require individuals to go above and beyond a 40 hour work week	City manager. Ultimately the current government set up has a four year turnover (sometimes shorter) . Turnover definitely affects both efficiency and stability.	Getting high school kids involved tends to ease tensions when trying to facilitate change or even get conversations started within families. Families are ultimately the smallest form of government in communities.	Yup
4/24/2025 17:06	Current or Former elected official	Communication from the mayor, failure of full time staff withe being able to do their job. or just not getting it done, mayor not enforcing town & hr codes	A person that is experienced and qualified to run a town. They understand HR law, have personnel management experience, and have work experience in a government entity.	This needs to be thoroughly researched and debated. I feel that some of the current employees of the town are not qualified to do the job we need done in the future.	Employee training and better trained management	The town is growing. We have full time employees and a part time mayor. In my experience, employees without managers is inefficient at best. We need a full time manager, currently identified as the mayor.	Mitch.abernethy0613@gmail. com
4/29/2025 19:42	Current or Former elected official	Poor communication from the mayor in general Last minute submission of monthly department reports, by city employees, did not allow sufficient time for review by commissioners prior to scheduled meetings 3. Continued absence at scheduled town meetings by the chief of police resulted in inability of commissioners to ask questions and engage in timely discussion (particularly following the resignation of officer Fischer from the city police force)	Regular monthly email updates from the mayor, particularly on high-profile issues facing the council Require ALL town employees, that submit reports supporting regularly scheduled town meetings, to provide their report (s) for commissioner review no less than 5 working days prior to the meeting(s) Require ALL town employees, that submit reports supporting regularly scheduled meetings, to be physically present at each regularly scheduled town meeting Require the Mayor to provide a complete and comprehensive town budget, that has been thoroughly cross checked prior, to the town commissioners for review, and multiple town discussions, no less than 3 months prior to the State required date for final approval	1. Combine the Zoning Board with the Planning Board 2. Remove separation of authority between the office of the Mayor and town department heads, and the Town Commission	1. Eliminate the separation of authority between the Mayor and town department heads, and the Town Commission	During my brief time as a town commissioner, I experienced a serious lack of integrity firsthand by certain elected and appointed officials. We were also the subject of berating and belittling by the chief of police, in emails and the town newspaper, with no apparent concern from the Mayor. A demonstrated lack of leadership and honor by both the current mayor and chief of police, in my opinion.	Ph: (661) 644-5583 Email: ctabernethy@gmail.com

Timestamp	Which one of the following are you?	What are the top 3 challenges you face or faced in your position?	What changes, if any, would help you and/or other town officials/employees deal with these challenges?	Which, if any, of the town's departments or services can be made more efficient by cooperation or consolidation with other units of local government? Please explain your answer.	What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve service or efficiency?	Please provide any other comments you feel would be helpful to the Local Government Study Commission.	Thank you for providing you input. If you would be comfortable with the Study Commission following up with you regarding your answers please provide your contact information.
9:45:1employee	Current or Former 4/30/2025	No leadership. No follow through on training. Lack of desire to improve processes.	A full time boss / manager	Public works depts could support each other with labor sharing possibly? Law enforcement 100% needs to work together. MCSO and EPD should have a terrific working relationship-it has been deteriorating for several years unfortunately.	Use the software available to cut down on hours to complete tasks.	The Town Mayoral position does not provide quality to the employees of the Town. They deserve solid, full time leadership and oversight. Accountability would drastically improve with a quality Town Manager. The employees deserve regularly scheduled reviews that include praise on the good they're doing and honest feedback for what they need to improve on. A Town manager could drastically improve the lack of culture.	
/1/2025 11:57:4	Current or Former elected official	The first was just learning what to do, where to search out information, procedures, etc.. To make it simple, there is not really any direction given to a new council member to help them learn the ropes. The second is that individual members of the community that attend the town council meetings seem to be a small group of individuals who mean well. These people want transparency and they should get that, but for some reason there seems to be personal disagreements of the past that have caused some hard feelings between council members and individuals within the town. In my opinion, we need to work together for the betterment of the town of Ennis. Third, it takes so long to get anything looked at, presented, followed up on, changed, voted on, whatever, and this makes things not very productive and efficient at times. I understand the open meetings requirements and the transparency laws. Still to me, meeting once a month with no other communication is like being married to someone and you both have a business and children together, but you two only speak to each other once a month for a few hours.	I would definitely recommend that we have someone who works with any new council or board member to get them started in their new role. I would love to see someone assigned to this, or we could even let the last person to be elected be the one to be like a big brother or sister to the newly elected. Some type of a quick training type of session and someone they can call for a few weeks if they have a question. I am not trying to create a new role because we know that it is a few individuals who volunteer to help out, and I know everyone is busy with their own lives. I just know that I had to figure it all out on my own and I could have been a couple of months ahead of where I am now if I had some guidance. Also, I am the type that speaks up and seeks the information. Not everyone is going to do that, so some of these individuals may would like the assistance.	I believe we have a big need to focus on our growth and infrastructure right now. I would love to see a few work sessions that focus on each department in the city. I believe that we need to go back to each department and begin with A and work our way to Z. This would take a lot of time and dedication, but I believe we can do it and that it is necessary considering the growth of the town of Ennis. Since it is important to many of the town's business owners that their voices be heard, I would like to see a liaison type of position looked at to help address this need. Not a paid position or anything that formal, but a way for the local business to feel that they are being represented.	I believe that the town of Ennis has a big need in workforce housing. The town also needs money. I believe that there is a way for the town to provide this workforce housing while at the same time, make the town more appealing to potential new employees. The town could see this as a income stream while they help out others in need.	I think this is a great time for this Government Review to be taking place. I know Ennis is small, but it is growing. The town has a lot to work on and we all need to pull together for the benefit of this community. I would like to see everyone in this community not feel uncomfortable to bring forth any concerns or opinions that they have. It has been pointed out that their are citizens who do not feel like they are heard and this to me if a problem. All elected or hired individuals work for the citizens of the town of Ennis. We are not above anyone else, we are here to serve our fellow citizens.	Stephanie Cselle 706-273-6267

