

Missoula Rural Fire District
Board of Trustees
Missoula, Montana 59804

February 10, 2021

PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 20-10, adopted April 14, 2020, the Board of Trustees is limiting in-person participation to its meetings, in accordance with the Governor's Directive and Opinion of the Attorney General.

The Missoula Rural Fire District (MRFD) Board of Trustees (BOT) met in regular session via a "Zoom" video conference on Tuesday, 2/9/2021.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Larry Hanson called the meeting to order at 19:00 hours.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: *Per Chairman Larry Hanson, the consensus of the Board was to skip the pledge of allegiance for the video conference call.*

ROLL CALL: Present: Larry Hanson, Chair; Ben Murphy, Vice Chair; Chuck Beagle, Secretary; and Dick Mangan, Trustee. Absent: Dan Corti, Trustee.

READING OF THE MINUTES: Secretary Chuck Beagle moved to accept the December minutes as submitted. Vice Chair Ben Murphy seconded the motion. Motion voted and passed.

CLAIMS: Trustee Dick Mangan asked a question regarding MRFD's coverage for the high cost of paramedic training: he wanted to know if we had an agreement with the individual firefighters going through that expensive training stating that they would agree to remain in the service of Missoula Rural Fire District for any given period of time after they complete that training or reimburse the District for the costs that were incurred, if they were to leave before the end of their agreement. Chief Newman stated that we do not currently have an agreement like this in place due to our history of retention, especially within the career ranks. However, if this is the wish of the Board, we can definitely look into implementing that. Secretary Chuck Beagle recommended that we check with our legal counsel. Discussion ensued amongst the Board members, and it was the consensus of the Board that they would like for Chief Newman to follow-up with the Board to see if a written agreement to this effect could be set up for MRFD personnel. Trustee Dick Mangan moved to pay the January claims as submitted. Vice Chair Ben Murphy seconded the motion. Motion voted and passed.

COMMUNICATIONS: *Administrative Assistant (AA) Heidi Sather reported:* In addition to the packet, we received a very kind letter of thanks from Jonah & Shannon Vaughan. They wanted to express their sincere thanks to the crew of Engine 341 for their compassion and empathy to a family member while responding to a fatal medical incident in early January 2021. The responding MRFD personnel were Battalion Chief Greg Orr, along with the 341 crew of Lieutenant Casey Porte, Engineer Cameron Harris, and Resident Firefighter Brayden Rogers. The District also received a Notice of Public Hearing from the Clerk and Treasurer's Office, regarding the petitions for annexation into the Missoula Rural Fire District for five properties that the MRFD Board recently approved. The final step in this annexation process will be the approval from the Board of County Commissioners, in which they will issue a resolution to approve the annexation of these properties into the District.

The packet contained copies of sympathy cards regarding the tragic loss of Retired Battalion Chief Dan Merritt that the District received from Retired City Fire Chief Mike Painter, the Local 613 Bozeman Firefighters, and the Missoula Board of County Commissioners. These were representative of the strong outpouring of support that MRFD received from around the state. Also included in the correspondence was a letter from AA Sather, specifying her last date of employment with MRFD. In addition, the packet contained the monthly Public Relations Outreach Breakdown for January 2021, which consisted of 13 total

documented events; and, the January IT (Information Technology) Report from IT Manager Joe Ford, in which he highlights the different computer services that he has provided to MRFD.

TRUSTEE REPORTS: None.

VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION: None.

LOCAL 2457: None.

BC'S OPERATIONS REPORT: BC (Battalion Chief) Greg Orr reported: January was a busy month. With winter coming on, we have had several MVA's (Motor Vehicle Accidents). Also, at the beginning of February, we helped East Missoula with a structure fire response. We sent an engine and a truck out there to help them on a trailer fire; our crews were there well into the night.

In January, we also had Battalion Chief Merritt's memorial service. There was a lot of work put into that by many folks, and they all did a fantastic job. We really appreciate their work, and, of course, we miss Chief Merritt.

STAFF REPORTS:

Office Manager (OM) Melissa Schnee reported: We are currently balanced with the County through November. The December statement was received but not balanced yet. She has been working on finalizing the audit, which is an item later on in the agenda.

She also wanted to thank AA Heidi Sather for her time with us and wish her luck on her new adventures. We have about a month left, but this will be Heidi's last Board meeting.

Assistant Chief Paul Finlay reported: He has been asked to share the Operations duties for the Western Montana Incident Management Team concerning the COVID vaccine distribution. This has been a pretty full-time job, including three meetings each day at a minimum, that represents that need, and frequently far more. In addition to his regular MRFD duties, he has shared that responsibility with Brad Davis from Missoula Fire Department for the last multiple weeks. So far, we have successfully planned the vaccine distribution and have helped many mutual aid partners access the vaccine. So, we expect that this responsibility will continue for Chief Finlay into the foreseeable future while also doing his MRFD work.

Fire Chief Chris Newman reported: Chief Orr touched on Chief Merritt's memorial; there was a lot of tough work, a lot of long hours went into putting that together, and it was a very fitting send-off for a great man and a great brother.

