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Change sought in city government

Among the various elections and issues to be decided on next Tuesday's ballot is one decision to be made only by the voters of Libby - whether or not to change the form of Libby's city government.

The Libby City Government Study Commission has recommended that Libby adopt a charter, or self-government, form and hire a city administrator to handle employee supervision and other administrative functions.

If the voters approve that alternative, said Don Howard, chairman of the study commission, the city council would appoint a charter-writing board.

Either there would have to be opportunity for local participation in the writing of the charter, Howard said, or there would have to be another vote of the people after the charter was written.

Currently, under what is called the Dillon rule, the city government has those powers specifically granted it by the state constitution and legislature. In writing a charter, the city could grant itself any powers not specifically forbidden it.

This increased flexibility would give the city leaders "bigger leeway of governing," said Howard.

For example, he said, under a charter form a city/county zoning board could be created to extend the zoning district out five miles.

The alternative proposed by the Libby City Government Study Commission would also remove the compensation now paid to the mayor and members of the Libby City Council, and apply that savings toward the salary of a city

administrator.

The mayor receives \$200 a month, council members \$100, for a total of \$9,600 a year. A city administrator would probably be paid about \$25,000 a year, Howard said, judging by Whitefish, which 10 years ago voted for a charter form with a hired administrator.

The Whitefish city mill levy is

the same as it was then, Howard said, because the administrator has saved the city as much as his wages, or more.

Having a professional administrator would be beneficial because that person would be educated in the field of municipal administration and government, and would have a better chance of getting grants for the city.

In hiring the manager, the city council would ask for qualifications, and could lay off the manager if the job isn't done, he said. "You have an awful hard time firing a councilman or mayor."

With the city growing, Howard said, "We are getting more into business all the time," and therefore need a full-time administrator.