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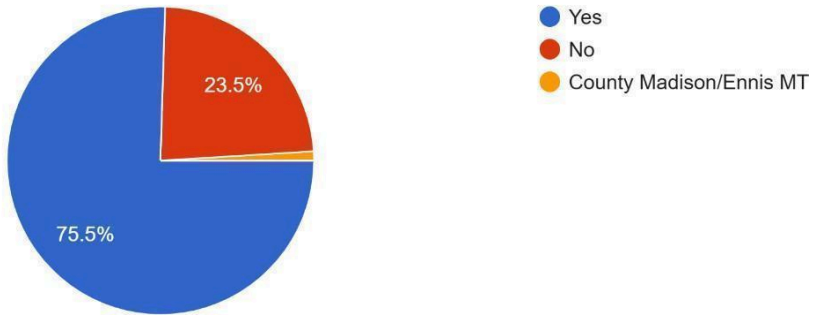
5/5/2025 9:55:09	Current or Former employee	employee retention, ageing equipment and infrastructure,	?	ZONING we pay two people to do one job and she doesn't even have to be here we have to answer alot of questions on her behalf			406-922-9587
5/6/2025 9:51:31	Current or Former employee	There is not a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities by the Town Commission. They often work outside of their legislative authority and compound matters. They should be concentrating on matters the Town needs accomplished. An example is water/sewer rates that have been left undone for numerous years even though the subject has been brought up numerous times.	When bringing something to a meeting with no notice of what they have in mind to the Mayor beforehand there is often discussion without the benefit of anyone being prepared. Also, the Commission, for the most part, should be doing the groundwork for matters they are working on. Not relying on others to do the work for them.	Most departments work well together. However, information and documents that have been requested to be included in the shared drives or when being processed have been ignored. This leaves a hole in the process that needs to be followed in order for the Town to be operating efficiently. In order for the Town to run efficiently the Commission needs a better understanding of what it takes to run the Town. Decisions are being made with little information other than what has been expressed to them by sources that want certain things changed, added, discarded, etc.	The Commission's position is to set policy, write legislation, etc. They would best serve the Town by not involving themselves in the daily operations of the Town. It is important to listen to your employees as they are the ones, lets say, in the trenches on a daily basis and are the integral part of the Town operating smoothly and efficiently.	It is relatively evident the LGR Study Commission has predetermined ideas of what conclusions will be in the final report. The process is being rushed and that further leads to the belief that the conclusions have already been decided on. This does not appear to be an impartial review of the Town's form of Government.	
5/8/2025 13:05:0	Current or Former employee	Managements inability to manage both staff and everyday situations.	Interpersonal relationship training, management training, de-escalation training.	N/A	Be open to ideas that could improve both internal operations and public relationships. The mentality of 'out of staters just want to change everything ' is hurting day to day operations of the town.	I believe having strong leadership with the towns best interests in mind is the best way to building a great town to live in.	
5/9/2025 10:54:2	Current or Former elected official	not able to be there enough to oversee what was going on not able to discipline employees without blowback working with council people that were uneducated or uninformed even though they had access to the information and chose not to do the work	town manager (for the ability to see everything that goes on day to day and be able to react when needed commissioners knowing what they have the ability to do and what their job is (job description education)	police/sheriff department and dispatch. Need to have a good plan going forward and ability to work together for the better and safety of the public	update all technology and start using what is available.. it makes work easier and quick and gives transparency ability to dictae what needs to be done with town employees (not them doing what they want when they want to) ability for public to be able to see and talk to all members of the town (employees, commissioners, mayor, public works, zoning) functional website with correct information, an easier way to navigate the site to make it user friendly		

Timestamp	Which one of the following are you?	What are the top 3 challenges you face or faced in your position?	What changes, if any, would help you and/or other town officials/employees deal with these challenges?	Which, if any, of the town's departments or services can be made more efficient by cooperation or consolidation with other units of local government? Please explain your answer.	What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve service or efficiency?	Please provide any other comments you feel would be helpful to the Local Government Study Commission.	Thank you for providing you input. If you would be comfortable with the Study Commission following up with you regarding your answers please provide your contact information.
10:59:3employee	Current or Former 5/9/2025	not having a leader that is professional understaffed poor communication	professional leadership would really help all employees. we need someone to monitor, lead and keep the pulse check regularly	public works departments with other towns working together is a great idea ennis should have 24 7 coverage of police.. at a reasonable price to the taxpayers	upgrade all meters get trained up and use the expensive software that the town pays for in the office need some accountability to be sure those things happen and don't just kick the can down the road	what would really help employee retention is if the employees felt like they were part of a team.. like we were all working for the better of the community that pays the payroll	
5/14/2025 11:43	Current or Former employee	no effective leadership, which lead to lack of training and accountability of others. not feeling like my work made a difference - no recognition	it would be nice if there was more structure. i have found at other jobs that feeling like you are part of a team makes everyone do a better job and also helps keep people long term. accountability. if there is a problem but you feel like there is nobody to take the problem to, or that no consequences will come of poor performance then you start to lack ambition to do the best you can	still hard to believe that the town pays so much for a police department but does not have full time coverage	mandatory training on a regular basis. team training and events.	there are so many employees that have a negative attitude about change or towards anyone that wants to try to do things different or improve processes. a few bad apples can really ruin the bunch.. or just run them off eventually. some people stay only for the benefits but they see the issues and just deal with it. it really would just take the right person in the right position to turn the place around slowly but surely.	
5/14/2025 12:12	Current or Former employee	Leadership is difficult with limited time to offer. Employees take it upon them self in leadership roles that usually benefits themselves more than what is correct. Absolutely no communications. So much behind the scenes. Employees should have been terminated for their actions continue to be employed and making same mistakes.	Ennis is ready for leadership that is available and there when decisions are being made by employees. Someone that can monitor more of the day to day activities and be aware of violations that are being allowed to continue without consequences	Deputy Clerk and Clerk Treasure could be combined, Manager would be able to take on roles that Clerk Treasure assumes.	Manager or at the very least Mayor that has more time to devote so things are always moving forward, fairly and efficiently	It is time for a positive change.	

[10] Summary of citizen survey

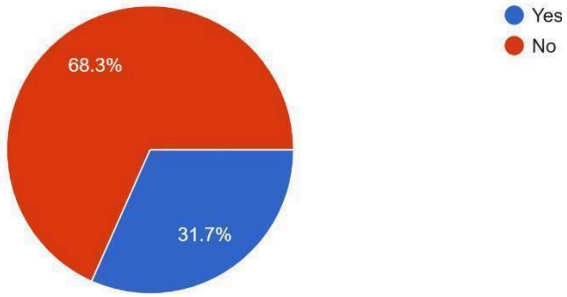
Do you live within the incorporated Town of Ennis?

