



Ophir Charter Review Committee

Governance Options Primer for Community Deliberations (June 2026)

In October 2025, the Ophir General Assembly (GA) formed a Charter Review Committee and appointed six members: Eric Beermann, Natalie Fijalkowski, Jacey DePriest, Joan May, Phil Hayden, and Slator Aplin to research three governance options. Ophir residents first responded to a survey about the current GA form of government. Results can be found [here](#). The survey guided the committee’s research. The committee met publicly monthly from October through May and by email throughout. Research concluded in May 2026. Findings are presented here and in the more detailed [Guide to Governance Options](#).

What the Committee Did and Did Not Do

The committee’s role has been to explore and document, not to advocate. This packet does not recommend any model over another. It presents each option as completely and accurately as the committee was able to, based on the charter, Colorado law, outside precedents, community survey results, and committee deliberations. Where the committee reached a tentative practical sense of how something might work, that is noted as a working judgement, not a conclusion. Where questions remain open, they are identified as such. The committee recognizes that some design details within any given model would only need to be worked out after the community has chosen a direction. What this packet aims to provide is sufficient information for an informed community conversation, not a fully engineered blueprint for each option.

► FOUR GOVERNANCE OPTIONS AT A GLANCE

General Assembly (Current)

Ophir’s existing system gives every registered voter who attends a monthly meeting an equal vote on town decisions, from routine operations to the annual budget. No separate council or board exists between meetings.

General Assembly 2.0

Keep Ophir’s direct democracy foundation intact while exploring a range of procedural and structural reforms to how the General Assembly operates and administers town governance, without changing who ultimately governs.

Town Council

Replace the General Assembly with an elected town council of five to seven members who make decisions on residents’ behalf, supported by a professional town manager handling day-to-day operations. Residents may attend and speak at meetings but would no longer vote on town decisions directly.

GA with Select Board

Add a continuously operating elected Select Board to manage town administration and executive functions between meetings, while the General Assembly retains all legislative authority and meets approximately four times per year.

SUMMARIES OF EACH GOVERNANCE OPTION

PART 1: General Assembly

What this model is

Ophir's current General Assembly system is one of only two direct democracies of this type in Colorado, the other being the town of Ward. Every registered voter who attends a monthly GA meeting holds an equal vote on any matter before the assembly. There is no separate council, board, or other ongoing governing body between meetings. The charter sets a quorum of seven people and requires a majority of those present to pass any motion, ordinance, or resolution.

How authority works

Every registered voter in attendance may speak and vote on any agenda item. The GA meets monthly and handles the full range of town business:

- Annual budget and mill levy
- Ordinances and resolutions
- Contracts above the \$5,000 charter threshold
- Land use decisions
- Legal matters and intergovernmental agreements
- Routine operational questions

The Town Manager carries out GA directives between meetings but holds no independent governing authority. Staff and committees provide operational and advisory support, but authority to decide rests with the GA. Voters who do not attend a meeting do not vote on decisions made at that meeting. The charter does not address remote participation or abstention explicitly.

What the current charter specifies

- Quorum: seven registered voters
- Contract approval threshold: \$5,000 (set when the charter was drafted)
- Meeting schedule: monthly
- Between-meeting emergencies: no formal defined procedure beyond the Town Manager's general administrative functions

What would stay the same

Choosing the Current GA as-is means no change to the governance structure. The committee has separately identified housekeeping updates that would likely be pursued regardless of which model is chosen, including provisions for remote participation, abstention handling, and the contract threshold. Those updates would not change the fundamental direct democracy structure.

PART 2: Town Council

What this model is

The Council-Manager-Mayor model replaces the General Assembly with an elected Town Council of five to seven members who make decisions on behalf of all Ophir residents, supported by a professional Town Manager handling day-to-day operations. This is the most common form of home rule government in Colorado, with extensive precedent across the state.

How authority works

The Town Council holds all legislative authority and votes on:

- Ordinances and resolutions
- The annual budget
- Contracts and land use decisions
- Hiring and directing the Town Manager

Residents may attend council meetings and speak during public comment periods but do not vote on matters before the council. Between meetings, the Town Manager handles administrative matters within the authority delegated by the council. Accountability runs through elections: residents who disagree with council decisions may vote to replace council members at the next election.

How this differs from the current system

Under the current GA, any registered voter who attends a meeting votes directly on town decisions. Under this model:

- That direct voting role ends
- Elected representatives vote on residents' behalf
- Residents retain the ability to attend meetings, speak publicly, run for council, and vote in elections
- The Town Manager carries significantly more defined authority, with a direct reporting relationship to the council

What this model would require to implement

Implementing this model would require a full charter rewrite, defining:

- Council composition, terms, and election procedures
- The Mayor's role and how the position is filled
- The Town Manager's authority and appointment process
- The relationship between the council and the public

All charter amendments require approval by a majority of Ophir's registered voters. Colorado has extensive municipal charter precedent for this model.

