

**POLSON RURAL FIRE BOARD MEETING
MINUTES FEBRUARY 10, 2010**

Board trustee members present: Alison Meslin, Paul Laisy, R. Jack Clapp, Fred Nelson

Board trustee member absent: Jim Manley, excused.

Staff Present: Fire Chief John Fairchild

Guests: Paul Mauer; Lester Johnson; Lee Manicke; Roger Rogers; Reg Wearley; Al & Leona Fillman; Ryan Nelson; Elizabeth Hoel; Bill Koberg, Mission Valley Security; Berl Tiskus, Valley Journal Reporter; Sasha Goldstein, Lake County Leader Reporter, Lake County Commissioner Bill Barron; Polson City Manager Todd Crossett; Volunteer Fire Personnel Ernie Butt, Chris McGuinness, Jeff Meslin, Ron Friez, Drew Hoel, Martin Glasson.

Meeting called to order at new fire station located at 25 Regatta Road by Chairperson Alison Meslin at 7:00 p.m.

Big Arm resident Paul Mauer addressed the board regarding a prior letter he sent to the board and local newspapers. In summary the letter noted the new \$230,000 fire station is housing brush trucks and used as a warehouse. The original intent for the fire station is to provide fire service for structure fires as well as wildland. In the event the bridge is impassible, full fire service could be provided to residents north of the bridge. Mr. Mauer suggested the volunteers response realigned; basically with volunteers residing in the rural to respond to the new station. The advantage to equip the station as a full function station is volunteers living in the rural will be able to respond quickly. In the past 30 days, the bridge has been impassible. Trustee Nelson suggested a Type I engine moved to the new station and noted the board has an obligation to the residents south of the bridge. Fire Chief Fairchild stated currently the rural has seven pieces of equipment with six housed north of the bridge. Trustee Clapp expressed response to complete a sufficient crew is vital. The responsibility of the trustees is to provide the best service available to the community in the way it is structured. Pumper/tanker #327 is housed at the new station for structure fires. Trustee Laisy noted by standards pumper/tanker #327 is not an engine; it does not have adequate hose, lacks tools and has no breathing apparatus. Volunteer Glasson suggested Engine #326 currently housed at Big Arm moved to the new station. Chairperson Meslin noted by the interlocal agreement the city responds with rural equipment, therefore, the rural can respond with city equipment. Trustee Laisy indicated his goal is to provide the best response and emergency services in the district. Departments in the state have the potential to be overwhelmed by an incident; whereby automatic aid agreements and in our case the interlocal agreement is a vital tool. Consider assigning firefighters to stations and engines, change dispatch and most important train, recruit volunteers for the new station. **Motion Trustee Laisy to recruit and train fire fighters for the new station a priority of the fire chief, second Chairperson Meslin. Trustee Nelson suggested the motion tabled and discussed under new business.** Trustee Clapp expressed the board mailed a recruitment letter to resident north of bridge and a column in the monthly Big Arm newsletter extends an invitation for volunteers. Volunteer Glasson expressed the volunteers do not have an issue with the station and plan to comply with Fire Chief Fairchild's recommendations.

Minutes January 13, 2010 Rural Fire Board Meeting; Chairperson Meslin requested the January 13, 2010 minutes corrected. Page 4 correct guidelines adopted data. Board reviewed and adopted with changes operating guidelines 100.05, 100.07, 100.08, 100.09, 100.10, 100.11, 100.12, 100.13, 100.14;. Operating guidelines not approved are 100.06, 100.15 and the apparatus operational guidelines 300's. Fire Chief Fairchild noted the 300's are apparatus operations. Chairperson Meslin replied the guidelines were not reviewed and will be on the agenda for the next meeting. **Motion Trustee Laisy to approve minutes of January 13, 2010 with modifications of the chairperson Meslin, second Trustee Nelson. Motion carried unanimously.**

Claims: The board questioned the following expenditures. Check #4159 payable to Stine Electronics \$165.00 for vehicular charger. Check #4155 payable to Polson Ambulance, Inc. \$255.00 rural share (total \$410.00 split with city) for CPR, AED training was available to all volunteers. Check #4149 payable to L.N.