102 responses



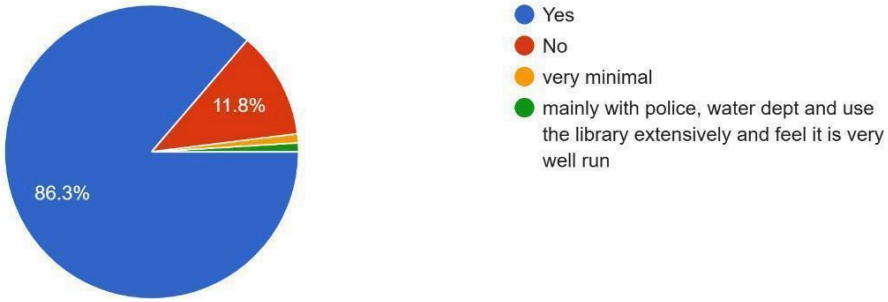
Do you own a business within the Town of Ennis?

101 responses



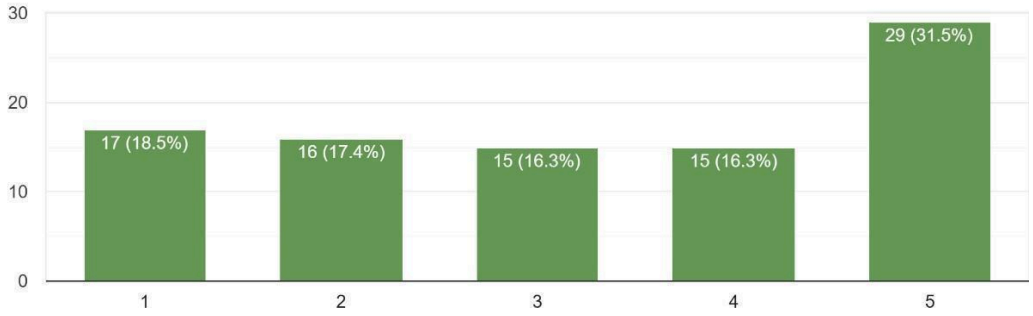
Have you ever interacted with the local Ennis government?

102 responses



How would you rate your experience with your interaction?

92 responses



Have you ever attended an Ennis Town Commission Meeting?

102 responses

What is the local Ennis government doing well?
we do zero well
ok
easy to stay in touch by way of emails of all meetings. Good!

I think, for the most part, the elected officials have good intentions and they do the best for the town.
?
roads/plowing water survey work on zoning being present at comm. events Library is a treasure and gathers people
providing employees top notch benefits plowing our roads better than in past
Spending our tax dollars
Being pleasant
Spending money
Very inclusive
Not much
Nothing to be honest. I’ve never seen a town perform on such a low level.
Nothing. Only job is to keep the town citizens safe and we are not
Running off commissioner's

No. The audit results and lack of management of employees is a problem. The solution is a city manager that puts their foot down.
Nothing
No
Replacing water lines
Very little. Every issue is addressed close to or after the closing date. The budget hasn't been balanced in years! The Town of Ennis has cost the taxpayers up to $40,000-$50,000 per year for auditors to balance the Town's office assets. Unbelievable!
Public Services, The Employees are great and the cops are helpful and doing a great job
Public Works
Police, Public works, Office Employees
Water, Sewer, Police, Front office employees
Managing to not lose their tempers with unruly residents, haha. Handling town maintenance.
Officer Moore is awesome my kids love him, Ginger and the new girl at Town Hall are great.

The town commission finally seems to have a group that works well together, as well as the all seem to come from diverse backgrounds.
I like the new town commission and it seems that they all work well together.
Wasting time, move forward, seek outside community help…hopefully our newest members can motivate for change
Meetings posted, alternative ways to attend meetings, listen to people.
Public service, cops are great, public works is on top of it, office staff is friendly.
Handling the boom town
attends meetings, are appropriate
Not very clear at all
They seem very good at spending money on frivolous things: lawsuits, parklets, arguments over police, and trees (to name a few) when we desperately need to upgrade infrastructure.
Keeping the twon rinning
Tree board
hanging on to their two longest employees
failing audits

Barely surving
I don't know
Employees, cops, public works, Ginger and Brennah
I greatly appreciate the patience and attention that Town Hall employees consistently provide to the residents. Their dedication is truly commendable. Additionally, the school would benefit from having someone like John Moore, who is committed to safeguarding the future of our generation. The Public Works team is hardworking and always eager to assist, contributing greatly to the community’s well-being.
They are amazing at notifying residents when a leak or water problem occurs. Eric Olson is always willing to help and work with people. The office ladies are kind and get things done.
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Not a damn thing.
I think the Mayor is trying to do the correct things but has a commission that is severely lacking and is not supportive. The commissioners make the mayor look bad. Corey Hardy is another one trying to do the correct thing and is prepared for meetings and seems to understand the process.
Reaching out when a water or sewer problem occurs. The employees are smart people who are just trying their best for the town.

Staff they are great. The cops are friendly and great with kids, Public works is responsive and the office ladies are friendly.
Communicating schedule and agenda of government meetings and, if a citizen has signed up for email communications on other events, status of services, or safety issues, those communications are timely and informative. The government effectively responds to emergency needs such as water line failures, but in the case of water line failures there may be a need to replace water infrastructure that could help eliminate such failures. Fixing those failures on an emergency basis is especially expensive because the contractor is getting a premium for their work and are usually paid on a time and materials basis because the scope of work is unknown going in. Inevitably such work uncovers additional things that need to be fixed, so the cost increases even more.
Staff and Services
i truly feel the Ennis government is doing so good at listening to the concerns of the residents and trying to make things fair for all.
Staff is great. The Police Department does their Job and the office staff is friendly and responsive
Open Meetings, Transparency
Staff - police - public works - office
Trying to help with growth .But, some think they’re going to stop growth.
The employees they are all great even the cops are nice - and I don't like cops
running through Commissioners

Not prioritizing water storage and repairing lines
Snow plowing and the local government review seems to be doing a great job.
The library is a great resource and has a wonderful staff. Plowing of streets has been better than in years past. Manages the treatment ponds well.
Committed to governing the town
The employees are great and helpful.
I believe the Ennis Local Government is doing an excellent job of keeping residents informed about water issues when Lions Park is closed. Additionally, I commend their efforts in embracing the growth and changes occurring within the town.
letting Lions Club run the park
Letting employees struggle apparently.
Employees are great.
I believe the local Ennis government is doing well at notifying people of water shut-offs and water maintenance done around town
Our community thrives when leadership focuses on practical solutions rather than political interests.

