

TOWN OF RICHEY STUDY COMMISSION FINAL REPORT - COMPLETION 1996

Clarice Beery Chairperson
Ann Taylor Committee member
Butch Raisl Committee member
Butch Volbrecht Exo-Officio member

The Town of Richey Study Commission elected by the voters on November 8, 1994, or thereafter appointed present this final report to the citizens of Richey Montana.

The purpose of the study commission, as defined in the state law, is "to study the existing form and powers of our town government and procedures for delivery of local government services and compare them with other forms available under the laws of the state". If some change is deemed necessary, the study commission may submit such proposed change to the electors.

In the conduct of their review the study commission has sought advice and information from a number of people in the town. Opinions, recommendations and information were solicited from the mayor, community organizations, citizens and the county attorney. All meetings of the study were open to the public. Public hearings were poorly attended so surveys were mailed out with the water-sewer-garbage statements to determine local opinion.

After an intensive study of the government of the Town of Richey, it is the opinion of the local government study commission that this community has an efficient and responsive government, working with very limited funds.

The Richey Study Commission recommends that the towns Government remain a mayor council form of Government as it has been since the towns incorporation in 1949. Clarice Beery and Butch Raisl voted in favor Ann Taylor abstained.

This recommendation was drawn from the following information:

A questionnaire was mailed to the citizens of Richey, with their water bills. The questionnaire asked how the citizens felt about Police protection, Fire protection, Streets and Roads, Water and Sewer. The results of the survey showed police protection was the number one concern, streets and roads were number two but streets and roads were rated as adequate. Water, sewer and fire protection were rated good.

Police protection is the biggest concern of both the citizens and the town officials. By law the county does not have to provide police protection within the city limits of the town of Richey. The county does try to provide police protection as best it can. Because of Richey's distance from Glendive our population and the sheriff department's budget their presence and protection is not always here at the right time nor soon enough

in an emergency.

The commission looked at disincorporation of the town. Dawson county would then be responsible for much of the towns maintenance and police protection. Clarice Beery and Butch Raisl visited with attorney Gerald Navatrill about disincorporation. Disincorporation is a rather simple and inexpensive process. Attorney Navratil offered no opinion on disincorporation of the town. He only suggested possible consequences of disincorporating. Possible need to convert or sell water, sewer, and garbage services to a private business. Conversion to private utilities could possibly increase rates substantially.

Ann Taylor visited with citizens from Lambert Montana about their form of government. Lambert disincorporated their town some years ago. Lambert's water system is owned by the town and they have a part time employee to manage the water system. Lambert has no sewer system, and garbage collection is county wide and paid for with property taxes. The people of Lambert haul their garbage to a central collection site and the county disposes of it from there. Any needs of the town are presented to the Richland County Commissioners by a group of local representatives. Most of the people Ann spoke with preferred the disincorporated government.

Raymond Raisl checked into the government of Savage Montana. Savage is unincorporated. The needs of the town are presented to Richland County Commissioners or must be financed locally. Savage has no public water supply and residents rely on private wells for their water. The sewer system is owned by Richland County and a fee of \$35.00 per year is charged for each sewer hook up. Garbage is a private contract and costs \$9.00 per month per household. Roads are maintained by Richland county. The system works well for Savage.

The biggest difference between Richey and Lambert or Savage is the distance from the County Seat. The increased distance makes representation at commission meetings more expensive. It also means Richey is harder for the commissioners to keep track of. A good example is the police protection provided for Richey by Dawson County.

Clarice Beery visited with citizens from Circle Montana about their form of government. Circle at one time had a strong Mayoral form of government. This form of government is much like a city manager except the mayor is elected and a city manager is hired. Circle has changed back to a mayor council form of government. Circle's garbage is privately owned and charges the second highest rate in Montana. Circle's water and sewer are owned by the city.

The study commission also submitted a list of questions to the Richey Mayor and Town Council. The report stated the most important problems include streets, water, and sewer. Police

protection is also a concern but moneys are not available to hire police protection locally. The lack of money is the limiting factor for providing more local services. Mill levies have not changed in the past five years but property values have decreased thus reducing total revenue for the town. It is also felt that some sources of revenue such as state and federal grants and entitlement could be reduced if the town were to disincorporate.

When residents were asked their opinions of the local economy and dwindling population most answers were much the same. Older folks feel the highway were the beginning of the end of a larger town and a better economy. Our economy relies on the farming and ranching industry. Due in part to the downside of mother nature, prices, and the Conservation Reserve Program our farms and ranches are larger and the young people are forced out. Young families mean growth and without them small towns suffer. Our schools enrollments have dropped from 228 students in 1960 to 99 students in 1996. There are only 144 households, 4 churches, 1 elevator, chemical and fertilizer business, 1 hardware, 1 bank, 1 postoffice, 1 gas station and farm supply business, 1 carpentry business, 1 grade school, 1 high school, 1 Senior Citizen and Community Center, 1 museum, a library and the city office. Richey is blessed with a very competent Ambulance service and a Volunteer Fire Department that responds to city and rural fires. There are many service organizations which keep families involved and happy. Most students are active in sports, music and church with good support from the community.

Respectfully submitted,

Clarice H. Beery

Chair

Bruce M. Taylor

Raymond Bail