PART 3: GA with Select Board

What this model is

The GA with Select Board model adds a continuously operating elected Select Board to Ophir's existing General Assembly system. The General Assembly remains the town's sole legislative authority, while the Select Board serves as the town's standing administrative and executive body between GA meetings.

This model is derived from New England Town Meeting governance, in which a Select Board serves as the community's standing elected governing body between town meetings. In those systems, the Select Board performs governance functions that Ophir currently assigns to individual charter officers, and a separately elected mayor is generally not part of the structure.

How authority would be divided

The Select Board would handle:

- Supervision and direction of the Town Manager
- Contracting and routine financial administration within GA-established thresholds
- Implementation of GA-adopted ordinances and policies
- Intergovernmental coordination and external liaison with USFS, San Miguel County, and other agencies
- Emergency operational response when GA action cannot be convened in time
- Administrative planning, agenda coordination, preparation of GA business, and continuity of ongoing projects between meetings

The General Assembly would retain authority over:

- All ordinance and legislative authority
- Budget adoption and supplemental appropriations
- Contracts and expenditures above charter-defined thresholds
- Land use decisions and property transactions
- Borrowing, debt issuance, and long-term financial obligations
- Charter amendments and structural governance changes

The GA would also retain the ability to direct the Select Board by motion and to petition for review of any Board decision. Select Board meetings would function as representative governing meetings: residents may attend and speak, but voting would rest with Board members.

How the GA calendar would work

- November: budget first reading
- December: budget final adoption
- March: general session
- July: general session

This preserves continuity with Ophir's current back-to-back November and December budget practice.

How the Select Board would be structured

Select Board size, meeting frequency, terms, compensation, and internal role assignments are design questions the committee explored but did not fully resolve. They would be specified during charter drafting if this model is chosen. In NETM communities, Select Board members typically hold three-year terms. For Ophir, committee discussion identified monthly, every three weeks, and bi-weekly as frequency options. Select Board members would be elected by Ophir's registered voters.

What would stay the same

- All residents may attend and speak at both Select Board and GA meetings
- The Town Manager role continues
- Existing committees and staff would continue supporting town operations under the new structure
- Charter amendment and electorate approval requirements remain the same

What this model would require to implement

Implementing this model would require significant charter amendments, including new articles establishing the Select Board and rewriting existing articles governing the GA, ordinances, officers, the Town Manager, and budget and finance. All charter amendments require approval by a majority of Ophir's registered voters.

PART 4: General Assembly 2.0

What this pathway is

GA 2.0 keeps the General Assembly as Ophir's governing body while addressing known gaps in how it operates. It is not a single fixed proposal but a set of reforms the community could adopt in whole or in part. Some reforms require only a GA vote; others require a charter amendment and electorate approval. The GA retains full authority throughout.

Procedural reforms: how the GA operates

These reforms address meeting mechanics and participation without altering who holds authority. Most can be implemented by ordinance. Examples the committee explored:

- Adopting a recognized parliamentary procedure
- Per-agenda-item comment and time limits
- A consent agenda for routine items
- A written comment option for residents who cannot attend
- Post-meeting plain-language summaries

Structural reforms: how authority is allocated

These reforms address the distribution of authority and typically require charter amendment. Examples the committee explored:

- Raising and redefining the quorum
- Increasing the \$5,000 contract threshold
- Formalizing the Town Manager's role and authority
- Establishing remote participation rights
- Differentiated voting thresholds by decision type
- Creating between-meeting coordinating authority with defined limits

Annual portfolio review

A complementary structural idea is an annual GA re-centering session organized around Ophir's actual governance domains: water, trash and snow removal, land use and planning (including the avalanche hazard overlay), external relations with USFS and San Miguel County, open space and green energy, wildfire mitigation, and legal matters. Staff domain reports and an electorate-wide survey would feed a documented priority map distinguishing must-address items, active ongoing work, and consciously deferred matters.

What stays open for the community

Which reforms to pursue, and in what combination, is a community decision.

Side-by-Side Comparison

► SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

The tables below compare the four models across six dimensions. They are intended to describe the models, not recommend one over another.