Not sure
Not much

there is always room for improvement and seems they trying to continue to grow forward!
I'm not sure - I have not specific complaints

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Not sure

Not much
there is always room for improvement and seems they trying to continue to grow forward!
I'm not sure - I have not specific complaints

What do you see as the Town's biggest challenges?
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability, Storm Water drainage on Main Street
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance
Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability, North 40 is terrible! Poor planning. Water & sewer maint. Managing junk. Pretty lax. Virginia City does a better job.
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, planning for the future in a realistic way
Managing growth, fire protection for the coming draught
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability, 1. Infrastructure 2. Managing growth 3. Maintaining current services 4. Financial stability 5. Public health and safety
Managing growth, Financial stability
Managing growth
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Managing growth, Financial stability
To many rules and regulations
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability

Infrastructure maintenance
Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability, Only taking the wealthy members into consideration
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability, Getting control of Departments IT, SRO and the Ennis Police Dept.
Managing growth, Maintaining current services
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability, Bring in resources, jobs, housing,
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability

Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Assuring the environment and beauty of the community is preserved
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Infrastructure maintenance
Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance
Maintaining current services, Financial stability
Financial stability
Managing growth, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability, Accountability
Managing growth
Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Managing growth
Managing growth
Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Public health and safety, Financial stability, Broken justice system established by corrupt Chief of Police, instated by the corrupt Mayor.
Maintaining current services
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
Managing growth, Not making training for the council mandatory
Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Maintaining current services, Financial stability
All of the above, with financial stability key to meeting the other challenges.
Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance

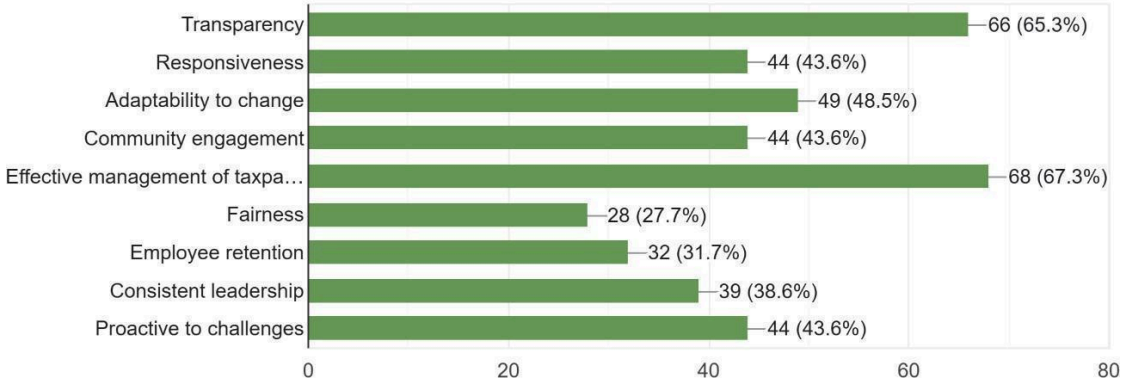
Managing growth, Employee retention
Public health and safety
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Infrastructure maintenance
Public health and safety
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance
Maintaining current services, Public health and safety
Infrastructure maintenance
Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance
Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance, Financial stability
Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety
Infrastructure maintenance
Managing growth, Financial stability
Managing growth, Financial stability
Managing growth, Financial stability
Maintaining current services, Public health and safety
Managing growth, getting all to follow town code
Public health and safety
Managing growth, Financial stability
Managing growth, Infrastructure maintenance
Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability
people who want to be involved but are misinformed onwhat is or is not
Managing growth
Managing growth, Maintaining current services, Infrastructure maintenance, Public health and safety, Financial stability

Do you believe the current form of government has the ability to effectively achieve long term goals and respond to those challenges?

102 responses

What What characteristics of your local Ennis government are important to you?

101 responses



Do you feel the Ennis government has a clear, long-term strategy for continuing to provide reliable and appropriate services to its residents?

101 responses

Do you feel a different form of government that may provide more oversight in day-to-day operations would benefit the taxpayers of Ennis?

98 responses

Please provide any other comments you have regarding the form and functionality of the Ennis local government.
Commission - Manager structure would be best ALSO- what happened to the “Envisioning Ennis” plans? They were great. We just spent all that taxpayer money on them and abandoned ship because some loud naysayers lost their minds over parklets? Why throw the baby out with the bath water??
need more input from people out of town. AND A VOTE!
sure would like to have more public participation at city meetings!
Having been on the city council of a city of 40k, now about 100k, I like the city manager form with Mayor and Council. But Ennis can't afford it. Climate change and global warning is not a 'Chinese hoax'.
Give me a sidewalk. This is my first year as a homeowner in Ennis. I can't attenst to current or previous ways of our gov or my tax dollars and where they are spent. SB 260 has me in a state of new home owner panic.
The town employees seem to do what they want, when they want with no regard to the people paying their salaries. If they were held accountable I think efficiency would improve.
Members of departments HAVE some knowledge of the position before engaging

To big for your britches, bid out mowing plowing and road maintenance, school is county not city. So you need law enforcement for a town of 1000 people? Smaller is better when we get to 10k people then reconsider law enforcement and maintenance departments.
Need to allow people that live outside of town limits . Have a vote! Not just a voice. Majority of business owners live out of town .
I think all of them should be canned. From the mayor to the commissioners.
Our water storage and sewage in town have real issues that most residents are unaware. Monies to fix vs patch should be a priority before town possibly burns down. Also parking spots downtown in winter are a serious hazard to anyone. Town should work with state before more injuries occur. As different child recreation ideas are being discussed at the park. Liabilities to injuries should be evaluated. Thank you
It's time for a city manager!
When the public ask questions- they deserve answers! Transparency!!
It's time to take a hard look at the Town of Ennis as a whole and review the management form the top on down? Changes would certainly be necessary to accomplish greater goals!
The commissioners need to get to their job and legislate. The employees do a great job when the commissioners are not trying to fire them and the mayor. Only thing to change is commissioners who know what their job is.
We do not need more oversight, we need the elected officials to do their job. Let the employees work.