The Community Risk Assessment Standard of Cover is continuing, and Engineer Cory Horsens is doing a great job with spearheading that. We had training on Module 3 of this, and we are about halfway through it. As part of that process this past month, we had an online Community Stakeholders meeting. Normally these are done in person, but for obvious reasons, we did it virtually. We had about 30 or so folks from around the community: people from local businesses, hospital administrators, school administrators, from all around the District. It went really well, and we got a lot of great feedback that the Center for Public Safety Excellence put together. So, we will be publishing that along with our community risk assessment once that process is done.

The new Station 4 project has just hit our first delay: they estimate a 2-week delay due to weather. We missed it by about a week in getting all of our flatwork, and all of our slabs poured. However, this was not unexpected, as we knew that winter weather conditions would have an impact, especially when you

start a project of this magnitude in November. So, hopefully, they can catch up the time as the weather gets a little nicer.

We had our Training Officer assessment center, and Battalion Chief Blaine Cowan is our new Training Officer as of 2/8/2021. So, we welcome him into that position and expect great things from him.

Reasonable Suspicion training took place at the beginning of February for the new drug and alcohol policy that the Board adopted. We did this across all three shifts, and it went really well.

Chief Newman was notified by our current legal counsel, Attorney Rich Gebhardt, that he will be retiring in June. He has been practicing law for close to 50 years, and he was MRFD's counsel back in the '80s and '90s; and he has a lot of rich history with MRFD, the area, and all of the local fire districts. So, his knowledge and experience will definitely be missed. With that said, we are looking to transition to a new attorney for our District. We believe that we have narrowed it down, and Chief Newman has a meeting with Kate Dinwiddie, an attorney out of Bozeman. She has good experience with fire districts, contracts, personnel issues, and she comes with very good reviews from other departments that have dealt with her. So, Chief Newman will be meeting with her, and he can update the Board at the next meeting as that transition progresses.

We are in the transition process as we prepare for AA Heidi Sather to be leaving around the beginning of March. As a brief history, we have not changed our administrative staffing levels in over 30 years. However, in the last 25 years, our career staffing has increased by 79%. Chief Newman believes that it is high time that we add another position into the administration. So, we are looking at a restructuring of the front office, mainly in the finance and accounting side of things. So, we are looking to hire two positions once Heidi leaves and then rename Melissa's title to become the Finance/HR Director. We have put out an advertisement for an Accounting Assistant to assist Melissa with the accounting's day-to-day operations. This will allow for Melissa to do the high-level things that she is much better at and can do a lot for the fire district if she can be relieved of the daily operational accounting that someone else at a lower level can handle. With that being said, we are going to start with hiring an Administrative Assistant as a temporary position to make sure that this is exactly how we want it to run. Chief Newman noted that this would initially cost the District more money to have this third position, but this should have been implemented years ago. If Melissa can be allowed to focus on the higher-level analysis and data side of our financial health, we believe that this structural change will pay for itself.

OLD BUSINESS: 2019 Audit Review: OM Schnee introduced to the Board Ms. Nicole Noonan, the MRFD Auditor, who has been working very diligently on the FY19 audit review. Ms. Noonan noted for the Board that her office experienced several delays due to COVID, and they are expecting a much faster process for the next audit. She stated that all issues found were corrected. She noted for the Board that she was able to give an unmodified opinion, which meant that this was the highest level of assurance that she could provide, stating that these financial statements are fairly stated. She also highlighted that the District is financially doing well in managing our liabilities and that MRFD had good financial reserves. She also noted that there were no compliance issues regarding MRFD's internal controls. OM Schnee also thanked Ms. Noonan for taking the time to present this report to the Board members for this February meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. **New Volunteer Firefighters Introduction and Oath of Office:** Chief Newman introduced to the Board our four newest Volunteer firefighters: some of them have been here before and are returning, and some are with us for the first time: Christian Drab, Jack Christiansen, Rob Ellis, and Jason Berry. Chief Newman virtually administered the MRFD Firefighter Oath to them and then welcomed them into the MRFD ranks.

2. **2020 Awards:** Chief Newman explained that this usually occurs in an executive session during a Board meeting; however, that option was not available during this virtual meeting. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, Chief Newman suggested to the Board that the Chiefs and the Board communicate their nominations via e-mail. Either the Board could e-mail the Chief their specific recommendations, or Chief Newman and Chief Finlay could submit their nominations to the Board with the corresponding reasons behind them. The consensus of the Board was to communicate with the Chief via e-mail to maintain the confidentiality of the 2020 Board award recipients.

ADJOURNMENT: Trustee Dick Mangan made a motion to adjourn. Secretary Chuck Beagle seconded the motion. Chairman Larry Hanson adjourned the meeting at 19:49 hours.

Respectfully submitted,



Heidi Sather, Administrative Assistant
Missoula Rural Fire District



Larry Hanson, MRFD Board Chair

3-9-21

Date

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Chuck Beagle, MRFD Board Secretary

3-9-21

Date