Curtis \$5,024.00 for the lockers/rack system at the new station. Check #4151 payable to Mission Valley Power \$591.60 for one month's electric service at the Fairgrounds Fire Station is a slight decrease from the previous month. The board requested the temperature setting reduced to 45 degrees. Fire Chief Fairchild has concern with the reduced heat setting for the structure, therefore increased the temperature setting to 55 degrees. **Motion Trustee Nelson to approve claims, second Trustee Clapp. Motion carried unanimously.**

Communications: Chairperson Meslin read a letter from David G. Graham, President Polson Fairgrounds, Inc. The letter stated since the fire station is located on the fairgrounds property, the PFI board felt the "Fairgrounds Fire Station" would be a very suitable name. PFI is also pleased to have the Rural Fire Station located on this property and look forward to a good relationship. **Motion Trustee Nelson to name station as requested by PFI "Fairgrounds Fire Station", second Trustee Clapp. Motion carried unanimously.** Trustee Laisy reported Police Chief Chase expressed the volunteer fire fighters did an outstanding job during the recent suicide attempt on the bridge. Trustee Clapp sent letters of appreciation to Lake View True Value, Western Building Supply, and Ace Hardware for their contribution to the new fire station.

Treasury Report:

Fund #7243 Voted Levy/Operating Fund Balance	\$ 33,628.33
Fund #7245 Operating Fund Balance	\$ <u>50,811.95</u>
Total Operating Balance:	\$ 84,440.28
Fund #7244 Voted Levy {Fire Apparatus}	\$ 47,167.57
Fund #7246 Capital Improvement Fund Balance	\$ 49,452.41
Paid bills in the amount of	\$ 8,495.52

Check numbers 4147 - 4162
(paid February 10, 2010)

Outstanding debt service payment on property annexed by City of Polson as follows:

Annexation July 22, 2009	\$ 284.72
Annexation September 9, 2009	\$ 46.66
Annexation December 7, 2009	\$ <u>51.65</u>
Total outstanding	\$ 383.03

Suggestion to the board: Charge a \$10.00 per month administration fee for non-payment. Trustee Nelson suggested a lien filed on the property to collect the debt service payment. The fees to file a lien include \$5.00 to file; \$5.00 to remove; and the cost of a certified letter for an approximate total \$15.00. The lien fees and certified letter cost will be added to the amount due. Chairperson Meslin noted the board has the ability to pass a resolution stating the property description and the amount owed then submit the request to the Department of Revenue to be applied to the real property tax statement for payment. **Motion Trustee Nelson to file a lien on the properties and in the future if a second letter is sent state a lien will be filed for non-payment if not paid by a specified date, second Trustee Clapp. Motion carried unanimously.**

Staff Report: 1). Fire Chief Fairchild reported 23 calls in January 2010. 2). Provided volunteer fire membership application for Ryan Nelson a resident in Briarwood Circle for the board to review.. **Motion Trustee Laisy to accept the nomination of the volunteers and fire chief for Ryan Nelson to become a volunteer, second Trustee Clapp. Motion carried unanimously.** 3). Lieutenant Chris McGuinness reported Polson Rural Fire Company elected officers and adopted by-laws per the board's request. The by-laws are submitted for the board's approval. Chairperson Meslin asked if there is a reason the generic by-laws recently approved by the board were not adopted rather than adopting the grandfathered by-laws. Jeff Meslin President of the Big Arm Fire Company reported the Big Arm volunteers reviewed the rural district by-laws and plan to adopt the by-laws at the next meeting and remove the prior by-laws. Chris plans to present the generic by-laws to the volunteers for review and report back to the board.