Your little local government review club is run by two people who want to destroy this town and make it like Big Sky and Bozeman. Leave it alone and let the employees work.
Stop treating your employees badly and trying to fire the elected mayor. The commission should support the employees not try to ruin their lives and bring back officer Moore in the school protect our kids
I believe that we need to continue with our current form of government.
Create more fundraising events for our community, resort tax is a must for long term survival, grow with our changing population. Jobs, jobs, jobs
The Town Commission needs to be prepared and know their job. The mayor does a great job despite the town commission trying to remove her for doing a great job. Don't change a thing except education for the commission.
Growth and demands will need trained professional leadership paid real salaries and not token stipends. People critiquing the Ennis govt and mayor need to realize these folks are citizens who are not professionals and are VOLUNTEERS. My advice? Stop complaining, volunteer yourself, share the burden, and get involved. Zoning codes could be addressed ...single family housing needs to be reworded allowing unrelated people to be considered a household. Home sharing, tiny homes and accessory dwelling units could be encouraged esp as property taxes and insurance go up. We need affordable trailer parks IN town so people could be close to services without needing to purchase an expensive home.. We need a `free` shed at the dump for good trash to be left for others...books, toys, building supplies, household goods, etc. Lessens solid waste issues. Walking and biking paths all over 'campus' to encourage healthy habits. Yes to a community aquatic / fitness / library / conference center. I think hard times are coming quickly...victory / community gardens should be encouraged everywhere, esp at the parks and on empty lots. Goats and sheep (on large city lots >0.5 acre) and more chickens allowed on the smaller city lots. If the city plants trees, could they be fruit-bearing?

Reclaim the volunteer ambulance to lighten the hospital's burden. We are a thriving community as evidenced by no vacant store fronts. As a rural community, newcomers need to be educated by the greedy realtors and developers about the limitations of living here and to curtail their demands for bright lights, plowed & paved roads, watered landscapes, rapid emergency response times and larger city services. Boulder Colorado is an example of a community that limited its growth. Just some thoughts. Thank you.
Police Department is a joke. Maintain and play the roads and repair the sidewalks.
a lot of problems would be solved if your employees had accountability. a part time mayor who can't be there every day to oversee what the heck is (or ISNT) happening is unrealistic. there's theft and laziness and there's just ancient processes that have never been forced to update. time to have DOGE for Ennis.
Time for a full time manager. Your employees have no leadership. They've been on their own doing whatever they see fit for far too long. Some hold themselves to a very low level and there is no accountability.
We need someone who knows what they are doing. We need a resort tax. We need a proactive leader.
take care of our water situation and stop allowing the green grass people to water in the mountain dessert
Why does the Town pay for the library it is not an essential service. These questions appear to cater to the personal belief of at leas 3 of the 4 members of the Local Review. Leave things the way they are and go find something productive to do.
I wish individuals could move past personal conflicts with certain Town employees and approach matters with professionalism and maturity. The current form of government is the most suitable for Ennis at this time. Unfortunately, it

seems that some individuals harbor negative feelings and are focused on undermining the progress and unity of our community. It’s essential for us to work together for the greater good of the town.
Ennis is doing great. The Town Commission needs to learn their role and stop bullying the Mayor and employees. Stop trying to fix something that isn't broken.
Not my job to do your job, but thanks for asking.
Our small town is growing and developing. I believe that in past years the city governess has been doing ok with lay community members. We have gone beyond that point now. I think our mayors have tried to do the "right" thing and have had the town's best interest at heart. I believe that our current mayor has been hindered by past commissioners that have no clue to their professional roles, excluding Corey Hardy. There are others that have their own personal agendas to push through that I believe have been a huge conflict of interest. We need a hired/paid town manager that can devote their expertise to providing guidance and foresight to the area's growth and continued growth. A hired Town Manager with the education and skills will need to lead the town through challenges without tearing a community apart.
Don't fix something not broken.
The Town id doing good, why are you trying to change it to be like somewhere else (California or New York).
The current form of government may have been the most feasible one for a town the size of Ennis with significant budget limitations. The question on this survey about whether the town is making the best use of taxpayer money is misleading given that there is a very significant budget shortfall. The town may be making the best use of the available tax revenue, but the cost of what the town needs to provide far exceeds the revenue. While to some that may suggest the possibility of excess/unnecessary or misallocated spending, I think the gap in what the town needs in revenue relative to what it is able to provide in services makes that seem unlikely. Besides, as noted above, when things like

emergency water line repairs are needed, the town has no choice but to pay the premium it costs in order to assure residents have water. Overall, I think the town is struggling in all areas to keep up with what the town needs in services due to the budget shortfall. My sense is the Ennis community has not committed to helping increase revenue which is desperately needed. If there was a change to a Commission with Town Manager form of government, perhaps the community would have more confidence that long term goals would be achieved and challenges met, but though that may be true, it still won't happen without more revenue. I therefore think something like a resort tax would be an excellent way to boost revenue given the Ennis economy's heavy dependence on visitors during the late spring/summer/early fall season. Yet I understand there has not been support for it and I gather some or all of the reason is lack of confidence in the Ennis government. I anticipate the Ennis community will not see long term goals achieved and associated challenges met without more revenue, regardless of the form of government. But if the reason for the community resisting ways to increase revenue has to do with lack of confidence in the current form of government, then a change in the form of government will have to occur.
It seems your questions are attempting to lead the person answering this survey to a conclusion that the person(s) who came up with this study want rather than actually listen to the people.
Stop trying to spend more money. This survey is clearly trying to steer comments to a Town Manager. Why so defensive when questioned about it at a public meeting? This is a steering committee not a local government review.
Decorum and civility are necessary to engage functional relationships between the towns residents, town employees, business owners, visitors & elected officials
Curious how your public meetings are during the day at the library where they can't be broadcast like the commission meetings or saved to be watched at a later time - what are you hiding. Your public comment policy appears unconstitutional and illegal. What are you hiding? Based on the scope of your questions this is clearly a steering committee and this committee wants a change in the government based on their past employment and publicly held

