



**CENTRAL VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

215 Wings Way
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MEETING PLACE: Central Valley Fire District, Station 1
215 Wings Way, Belgrade, MT

DATE: November 14, 2023

TIME: 5:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE: (Present) (Absent)

Trustees:	Ty Elliot, Chair	X
	Mark MacLeod, Sec/Treas.	X
	Justin Varley	X
	Ron Murray	X
	Darren Wilkins	X
Fire Chief:	Lonnie Rash	X- remote
Fire Marshal:	Jake Zlomie	X
Operations Chief:	Vacant	X
Acting Clerk:	Debbie Bloem	X
City Representative:	Jim Simon	X

NOTICE: **ALL MEETINGS OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT BOARD
OF TRUSTEES ARE RECORDED**

GUESTS/VISITORS: Glenn Bradbury, Greg Tryon, Mitch Hamel BSFD, Briana Scherrer,
Justin Monroe, Mo Holt, Seth Nowlin, Taylor Lee, Gus Holcomb,
Anthony LoGiudice, Tyler Samlowski, John Foster BSFD, Jeff Ball,
Chris Cameron, Nick Tucker, Dustin Pitman, Jason Anderson, Will

Roberts, Neil Cardwell, R. Johnson, Cody Lipperd, Nick Stinson, Miranda Roy, Matt Polzin, Trent Saunders, Jordan McGearty, Sean Rodino II, Brinn Fiorentino, Seth Ray, Nick Johnson, Mike Liebmann, Mitch Davis

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Elliot led the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA: As presented.

MINUTES: Trustee MacLeod moved to approve the **October 10, 2023 minutes** as submitted. Trustee Murray seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

FINANCIAL REPORTS: Trustee Wilkins moved to approve **the financial reports**. Trustee Varley seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMUNICATIONS: The **Mason Moore Foundation** sent a thoughtful note of encouragement after the crew responded to some especially difficult incidents a month ago. A local artist, **Duncan Bullock** created a painting entitled **Fire Tornado**, inspired by the Bridger Foothills wildfire, which she donated to CVFD. Murdoch's donated their "round up" funds from August and September to CVFD. This donation was passed along to the volunteer association. Central Valley Fire District also received thank you notes for **station tours**. Crew members received a note, along with a donation, thanking them for their skill and compassion in an **EMS response**. This donation was passed along to the Union Benevolence fund.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

FIRE CHIEF REPORT: As submitted.

Fire Chief Lonnie Rash began by noting that **two recruits** have completed the Gallatin Valley Firefighter Academy and are assigned shifts and that a previous employee who is a Firefighter/paramedic, will be returning in January. He reviewed

the failure of the **mill levy** and noted that there were some things out of the District's control that contributed to this outcome and that a lot was learned from this process. A group of US Forest Service smoke jumpers will be using **Station 7** for a location to perform some off-season repair and maintenance on their equipment and will be billed for actual costs for using that facility. Chief Rash presented the opportunity that the department has been given to hire a **Financial Manager**, bringing the previously outsourced services of an accountant in-house. In his report, he identified how this position will be funded, using the administrative position allocation, along with the funds currently budgeted for financial consulting. The analysis of the **EMS delivery** is now being completed by Fitch and Associates and a report should be available by the end of the year. The **Reese Creek community** will have several members who will be participating in the upcoming volunteer defensive firefighter academy. Chief Rash concluded by **thanking** the department for his time with the District.

OPERATIONS REPORT: Included in the Fire Chief Report.

FIRE PREVENTION REPORT: As submitted.

Fire Marshal Jake Zlomie reported on the various tours, school assemblies and other **outreach activities** that the department participated in during the month of October, especially during Fire Prevention Week.

The **third-party reviews** are going well. Building activity did increase from October of 2022, with more permits issued and additional revenue for the District.

LOCAL 4939 REPORT: As submitted.

Union President Pitman reported that the GVFA did go very well with a lot of hard work going into the process. After expressing appreciation for the proposal by the City of Belgrade, he read a report, submitted from the Union, communicating some concerns and asking for time for internal discussion as well as reiterating

the commitment of the Firefighters to continue to serve the community.

Chairman Elliot made a commitment to include the Firefighters in future decisions and discussions pertaining to both, any agreements with the City of Belgrade and the selection of the next Fire Chief.

President Pitman urged each of the trustees to come out to the Stations and **spend time visiting with the Firefighters.**

TRUSTEE REPORT: None.

CITY LIAISON REPORT: None.

Trustee Varley moved to accept **the reports** as submitted. Trustee MacLeod seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

ORDER OF BUSINESS:

DISCUSSION ITEMS: **Interlocal Agreement Between Central Valley Fire District and the City of Belgrade**

Trustee Murray, Chairman Elliot, City Manager Neil Cardwell, Assistant City Manager Greg Tryon and a couple of Firefighters met to discuss an Interlocal Agreement between CVFD and the City of Belgrade. Chairman Elliot stated that if it is decided to go down this path towards an ILA, the City Manager would be the one to make the call to Greg Prothman to begin the search for the next Fire Chief. The City Manager has committed to sharing the cost of this search because the former Fire Chief resigned to work for the City of Belgrade and City Manager Cardwell brings hiring experience. If the District enters into this service agreement with the City before July 1st, 2024, the new Fire Chief would be an employee of the District, if he is hired after July 1st, 2024, he would be an employee of the City, along with all the other members of the District.

