

ORDINANCE 2026-001

ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Missoula County Community Council Ordinance

Section 1. Authority

This ordinance is enacted pursuant to Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 7-3-417(2), which authorizes the establishment of community councils by ordinance in counties that do not adopt a self-governing charter.

Missoula County is a general government powers county established under MCA Title 7, Chapter 21, Part 1, and operates under the elected county official form of government as defined in MCA 7-3-111. As such, Missoula County is a limited powers government and may only exercise powers expressly provided by statute or necessarily implied therefrom.

Accordingly, the establishment of community councils in Missoula County must be authorized by ordinance in compliance with MCA 7-3-417(2).

Section 2. Purpose

The purpose of this ordinance is to establish a consistent and legally compliant framework for community councils in unincorporated areas of Missoula County.

Community councils serve as advisory boards to the Missoula Board of County Commissioners (Commissioners). Their role is to:

- Provide a structured forum for residents to express concerns and offer input on local issues;
- Facilitate two-way communication between communities and county government;
- Promote civic engagement and local participation in county decision-making processes.

Community councils created under this ordinance are advisory only. They do not possess governing, taxing, regulatory, or enforcement authority.

Section 3. Establishment of Community Councils

This ordinance establishes the framework for the creation and operation of community councils in unincorporated areas of Missoula County.

The Board of County Commissioners (Commissioners) may, by resolution, establish individual community councils under the authority of this ordinance. Each resolution shall specify:

- The name of the community council;
- The geographic boundaries of the area it represents;
- The initial appointment process, including any transitional provisions;
- The staggering of terms to ensure continuity of membership.

A. Boundaries

Community council boundaries shall generally follow established geographic or administrative boundaries, including but not limited to:

- School districts,
- Special districts (e.g., fire, water, or sewer districts),
- Other logical or community-identified boundaries as determined by the Commissioners.

B. Membership

Each community council shall consist of seven (7) members.

C. Appointment Process

- All members shall be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners.
- Individuals must be residents of Missoula County and the council area as defined in each community council resolution.
- Current members who were elected prior to the adoption of this ordinance shall be permitted to serve out the remainder of their elected terms and may be eligible for appointment thereafter.
- Current alternates shall be permitted to serve the remainder of their elected terms and may be eligible for regular seat appointment thereafter.

D. Terms

- Terms of appointment shall be three (3) years.
- Terms shall be staggered as directed by the Commissioners to ensure continuity of experience and representation.

Section 4. Duties and Responsibilities

Community councils established under this ordinance shall serve in an advisory capacity to the Missoula Board of County Commissioners (Commissioners). Their responsibilities include:

A. Community Engagement

- Serve as a forum for residents to discuss local issues, concerns, and opportunities;
- Facilitate communication between the community and county government;
- Encourage civic participation and public input on matters affecting the council area.

B. Advisory Role

Community councils may provide non-binding recommendations to the Commissioners on matters including, but not limited to:

- Land use planning and development proposals;
- Public infrastructure and capital improvements;
- Emergency response and public safety;
- Transportation and road maintenance;
- Parks, trails, and recreation;
- Public health and environmental concerns;
- Other matters referred to the council by the Commissioners or raised by the community.

C. Meetings

Frequency and Notice:

- Community councils shall hold regular public meetings, at least 6 times per year or more frequently as needed.
- Notice of regular meetings shall have a minimum of two (2) days advance notice but whenever possible more notice should be given.
 - Notice of meetings must include:
 - The date, time, and location of the meeting,
- Meetings must be conducted in accordance with Montana open meeting laws.
- Noticing Agenda:
 - A proposed agenda, which should be posted publicly at least 48 hours or two (2) calendar days in advance, when practicable.
 - To ensure proper noticing, it is recommended meeting agendas be submitted to County staff at least one week (seven days) before meeting.
- Meeting minutes must be:
 - Taken at each meeting (summary format is acceptable),

- Include a record of council member attendance, any votes taken and the time of adjournment,
 - Submitted to the designated County staff to be recorded with the Clerk and Recorder's Office within 30 days after the minutes have been approved by the board.
- The standard meeting format shall include the following agenda structure:
 1. Call to Order
 2. Roll Call
 3. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda
 4. Presentations (if applicable)
 5. Old Business
 6. New Business
 7. Next Steps
 8. Adjournment
- Councils must provide opportunities for public comment and maintain decorum throughout the meeting.

D. Reporting

- Maintain and publish meeting agendas and minutes;
- Each council shall provide an annual report summarizing the council activities to the Commissioners at the October or November All Community Council Town Hall meeting.