positions. Look at how you posed your questions trying to force the person answering to align with you preconceived intentions to change the Town. Leave it alone and let the employees do their jobs.
Who on the committee came up with these questions? Very one sided like you already know your outcome and answers. Don't change a thing and don't make us like California.
there is no leadership at the Town. Who is the mayor? I never see her at Town events being a face for the town. Need to keep the mayor but they should be out and about garnering feedback from citizens and being a face of the Town. The employees need leaderhsip
There is no oversight. Department heads shoot from their hip and have no consistency. They need a manager
Why do we spend so much on the Police force? John Moore is a the worst and I think he is unstable with a good chance he will shoot someone. Contract with the county for law enforcement. Town office staff is likely embezzling funds or stealing hours, the corruption runs deep. Get a town manager and get rid of the current staff.
The Town of Ennis needs a manager to manage employees for transparency and accountability. The recent audits reflect a total lack of accountability and ability to manage tax payer dollars. The town needs to contract with the Co for law enforcement. Spending $250,000 dollars for not even 1/2 coverage to irresponsible. Sharing resources and decreasing liability is the appropriate action. Streamlining duties is imperative for a government to be adaptable to changes/challenges.
As people talk about city council meetings, they seem contentious. I would like us to reach a point where these meetings are fact finding conversations. As i hear from various people, I believe city staff needs to seek help defining boundaries of their respective jobs and how to work within those boundaries.

A part time mayor does not have time to carry out those duties adequately, especially while running a personal business. Let's set a gial of getting beyond the council just putting out fires. Then we can better manage our own growth. Thanks to those sho have chosen to commit to running our city government.
Your questions seem to suggest a predetermined decision to change the current form of government. Why is there a push to alter something that is working well and could potentially increase costs for the Town? It may be in the best interest of the community to maintain the current structure rather than implementing changes that could disrupt the stability and success of our town.
Financially, government should be run more like businesses - not in the profit sense but in the leadership sense. I've asked a lot of questions and learned a lot about the current form from people here and in other Towns. I think Ennis has struggled along for years and it is time for a leader. The employees deserve a full time manager not a pop in and pop out Mayor position that has no real firm dedicated time for the employees.
The employees are probably doing the best they can with what they have. Like a business - if there are employees that just aren't good at their job, especially after years and years in the same position, it's on the manager to make it better. Ennis is lacking a manager for these employees.
What other employees are struggling through their daily tasks and professional growth just shooting from the hip and trying to learn as they go on our dollar? They deserve better.
Stop trying to turn Ennis into California and don't change anything.
It’s interesting that this committee chooses to meet at the library rather than Town Hall, where meetings could be properly recorded and memorialized—especially since official town meetings are typically held at Town Hall.

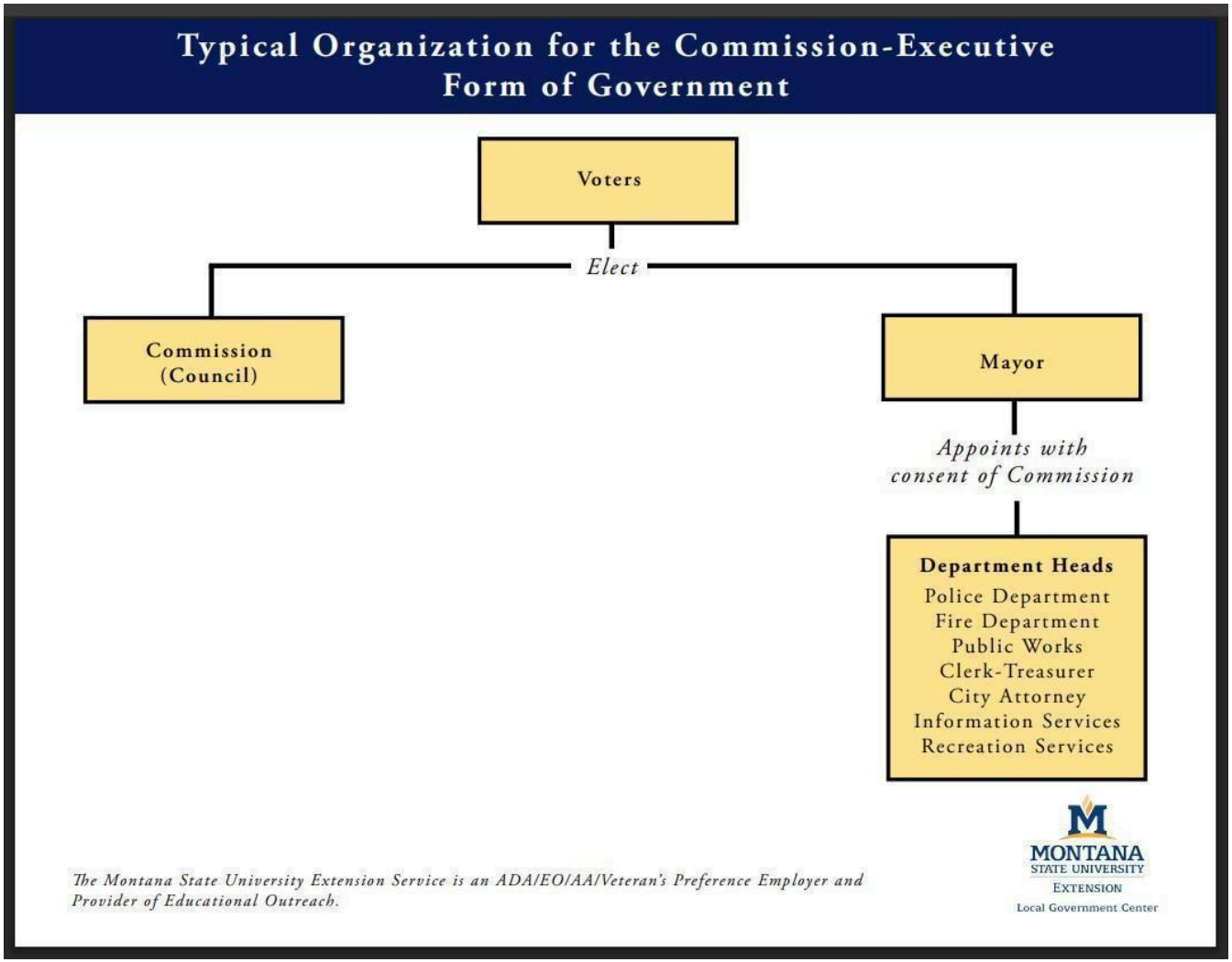
There is no sense of team with the town. There are clicks in employees and even elected officials. No vision. No leadership
Needs a manager, impossible to manage happenings with part part time leader
do not have a local police dept - make an agreement with the Sheriff's office. Desparately need a resort tax!