City Manager Cardwell distributed and read through a proposed resolution to authorize the City Manager to develop an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Belgrade and the Central Valley

Rural Fire District in which the **City of Belgrade would manage the Central Valley Fire District** including its assets and employees. City Manager Cardwell sited the administrative cost savings. He sees a mutual benefit and noted the possibility of the City of Belgrade funding a dedicated ambulance service for its residents in the future. Whether or not this moves forward, he is confident that the City and District will continue to have a good relationship. The Board Members deferred questions until after the attendees had an opportunity to make comments.

Volunteer Firefighter Gus Holcomb expressed **concerns** over involving anyone other than the Fire District Board of Trustees in decisions regarding the hiring of the next Fire Chief and specifically involving a former CVFD Fire Chief in decisions regarding the District. Chairman Elliot stated that he believes that it is appropriate to explore this option at this point.

Trustee Murray reviewed some of the recent set-backs and said that he appreciates the cost savings benefit. He believes that the Board should hire the Fire Chief and possibly consider this option in the future.

Maureen Holt expressed her continued concerns over asking the property owners to pay more in taxes and urged exploration of other means to fund the department.

Volunteer Firefighter Glenn Bradbury spoke as a resident outside the City of Belgrade, expressing his preference for the department to continue to be run by the CVFD Board. He is concerned that the Fire Chief would essentially have two bosses.

EMS Volunteer Will Roberts asked if the CVFD Board would still exist. The Chairman responded that the Board would still oversee the Fire Chief and communicate to the City Council and the City Manager would have the ultimate authority and the ability to fire the Chief or any member of the fire department. The City Manager noted that the Board would not retain the authority to fire the Fire Chief.

The City Manager executes the policy decisions of the City Council. The Fire Board would set the policy and the City Manager would ensure that the members follow that policy. The City is concerned because they chose to be a part of the District. If the City of Belgrade left the District, the City Manager stated that the District's budget would lose "70 to 80%" of its funding. As the City

continues to grow, and if mill levies for the District should fail, the City of Belgrade may find themselves being concerned about the services that it is receiving from the department. The City Manager is looking for ways to realize some extra funding from some of the visitors that come through the airport and thinks that there would be extra clout with the addition of the District to the City. He urged a decision before hiring a new Fire Chief to ensure that the new Chief would know who his boss will be. There were concerns on both sides of this issue.

Chairman Elliot emphasized that whether or not the agreement exists, the City Manager will be a part of the process to hire the next Fire Chief.

Trustee Murray asked if there are other options besides Greg Prothman's company for the hiring process. He added that Fire Marshal Zlomie is willing to step up as Acting Chief, along with the rest of the leadership of the department to lead the department until a new Fire Chief is hired. He voiced that it would be wise to slow down the process and wait until after the holidays to begin the hiring process.

Chairman Elliot agreed that there are other options and that this hiring can be delayed.

Assistant City Manager Greg Tryon voiced his concern over the fire department operating on its own. He sees other areas combining cities and districts. He stated that the City of Belgrade may decide to form their own fire department and the District will be left with Reese Creek, Springhill and Dry Creek and that is it. After being asked, he said that it would benefit the City to partner with the District, in order to have the ability to see its residents as individuals, in the way that the fire department does. Cities focus on serving their residents as a whole. The fire service focuses on individuals. The City of Belgrade will want to have some control over fire service as it invests more money in the fire department. Lt. Jason Anderson asked where the 20-25% cost savings figure comes from and who will represent the residents outside of the City of Belgrade. Assistant Manager Tryon supplied that figure and responded that the Fire Board should continue and reviewed some of the ways that money could be saved by combining through cost avoidance and sharing services as well as insurance.

Lt. Mitch Davis responded as a resident of the District that he supports the Fire Board governing the fire service.

Lt. Jordan McGearthy asked that with such a good relationship between the parties, why a contract is necessary in order to share the cost and process of hiring a new Fire Chief. He believes that this is a decision for some time in the future and that a future Fire Chief would probably like to be part of the decision whether or not to partner with the City of Belgrade.

City Manager Cardwell is opposed to hiring a Fire Chief before making this decision because moving to this Interlocal Agreement would change the position of Fire Chief. The Administration of the District would be taken over by the City of Belgrade so that part of the job description would be taken away from the Fire Chief and he would be an Operations Chief.

Chairman Elliot wrapped up the discussion by stating that a decision will not be made at the meeting tonight. He asked who the current Human Resources employee is and what the grievance process is, pointing out one of the current needs in the department. The Board agreed that the hiring process will wait at this point and there will be not be any action in haste. He appreciated the participation and attendance of so many at the meeting.

City Manager Cardwell pointed out that there is a current ILA with the City of Belgrade enabling the department to request assistance in the general administration of the department due to the departure of Fire Chief Tryon to the City of Belgrade.

ACTION ITEMS:

Election of Vice Chairman

Trustee Wilkins **nominated Trustee Varley as Vice Chairman.**

Trustee MacLeod seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Acceptance of Fire Chief Resignation

Trustee Varley moved to **accept the resignation of Fire Chief Lonnie Rash.** Trustee Murray seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Move to Executive Session for Discussion Only – Declined

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The next regular meeting of the Central Valley Fire District Board of Trustees is scheduled for **December 12, 2023**.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.



Ty Elliot, Chairman

Mark MacLeod, Secretary/Treasurer

ATTEST: 

Debbie Bloem, Clerk