Section 5. Open Meetings and Public Records

Community councils are subject to the provisions of the Montana Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law, as outlined in MCA Title 2, Chapter 3. Accordingly:

A. Open Meetings

- All meetings of community councils must be open to the public and properly noticed in accordance with state law.

B. Public Records

- Community councils must provide records of:
 - Meeting agendas,
 - Meeting minutes,
 - Any written recommendations or reports submitted to the County.
- These records are considered public documents and must be made available upon request in accordance with state law.

- To ensure compliance with public records retention requirements, all such documents must be submitted to the County, which will maintain them as part of its official records.
- The County will maintain a publicly accessible website where community council agendas and minutes will be posted for transparency and public access.
- The County will provide an official email address for council communication and correspondence. This email address shall be included in all council correspondence.

Section 6. Funding and Financial Procedures

A. County Support

- Community councils may receive annual funding allocations from Missoula County, subject to availability and approval through the County's budget process.
- Allocated funds may be used for:
 - Meeting space rental,
 - Public outreach and communications,
 - Website or digital tools,
 - Training or community engagement events, and
 - Other expenses approved by the County.
- Expenses must be approved by a majority of council members present during a noticed meeting attended by a quorum of the council.

B. Financial Oversight

- Council shall submit invoices to Missoula County to pay for services needed to operate the council.
- Councils may not accept or expend donations, grants, or other funds without prior approval from the Commissioners.

Section 7. Administrative Support

To promote consistency, transparency, and compliance with applicable laws, Missoula County shall provide administrative support to community councils, including but not limited to:

A. Staff Liaison

- The County shall assign one staff member to serve as the primary point of contact for all community councils.
- Missoula County shall be listed as an account holder on all official council accounts, including but not limited to bank accounts, PO boxes, and digital communication channels. The County shall maintain administrator access to all public-facing communications and services.

- This staff liaison shall:
 - Coordinate communication between councils and County departments,
 - Assist with agenda posting, meeting notices, and public records compliance,
 - Provide guidance on County policies, procedures, and financial reporting,

B. Training and Orientation

- The County shall provide training for all community council members on the legal and procedural requirements for public boards under Montana law.
- Training may be delivered through the MSU Local Government Center or a similar qualified provider, and shall include:
 - Open meeting and public records laws,
 - Roles and responsibilities of advisory boards,
 - Ethical standards and public accountability.

C. Templates and Tools

- The County may develop, distribute and require standardized templates for:
 - Agendas and minutes,
 - Bylaws,
 - Annual reports and financial statements,
 - Public notices and outreach materials.

Section 8. Dissolution

The Board of County Commissioners (Commissioners) may dissolve a community council established under this ordinance by resolution if any of the following conditions are met:

A. Inactivity

- The council has failed to hold a public meeting for a period of six (6) consecutive months.

B. Membership Vacancies

- The council's membership falls below the number required to establish a quorum, and the vacancies cannot be filled after reasonable efforts by the County but not more than 12 months.

C. Council Request

- The council submits a formal written request for dissolution, approved by a majority vote of its members.

D. Other Cause

- The Commissioners determine that the council is no longer serving its intended advisory function or is not operating in compliance with this ordinance, after providing notice and an opportunity for the council to respond.

Section 9. Severability

- If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, or phrase of this ordinance is held to be invalid or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of the ordinance. The Board of County Commissioners declares that it would have adopted this ordinance and each section, subsection, sentence, clause, and phrase thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more sections, subsections, sentences, clauses, or phrases may be declared invalid.

Section 10. Repealer

- The enactment of this ordinance repeals the following resolutions:
- 1987-070 Resolution Establishing Seeley Lake Community Council
- 1994-021 Resolution Establishing Lolo Community Council
- 2006-021 Resolution Establishing Bonner Community Council
- 2006-110 Resolution Establishing East Missoula Community Council
- 2006-111 Resolution Establishing Swan Valley Community Council
- 2008-086 Resolution Establishing West Valley Community Council
- 2023-016 Resolution Establishing Clinton Community Council

Section 11. Effective Date

This ordinance becomes effective January 8, 2026

DATED THIS 8th DAY OF JANUARY 2026

ATTEST:


F941C347706B66B1FE14B1915AFB4B77 ready-sign
Tyler Gernant, Clerk and Recorder

APPROVED:

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
MISSOULA COUNTY


13F051ED69FA2244FFA409545EBDD56F ready-sign
Josh Slotnick, Commissioner

APPROVED AS TO FORM:


6ABD131CAC64960B7B58E293CF03466F ready-sign
John Hart, Deputy County Attorney


A6ACE081F2505A3A08967F7EBBB8C312 ready-sign
Dave Strohmaier, Commissioner


6F45D38DCC41E9C2B2D512DC93A576B2 ready-sign
Juanita Vero, Commissioner