[11] An informal calculation by the Montana State University Local Government Center shows savings over time per capita with municipalities that employ a city manager.

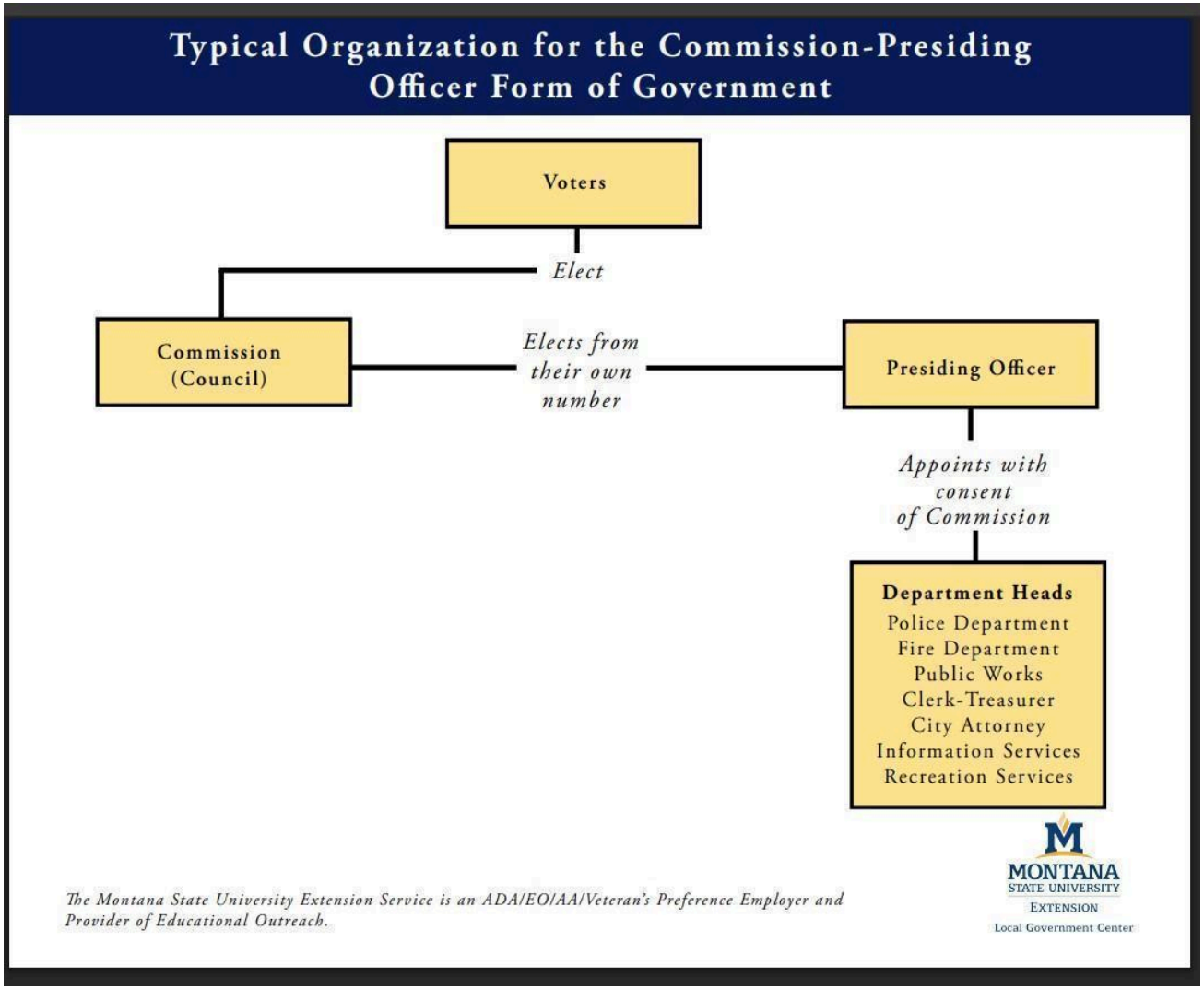
City	Population		Total Funds Appropriated (TFA)		TFA/Person	TFA/Person		Gov Form		
Miles City	8475		$6,606,006.00		$779.47			Com-Ex		
Havre	9213		$7,696,520.00		$835.40			Com-Ex		
Sidney	6167		$3,491,129.00		$566.10			Com-Ex		
Laurel	7203		$5,882,024.00		$816.61			Com-Ex		
Glendive	4811		$4,586,440.00		$953.32			Com-Ex		
Libby	3097		$2,062,195.00		$665.87			Com-Ex		
Shelby	3246		$2,831,838.00		$872.41			Com-Ex		
Cut Bank	3035		$2,206,247.00		$726.93			Com-Ex		
Total	45247	Total	$35,362,399.00	Total	$6,216.11	$777.01	Average TFA/Person			
			$781.54 All Com-Ex Cities TFA Total/Total Population							
Polson	5478		$4,148,826.00		$757.36			Com-Mgr		
Belgrade	11966		$6,739,157.00		$563.19			Com-Mgr		
Lewistown	6076		$4,406,203.00		$725.18			Com-Mgr		
Columbia Falls	5656		$3,900,895.00		$689.69			Com-Mgr		
Total	#REF!		$19,195,081.00	Total	$2,735.43	683.86	Average TFA/Person			
			$398.67 All Com-Mgr Cities TFA Total/Total Population							
						$93.15 difference between the average total fund appropriated per perso				
Outliers										
Hamilton	5165		$5,882,024.00		$1,138.82			Com-Ex		
Whitefish	8915		$11,682,504.00		$1,310.43			Com-Mgr		Resort tax
West Yellowstone	1244		$7,567,643.00		$6,083.31			Com-Mgr		Resort tax
Livingston	8790		$9,905,720.00		$1,126.93			Com-Mgr		