The Polson volunteers became a part of the rural fire district and formed a company with the final remaining step to elect officers and adopt by-laws. All the volunteers have signed an oath of allegiance. Trustee Laisy expressed appreciation for the volunteers oath. 4). Fire Chief Fairchild provided a document stating qualifications to become an officer in a fire company as a base to set policy. 5). DOT inspections are currently being performed on equipment. Tender #323, 1987 GMC K3500 (Batmobile) did not pass the DOT inspection this year. The estimated cost of repairs is \$2,013.14. The Ronan Volunteer Fire Department has a 2000 F350 1 ton truck which is an option to replace #323. The mileage is 20,317, original owner Glacier Park as a lease return. The cost of the vehicle is \$15,000 with Ronan carrying the paper for two years at no interest. The vehicle is not designed to carry the loads required for wildland response. Volunteer Glasson indicated modifications to make the vehicle a wildland component is not recommended. A grant application for fire apparatus has been submitted. Metal Works of Montana in Missoula has a selection of Type 6 and large trucks. The department should review options for replacement. Trustee Laisy suggested the chief look for at a 1.5 ton vehicle. Lake County Commission Barron suggested the board review a lease-purchase option. **Motion Trustee Laisy direct fire chief to look into options, second Trustee Clapp. Motion carried unanimously.** 6). Chairperson Meslin noted the interlocal agreement requires an annual inventory review. She would like to meet with the fire chief to review and update the inventory.

Old Business:

STAKEHOLDERS GROUP REPORT – Trustee Clapp reported the information is advisory. It is a channel to provide some middle ground as we move forward. It was suggested that each fire company should have a representative in the stakeholders group. He suggested the board permit the group to increase to 11 members which will permit Carol Swope to participate. Chairperson Meslin thanked Todd Crossett for attempting to resolve some of the communication problems between the board and the Polson Volunteer Fire Department. The first half of the meeting was informative and a good reminder of some of the basic rules of communication. During the second half, time was spent on concerns with the goal of resolving those concerns at subsequent stakeholders meetings. Prior to the meeting Trustees Manley and Meslin expressed an imbalance of the participants in the stakeholders group. The board authorized participation in a group of no more than 10 and specified who should attend from the board. The list created by Todd Crossett included 13 members including Todd. Trustee Meslin informed Todd she would attend the first meeting, but would go back to the board for their decision for what to do in the future since the composition is not what the board authorized and was reluctant to participate in a way that was not authorized by the board. Todd indicated he would determine the makeup of the group and would not have to follow the board's decision. Meslin understood he was not bound by the board's decisions, but unfortunately she was. The group is unbalanced with six members obviously critical of the board and with just Meslin to speak for the board's respective. Participants City Commissioner Judy Preston and resident Carlisa London which Meslin is not certain how or why they were chosen. Due to the imbalance it does not likely appear a breakthrough in trust and communication will be resolved which are the stated goals. The Big Arm Firefighters before the meeting asked Trustee Manley to attend to speak for them. Todd prohibited Manley to represent Big Arm Firefighters. Trustee Manley suggested Trustee Laisy join the group due to his experience and has seen similar problems. Todd vetoed Trustees Laisy and Manley. Todd was concerned about public criticism precised by open meeting laws if three board members were in the group. This was a surprise since Todd's list had three board members Trustees Nelson, Clapp and Meslin. Neither Trustee Manley nor Attorney Bob Long believe this would be a violation of the open meeting laws since no board decisions would be made. Since three or more trustees get together in committee to write grants. Todd approved of Trustees Nelson, Clapp and Meslin; but not Trustees Clapp, Laisy, and Manley. Therefore Todd's veto relates less to the number of the board members than the identity of the board members. Based on Todd's creation for the list of the group the imbalance regarding the two perspectives and the exclusion of people who would like to balance at better don't think this is likely to accomplish much except create another forum for the same position we already heard. The board will have to vote on whether to participate since it is different from what the board previously authorized. If the board decides to participate, it may be better for Trustee Nelson to participate rather than Trustee Meslin, since Trustee Nelson was on the original list along with Trustee Meslin. Todd may not allow Trustee Nelson to replace Trustee Meslin, although Trustee Nelson was on the original list. If the board continues with the stakeholders meeting it would be appropriate to include as many people as