DECISION AUTHORITY

	GA	Council	GA w/ Select Board	GA 2.0
Who votes on ordinances	Registered voters attending the meeting	Council members	Registered voters attending the meeting	Registered voters attending the meeting
Who votes on the budget	Registered voters attending the meeting	Council members	Registered voters attending the meeting	Registered voters attending the meeting
Resident direct vote on decisions	Yes, at every monthly meeting	No; council votes on behalf of residents	Yes, at quarterly GA meetings	Yes, at every monthly meeting
Accountability to residents	Voters decide directly at each meeting	Voters select council members at periodic elections	GA retains override authority over Select Board; Select Board faces periodic elections	Voters decide directly at each meeting

MEETING STRUCTURE

	GA	Council	GA w/ Select Board	GA 2.0
Primary governing body meeting frequency	Monthly	Set by charter; monthly to bi-weekly	GA quarterly; Select Board monthly to bi-weekly	Monthly
Quorum	Seven registered voters	Defined in new charter (quorum set relative to council size)	GA quorum: defined in new charter (may differ from current seven); Select Board quorum: set relative to defined board size	Some number or percentage of registered voters (subject to charter amendment)

GOVERNING AUTHORITY BETWEEN FORMAL VOTES

	GA	Council	GA w/ Select Board	GA 2.0
Authority to act without a vote of the primary governing body	Town Manager carries out GA directives within general administrative authority; no independent legislative or contract authority above \$5,000	Town Manager acts within standing authority delegated by Council; Council itself exercises continuous governing authority	Select Board holds charter-level administrative and executive authority between GA sessions within defined limits; acts by resolution rather than ordinance; Town Manager executes directives from both GA and Select Board	Town Manager carries out GA directives within general administrative authority*
Contract authority without a formal vote	No contract authority above \$5,000 without GA approval	Town Manager acts within Council-delegated contract limits	Select Board authorizes contracts within defined dollar thresholds; larger contracts require GA vote	No contract authority above \$5,000 without GA approval*
Emergency authority without a formal vote	Town Manager acts within general administrative functions; no defined emergency executive authority	Town Manager acts within Council-delegated authority	Select Board acts and reports to next GA meeting	Town Manager acts within general administrative functions*
Executive session participation continuity	No fixed membership; participants at any given meeting may differ from those at prior meetings	Council members participate consistently across sessions	Select Board members participate consistently across sessions	No fixed membership; participants at any given meeting may differ from those at prior meetings

EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE

	GA	Council	GA w/ Select Board	GA 2.0
Elected positions	Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, Town Clerk, Treasurer	Council members; Mayor (elected or appointed per charter)	Select Board members (3-5); existing officer roles reorganized within Board framework	Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, Town Clerk, Treasurer (unchanged)
Town Manager role	Carries out GA directives; no defined independent authority in current charter	Hired by and reports to Council; exercises significant delegated administrative authority	Reports to Select Board day-to-day; implements policy set by GA	Carries out GA directives; role may be formally defined under structural reforms

CHARTER AND ADOPTION REQUIREMENTS

	GA	Council	GA w/ Select Board	GA 2.0
Charter amendment scope	Housekeeping updates only; no structural change	Full charter rewrite required	Significant new articles required; major revision of existing articles	Varies: some reforms require ordinance only; others require charter amendment
Electorate vote required to adopt	No	Yes	Yes	Depends on which reforms are pursued
Reliance on established municipal models	Ophir and Ward are the only two examples of this form in Colorado	Extensive Colorado precedent; town attorney can draw on existing templates	No Colorado precedent; design draws on New England Town Meeting tradition	Builds on existing GA structure; structural reforms may draw on precedent or require novel drafting
Implementation cost considerations	Attorney review required for housekeeping updates even without structural change	Extensive charter revision and election restructuring	Extensive charter revision and election restructuring	Costs depend on which reforms are adopted

Methodology note: The tables describe how each model works. When a model does not include a particular body or mechanism, the tables explain how that function is handled instead of treating the absence as a problem. The Charter and Adoption Requirements table explains what would be required to adopt each model; it is informational and not meant to judge which model is better or worse.

GA 2.0 is a range of possible reforms, not a single fixed proposal. The tables show the shared baseline structure. Asterisked cells mark areas where the specific reform chosen would change the outcome.

Note for committee review: The “Reliance on established municipal models” row is under committee review and may be moved or removed in the final version, as it reflects contextual background rather than a governance characteristic.

A Note on Implementation Costs

Every governance path would involve some implementation cost. Even keeping Ophir’s current governance structure would likely require attorney review and charter drafting for housekeeping updates the committee identified during its work.

What changes across the different options is primarily the scale of legal and administrative work involved. More substantial structural changes, such as creating a Town Council or Select Board system, would likely require more extensive charter revisions, election changes, and related legal drafting. Some models would also require decisions about compensation for newly elected positions.

The committee has not attempted to estimate dollar amounts. Actual costs would depend on the scope of changes adopted, attorney rates, and future implementation decisions made by the town.

Questions and Scenarios

► QUESTIONS AND SCENARIOS FOR COMPARING GOVERNANCE OPTIONS

Different governance structures are built to handle different kinds of pressures. Some are better suited to fast day-to-day administration. Others are better suited to continuity, sustained oversight, or resisting outside pressure over time.