G: Forms of Government Evaluated by Study Commission

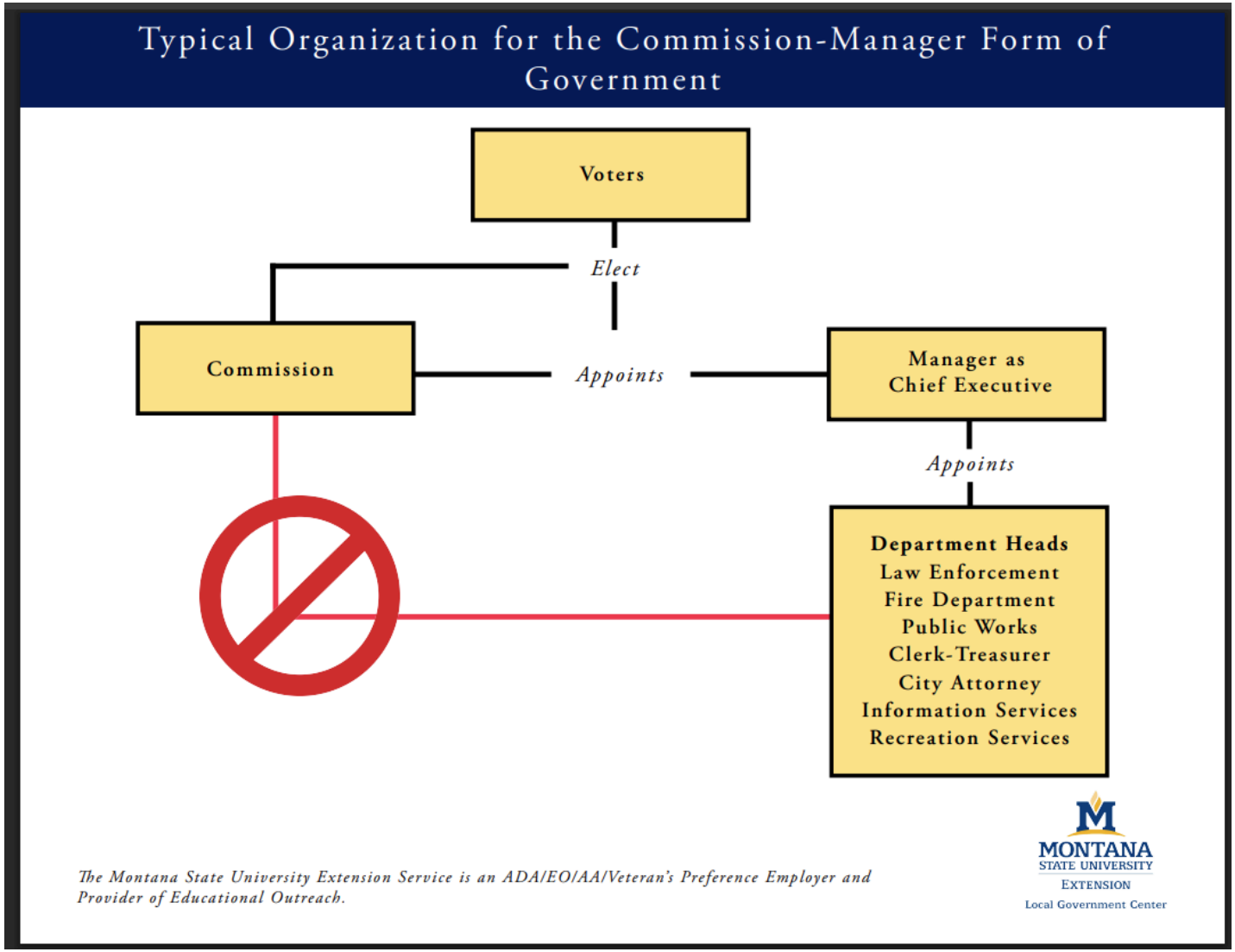
Commission-Executive used by: Ennis, Stevensville, Hot Springs and Three Forks



Commission Presiding Officer Form used by: Virginia City



Commission-Manager Form used by: West Yellowstone, Livingston, Whitefish, Lewistown, Polson



V. SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

The 2025 Study Commission respectfully submits the following additional recommendations to supplement the report. These recommendations are intended to enhance the long-term functionality, fiscal responsibility, and representational fairness of Town governance.

Required Education and Training

The Study Commission strongly recommends that the Town of Ennis adopt an ordinance requiring annual leadership and operations training for both elected officials and town employees. This recommendation builds upon the 2016 Study Commission's guidance and is reinforced by findings from recent audits highlighting concerns related to segregation of duties, cash reconciliation processes, and adherence to proper bidding procedures. These findings underscore the need for regular employee training and cross-training to ensure compliance with state statutes and to reduce the risk of financial or procedural errors.

Questionnaire responses from employees, elected officials and community members emphasized the need for improved training. Many commissioners come from private-sector backgrounds and may not have practical experience in parliamentary procedure, municipal finance, or the legal responsibilities of elected office. A structured annual training program will help ensure effective governance, promote transparency, and instill a culture of competency and public trust within town leadership.

Consolidation with Madison County

The Town of Ennis should explore opportunities to consolidate certain services with Madison County, particularly in areas where collaboration could reduce costs and improve efficiency. This recommendation includes exploration of consolidation in all departments where reasonable, to reduce taxpayer costs for services.

One key area is law enforcement coverage. At present, the Town and the Madison County Sheriff’s Office operate without a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure coverage during periods when the Ennis Police Department is not staffed. This gap has become especially pressing with the passage of House Bill 333, which mandates that third-class towns either maintain a fully staffed police department or enter into a formal contract with their county for law enforcement services.

This legislative change presents an opportunity for the Town to proactively engage in discussions with the County to formalize service agreements, potentially lowering costs and improving public safety coverage. Consolidation efforts such as this, if thoughtfully implemented, could enhance service continuity and long-term sustainability, particularly under the direction of a professional town manager.

Annexation of Surrounded and Serviced Properties

The Study Commission recommends that the Town of Ennis pursue annexation of properties that are either wholly surrounded by town boundaries or are already receiving municipal utility services. These properties benefit from proximity to town services and infrastructure but often do not contribute proportionally to their maintenance and delivery.

Annexation would help distribute service costs more equitably, expand the Town's tax base, and provide a more consistent governance structure for properties functionally integrated with the community. Moreover, bringing these properties into town limits would widen the pool of residents eligible to serve on local boards and in elected positions, thereby strengthening civic engagement and broadening community representation.

Local Tax Option

Many Montana communities have asked voters to approve a local tax option or “resort tax,” to offset the cost of a town manager and to generate income for town services. The study commission recognizes this would be a change for businesses owners, and the benefits of such income should be explored.