possible and the board should give public notice that some or all of the board may participate then there would not be a problem with the extreme imbalance that now exists. In its present makeup Trustee Meslin does not intend to attend the February 28th meeting as she does not have any optimism in the process. Trustee Clapp requested to clarify the number of participants what part of the stakeholders group is not consistent with this board expressed at the last meeting. Trustee Meslin replied the board indicated 10 participants with 2 city commissioners. If it is going to work, the whole board should be present, because it would be a worthwhile benefit for everyone. City Manager Todd Crossett replied to Trustee Meslin's statement stating it is not his intention to tip the balance; his intention is to see all perspectives My personal opinion is this group is not making any viable decision. He is happy to add more people to the group. He can understand that there is a feeling the board is outnumbered; while that was not his intent. The original list that was circulated at the advise of the city attorney suggested 2 board members should participate; while there is no preference as to who participates. There are other members of the community that share your perspective and Todd would welcome them in the group. Todd welcomed Ron Friez as a participant from Big Arm. Outside the whole debate is Carlisa London is a citizen and City Commissioner Judy Preston. Todd is the facilitator; not a member of the group. He observes a risk of exploiting the asset the community has in the dedicated volunteer firefighters. Todd welcomed a larger group to participate. Chair Meslin thanked Todd. Trustee Laisy voiced his position on the board is not to get rid of any of the firefighters. Trustee Nelson questioned the city attorney's input on composition of the stakeholders group. Todd replied the city attorney advised a quorum would be in violation of the open meeting laws. Trustee Nelson would like the stakeholders group to proceed with a minimum number of participants. He suggested Trustee Laisy take his place. In closing, Todd indicated he is very willing to continue with the stakeholders group. Chairperson Meslin indicated the first of the stakeholders meeting provide good exercises of how to listen and talk to people. There was a lot of anger in the concerns which were board decisions. The board arrives at decisions by a majority vote, therefore it would be more advantageous for more of the people who voted for those decisions to be at the stakeholders group if they are going to explain what decision were made in the past. Trustee Laisy thought the original intent of the stakeholders group is to provide better communication. Following the first meeting, it is a perception the program is to convince other groups to operate differently than present operations. The board should make operational decisions, therefore, the board should not support the stakeholders concept. The board is representative of the property owners and taxpayers. Commissioner Barron felt it was a positive meeting with concerns expressed in a controlled environment. Everyone has to make concessions. In some instances communication issues exist. Jeff Meslin indicated all the decisions were made in an open meeting by the duly elected board members. It appears the stakeholders group is trying to change the board's decisions. Volunteer firefighter Martin Glasson indicated his perception was to put to rest the animosity between the city and rural trustees and work out differences in a controlled fashion. The goal should be to come together as one unit to serve the public better. Volunteer firefighter Ron Friez indicated the original concept to communicate issues then it serves the purpose. Chairperson Meslin suggested a special meeting of the board and members of the fire department open to the public with an agenda of the concerns to be discussed in a relaxed public meeting. . **Motion Trustee Nelson to continue with stakeholders group, second Trustee Clapp. Trustees Nelson, Clapp and Laisy for; Trustee Meslin opposed. Motion carried.** Trustees Nelson and Laisy declined to participate in future stakeholder meetings .

UPDATE ON NEW FEMA GRANT APPLICATION FOR RECRUITMENT & RETENTION – The FEMA grant submitted for a new fire truck remains in the review process. A Safer Grant will provide funds for recruiting and training new firefighters throughout the district and especially in Valley View and Minesinger and Turtle Lake areas. Chairperson Meslin completed a grant application to Plum Creek Manufacturing. The application is for \$10,000 to purchase 5 sets of protective gear Notice of award will be available the end of April.

