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Big Horn County Local Government Study Commission: 1995-96

Report-February 22, 1996

To the Citizens of Big Horn County, Montana:

The Big Horn County Local Government Study Commission, elected by the voters on November 8, 1994, present this Tentative Report to the citizens of the County for their review before writing our Final Report, which will make recommendations and place issues on the November 5, 1996 ballot.

The purpose of the Study Commission, as defined in 7-3-171 through 7-3-193, M.C.A., is to study the existing form and powers of a local government and existing procedures for delivery of local government services and compare them with other forms available under the laws of the state of Montana. A study commission may be established by an affirmative vote of the people at 10-year intervals.

In the conduct of our review, the study commission has sought advice and information from a number of people within the county, from other counties, and professional agencies. Opinions and recommendations were solicited from area communities, local citizens and organizations by means of countywide hearings which were open to the public. A mailed survey, in which we gathered information to gain a wider range of views of the people in the county proved quite successful.

While in the process of assessing the efficiency of our county government, we found various problems involving waste of county funds primarily caused by uninformed decisions. We investigated the option of a professional manager form of government, but, after reviewing the results of the mailed survey, we felt there was not adequate support for such a major change in the form of government at this time. We feel such a change may, in the future, gain sufficient support if elected officials fail to exhibit more dedication to their jobs by investing more time researching and analyzing the needs of the county in the changing economy.

Law enforcement was also a topic we researched. Big Horn County and the City of Hardin share a consolidated law enforcement organization operated under the direction of the Big Horn County Sheriff. Attention to this issue is long-overdue. We found that inequities exist in the amount of funding furnished by each governmental entity for services and some members of the community perceive various inequities in the delivery of those services. We believe that provision must be made for the City and County to meet on a regular basis to address this issue. Time and effort will be required to eliminate inequities and to prevent any unnecessary burden on the taxpayers.

Upon completion of our examination of the existing form and powers of Big Horn County government and its procedures for delivery of local government services, we, the Big Horn County Study Commission, propose the following recommendations and changes to your local county government.

Study Commission Recommendations:

1. The County Commissioners establish Community Councils according to provisions in 7-3-417 M.C.A. as outlined in our policy recommendations by March 1, 1997.
2. In hopes of improving City and County relations, enactment of a resolution or plan to have at minimum, quarterly meetings of the Hardin City Council and the Big Horn County Commission to resolve the dispute over Law Enforcement funding within the City of Hardin.
3. By the powers invested in the Study Commission, we will place a proposal on the ballot for the November 5, 1996 general election that will change county elections for elected official to a non-partisan basis. Provision for this measure is found in 7-3-413 M.C.A.

If you have any comments or questions regarding these recommendations or proposals affecting your county government, we encourage you to attend our meetings that are held on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month at the Courthouse, Room 301, to express your views.

Big Horn Study Commission
/s/David Seder, Chairman
/s/Ronald W. Reece, Commission Member