The situations below are meant to help residents think about which governance challenges matter most for Ophir's future. Some involve routine operations. Others involve questions that may shape the town over decades.

As you consider these scenarios, think not only about which model performs best in normal conditions, but about which kinds of challenges you believe Ophir should be most structurally prepared to handle.

Core Governance Questions

These five questions identify fundamental tradeoffs built into any governance structure. They are meant to help you think about what each model is designed to do well and what it gives up in exchange.

1. Speed vs. Direct Say in Everyday Decisions

The situation: A routine but contested decision, such as choosing a new service vendor, updating a local code provision, or approving a maintenance contract, splits residents between those who want more process and those who want a decision. Some want extended community discussion before anything is decided. Others want a quick decision to avoid service gaps or cost increases.

The question: Which model handles this tension in the way that matches what you think local government should do best: decisions made quickly on your behalf, or decisions made directly by you?

2. Emergency Decision-Making Authority

The situation: A sudden infrastructure failure, natural disaster, or public safety emergency requires significant spending and coordinated action before the next community meeting. Delay makes the outcome worse.

The question: Which model gives the town what it needs to act quickly while making sure that authority remains answerable to the community afterward?

3. Who Participates and Whether That Changes Over Time

The situation: Who is voting in Ophir may shift over time, including changes in the balance between full-time residents and second homeowners, as well as housing and population changes in the region. These changes can affect who participates and what values and priorities tend to drive decisions.

The question: Which model best protects Ophir's ability to govern by its own stated goals, even as the mix of who is actively participating shifts over the years and decades to come?

4. Complex or Long-Running Matters Requiring Continuity

The situation: The town becomes involved in a matter that needs informed discussion over months or years: a water rights negotiation, an intergovernmental agreement, a coordination process with an outside agency, or a legal claim. Managing it well becomes more challenging when the group keeps changing from meeting to meeting: what was decided before has to be re-explained, and the rest of the town's regular business still needs to happen at the same time.

The question: Which model best keeps a complex, long-running matter moving forward without having to rebuild shared understanding every time a different group of people is at the meeting?

5. When the Community Is Divided

The situation: A significant proposal, on town-owned land or touching on what kind of place Ophir should be, generates strong support among some residents and strong opposition from others with equally valid competing interests. The division may be about environmental values, community character, or what amenities the town should provide. Both sides have valid standing and no easy consensus is available.

The question: Which model best navigates this kind of conflict, without ignoring minority concerns or letting a small group stop what most residents want?

Ophir Specific Questions

These three situations are recurring realities Ophir already faces. They are not hypothetical. Use them to test how each governance model would actually perform under the specific pressures this community lives with.

A. Water Supply, Infrastructure, and Growth Limits

The situation: Ophir's water system is aging. Maintenance demands compound over time, capital investment is significant, and the system's capacity shapes what future development is even possible. Decisions deferred today may become more expensive and harder to solve tomorrow. Without a functioning water system, the town cannot operate normally as a year-round community. The system requires consistent oversight, long-horizon planning, and ongoing technical management alongside everything else the town does.

The question: Which model is best equipped to manage an aging, finite water system that requires sustained investment and attention, where deferred decisions accumulate quietly until they become crises?

B. Environmental Stewardship and Development Pressure

The situation: Ophir has spent decades trying to protect the land surrounding the town through open space efforts, wilderness advocacy, land trades, and attention to development pressure on nearby undeveloped areas. Future pressure may come gradually through agency processes, neighboring landowners, infrastructure expansion, recreation interests, or proposed land use changes. These issues often unfold over many years rather than through a single town vote.

The question: Which model best balances long-term environmental stewardship, informed decision-making, and direct community participation when difficult land-use or development questions arise?

C. Avalanche Hazard and Difficult Long-Term Decisions

The situation: Ophir's avalanche hazard overlay involves scientific uncertainty, property rights implications, significant potential liability, and decisions with lasting consequences. It is the kind of matter where even what a good outcome looks like is disputed: acting too decisively risks overreach; deferring indefinitely allows liability and community tension to accumulate. Managing it requires the same people to remain engaged over years, the ability to keep legal work moving without losing track of it, and a governance structure that can confront difficult questions rather than avoid them.

The question: Which model is best equipped to govern a situation where certainty may never fully exist, the costs of both action and inaction are real, and the temptation to defer is always present?

A Note on What Comes Next

This document is a starting point for community deliberation, not an ending point. The General Assembly and the broader electorate will have the opportunity to debate, question, advocate for, and ultimately decide on a direction. The decision belongs to the community. The committee will also be releasing a [Guide to Governance Options](#), which contain the committee's complete deliberative record for each governance model pathway.