COMMITTEE REPORT TO REVIEW RECRUITMENT & EQUIPMENT NEEDS FOR FAIRGROUNDS FIRE STATION –

In response to the letter in the news media seeking new recruits, Trustee Laisy receive three calls pertaining the to Fairgrounds Fire Station. The calls were information only. Chairperson Meslin indicated a number of people are somewhat interested and would like to think if the invitation would come from the fire chief he

would have more success and influence. Valley Bank would like to close the building loan on the Fairgrounds Fire Station. Traditionally when the construction is complete the loan is closed. **Motion Trustee Nelson to leave the loan open and review next month, second Trustee Clapp. Motion carried unanimously.** Fire Chief Fairchild advised the board of a letter identifying construction issues with the completed station. Chairperson Meslin will contact contractor Paul Iverson regarding the tracks on the automatic bay door openers.

FAIRGROUNDS FIRE STATION UTILIZATION – Paul Mauer addressed the earlier comments. Noting current volunteers are 28 firefighters in Polson, 5 to 8 in Big Arm and 5 in Irvine Flats. As a rural taxpayer, he expects the Fairgrounds Station to be up and running. Chairperson Meslin commented on the use of fire engines north and south of the bridge. Currently all the brush vehicles are housed north of the bridge at the Fairgrounds Station. Housing brush and structure engines equally north and south of the bridge would provide two fully active stations – Polson City and the Fairgrounds Station. The interlocal agreement provides for use of buildings, equipment and share volunteer fire fighters which works very well. Both stations should house structure apparatus equipment whether it be city or rural. Bill Koberg resides south of the bridge and depends on Polson Rural to respond irregardless of the interlocal agreement. Trustee Clapp questioned what is different for the rural. Does Montana Code specify something different for the placement of equipment and personnel for the rural district? Trustee Laisy responded the incident management system is similar to the Montana Codes. The Montana Code and incident management system provides for the board to request certain management criteria of the fire chief. Trustee Clapp agreed the board has the authority to hire and fire the executive. Although there is nothing in Montana Code to allow the broad powers. Chris McGuinness suggested the board explain their vision for response from the Fairgrounds Station. Paul Maurer stated the Fairgrounds Station is an asset and should be used in a positive way with the interlocal agreement in place. Experiencing a chimney fire at her Big Arm residence Chairperson Meslin indicated response from Polson was 27 minutes and added the volunteers were at a weekly training in turnouts ready to respond quickly. **Motion Trustee Laisy the board require the fire chief to make a priority to recruit and train firefighters for the Fairgrounds Fire Station and during the next 30 day period the fire chief track time spent on rural district duties not including calls and training per day to provide the board with time required to perform duties, second Chairperson Meslin.** Discussion: Currently time spent on response calls and training are logged. Trustee Laisy would like to evaluate time spent on administrative duties. Trustee Clapp suggested adding response and training time since a normal city fire chief performs mainly administration duties and rarely responds to calls. Although response is a major component of the Polson position. **Trustee Laisy amended motion to include time spent on calls and training, second Chairperson Meslin.** Bill Koberg expressed the board has done a lot to recruit. What does the board expect the fire chief to do beyond their recruitment? Trustee Laisy indicated the fire chief knows the area and people a little better than the board and the board has received resistance to try to recruit volunteers and in some cases recruits were turned away. Perhaps if the invitation would come from the chief, he would have more success. The board is hopeful the fire chief will be more successful than the board. Bill Koberg suggested the board set policy and quit micromanaging the department. Trustee Laisy indicated micromanaging is caused by the management or current management not following the board's direction and not managing the way the board expects. **Motion vote - Trustees Laisy and Meslin for; Trustee Clapp opposed; Trustee Nelson abstained. Motion failed.**

COMMITTEE REPORT OPEN HOUSE FOR NEW STATION - Trustee Laisy reported the open house is scheduled for March 13th 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Lake County agencies located at the site will participate in the open house. DES will provide fuel reduction information, Montana Highway Patrol will provide buckle-up safety, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fire, and Polson Ambulance will also provide useful information. The volunteer fire personnel will provide recruitment information. Plans for a opening ceremony to acknowledge those who made the station a reality will be reported at the next meeting.

