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# Survey finds mixed feelings towards city

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Responses to a recent survey on city government ranged from praises to pannings, with almost two-thirds satisfied with the present form of government.

The City Government Study Commission mailed a two-page survey questionnaire to 300 Libby residents, and 43 were returned.

More than three-quarters said they understand the present form of government.

More than 60 percent reported satisfaction with the present form, and more than 20 percent said they were dissatisfied. About 5 percent gave neutral responses, and others didn't answer.

About 40 percent did not favor a change in the city government; just under 30 percent did favor a change, and just over 30 percent gave no answer to that question.

On the other hand, the single most frequent answer to "What pleases you most about our

present city government?" was "Nothing."

Some others complimented the availability of officials and their responsiveness to members of the public. "Honest, sincere, hardworking council members," wrote one.

"The kindness of your secretary — Virginia," wrote another. Virginia McGill has been city clerk since 1978, and started working for the city as assistant clerk seven years before that.

Cost was listed both as a most pleasing and as a most displeasing aspect of the city government.

High cost and taxes were the most frequent complaint, followed closely by services and their lack.

"Cost keeps increasing with no increase in services," one respondent wrote.

"It in no way provides the type of services that a city of its size should provide," wrote another.

To solve the lack of adequate

funding for services, wrote one, "either enlarge the city limits or merge with the county. Raising taxes to existing residents is not a solution."

This idea was frequently echoed in other responses, along with urges to consolidate any and all city services with the county.

"I don't think the city is doing anything that the county can't do as well," one person wrote. "Thus I doubt that having a city government is particularly necessary. Economically disincorporation may be best."

At a public hearing last month, after the surveys were returned, the most frequent suggestions given to members of the study commission were to disincorporate the city or to consolidate it with the county — or at least the area around Libby proper that benefits from city services.

One respondent to the survey noted the higher taxes paid by city residents and wrote, "In other words we are penalized

taxwise for living within this imaginary line called city limits."

Another said that some areas designated as county "are virtually surrounded by the city" and should be brought into the city.

"Let's face it. The City of Libby needs to be enlarged," wrote another. "Who's kidding who; they claim it can't be done: there is no such word. Get on the stick and do it, it may take 10 years. There has to be a bigger tax base if you intend to do anything."

There is a "major lack of direction," one respondent complained. "City policy seems to change far too often," the person wrote, citing recent questions as to whether to back a new motel, whether parking meters are needed and whether to buy the water system. Major decisions like the federally mandated new sewer plant are forced upon the city, the person wrote.

"We need strict zoning now,"

wrote another. "If any big projects (mines, ski areas, oil fields, etc.) get going we'll be in big trouble."

Another complaint was "how everything major is settled between members prior to a meeting."

"I don't think the mayor and city council should be able to serve more than 3 or 4 years," one person wrote. One term as mayor or city council member is four years.

When city services were rated from 1 (very poor) to 10 (good), most came out averaging at least 5 (adequate).

Parking, beautification, zoning and planning, sidewalks and curbs, and parks and recreation each averaged 4.

Streets, animal control and courts all averaged a rating of 5.

Sewer, clerical, snow removal and lighting averaged 6, police and cemetery averaged 7, and fire was rated highest, averaging 9.

More than half of the survey

respondents called the result of contracting of police services by the county adequate, and another quarter called it good.

Individual responses ranged from "excellent" and "very good" to "It's made the police dept. into gustapo (sic)," with some more cautiously saying, "So far, so good" or "apparently."

Nearly 40 percent did not say whether they favored contracting of other services. About a third said they did — most of them favoring the contracting of any services possible — and slightly fewer said they did not.

About 16 percent listed city personnel as a weakness of the existing government. Most did not report either strengths or weaknesses.

Almost half said the average Libby citizen is concerned about what happens in city government, but the same number had no response to "What would you do to show concern?"