New Business:

DISCUSS AND CONSIDER JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM – Trustee Clapp presented the guidelines Two new rural members are active through the junior program. It is good source of getting young people between the ages of 16 and 18 involved. Chairperson Meslin is hesitant with the safety issue. Trustee

Clapp reported Bigfork has a successful program. The program was analyzed by the state worker's comp insurance program. Currently two juniors are active and others are interested, which will provide new recruits. Trustee Laisy indicated 20 percent of firefighter deaths occur coming to and from a fire. Another attorney in addition to the city attorney should review the program. Trustee Manley reviewed the program and made some changes on the application form. Fire Chief Fairchild reported a number of junior programs in various fire departments were reviewed. He suggested the board review the guidelines and report at the next meeting. At the scene, the junior firefighter is assigned to an officer who is outside the immediate danger zone **Motion Trustee Clapp to review the junior firefighter program next month, second Trustee Nelson. Motion carried unanimously.**

CONSIDER UNIFIED/CONSOLIDATED APPLICATIONS – Fire Chief Fairchild reviewed the city and rural volunteer firefighter application and prepared a consolidated application. He suggested the board review the consolidated application and discuss at the March meeting. Volunteer Ernie Butt supports the joint application. **Motion Trustee Nelson table to next month, second Meslin. Motion carried unanimously.**

DISCUSS FORMING ADDITIONAL RURAL FIRE COMPANY – Trustee Clapp asked if the intention is to form a company. The interlocal agreement provides that all the companies work together as one. **Motion Chairperson Meslin to form a company for the Polson Rural Fairgrounds Fire Station, second Trustee Laisy. Trustees Meslin and Laisy for; Trustees Clapp and Nelson abstained.** Trustee Nelson clarified personnel is not available at this time for the station. Chair Meslin commented Greg Perkins and Paul Iverson completed the application for the Fairgrounds Station.

TAX RESPONSIBILITIES FOR RURAL FIRE COMPANY – Chairperson Meslin contacted attorney Richard Gebhardt regarding tax responsibility on volunteer firefighters potential retirement benefits. Our recent auditor Dan Meyer confirmed all donations should be deposited in the district's funds and should be used for specific causes relating to the fire company who donated the funds. The donations can then be tax deductible and the general public has full disclosure on how the funds are spent. A rural fire company should form a volunteer firefighters association to raise funds such as barbeque or pancake breakfast. This will avoid any tax liabilities or need to file a tax return. None of the donations to the association will be tax deductible. Any equipment purchased by the association and used in the district should be donated to the company.

POTENTIAL LEGISLATIVE SOLUTION TO FIREFIGHTER COMPENSATION - Montana Public Service Retirement System indicated volunteers cannot be compensated if the volunteers plan to remain eligible for the state retirement system. Fire Chief Fairchild reported volunteers may elect to not sign up for the retirement and elect the retirement the board offers. Trustee Laisy suggested during the next legislative session lobbyist for the firefighters association support a change to allow for participation in additional retirement plans. The change should not constitute a fiscal cost to the state district boards. The boards could make a decision that volunteers response is measured at a per hour fee. Representative Jana Taylor is willing to carry the retirement compensation bill to the 2011 legislature.

INVITATION TO READ – Trustee Meslin introduced an article “Recruitment and Retention” authored by firefighter Wilson. It is an interesting concept with different approaches. She invites the board and other to read and discuss at the next meeting.

PUBLIC INPUT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS – None

Motion Trustee Clapp to adjourn, second Trustee Nelson. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 9:46 p.m.

Alison W. Meslin Chairperson

Jack Clapp Secretary-Treasurer