POLSON RURAL FIRE DISTRICT BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
FAIRGROUNDS FIRE STATION NO. 4
MINUTES WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2015

Board trustee members present: R. Jack Clapp, Fred Nelson, Drew Hoel, Jack Konitz, Patrick Gembala.
Board trustee member absent: None
Staff: Finance Officer Bonnie M. Manicke.
Visitors: Lake County Commissioner Bill Barron, Polson Mayor Heather Knutson, City Manager Mark Shrives, Interim City Fire Chief Clint Cottle, Berl Tiskus, press Valley Journal, Lee Manicke, Elsa Duford, John Fairchild, Bob McCrea, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Division of Fire, City Commissioner John Campbell, City Commissioner Ken Siler, Terry Gembala, Assistant Fire Chief #1, Julie Sisler, President Polson City/Rural Fire Department Membership; Kevin Straub, Karen Sargeant, James McKee, Jane Clapp, Grant Clapp, Greg Perkins, Scott Kiser, Martin Sago, Carol Swope, Ronnie Swope, Jason Edwards, Leanna Fillman, Dean Sams, Steve Stanley, Paul Laisy, Lee Engbretson.

Chair Clapp called the special meeting to order and opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance at 6:00 p.m. {00:09}
In a generic, general sense the purpose of the meeting is to discuss personnel matters. City Manager Mark Shrives requested an opportunity to address the rural board. Mark thanked the board for calling the meeting. Mark received a letter of resignation from Fire Chief John Fairchild on Monday. John is moving on to pursue other opportunities. City Manager Shrives sent a letter to the board and also met with the officers of the fire department and the membership yesterday. Mark introduced his selection for interim chief for the Polson Fire Department Clint Cottle. Clint thanked Chair Clapp, Rural Fire Board Trustees and members of the public for the opportunity. Clint read the letter sent June 30th by email to Chairman Clapp and Rural Fire Board Trustees.

Dear Chairman Clapp and Rural Fire Board Trustees,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and explain to you my vision for the department and hopefully ease some concern you may have.

First I would like you all to know that the decision to accept this position was not something that I have taken lightly. I am a man of strong faith and when this opportunity was presented to me I spent a lot of time in prayer and consultation with my family. I diligently did as much research as I could about the department. I read the two different professional consultants reviews of the department. What I took into consideration was whether or not the items listed as problem areas in the department were fixable or not and I came to the conclusion that with the correct form of leadership they most certainly are. It is with all that in mind that I made the decision to accept this position.

The Polson City/Rural Fire Department has a rich history. The department is filled from bottom to top with some of the most outstanding individuals that live in our area. They are a dedicated, well trained and equipped group. Much of that is a credit to your guidance. They deserve to be a part of a Fire Department they can be proud of and take ownership in. My leadership style
consists of consistent communication, every member being treated equally and with respect, proper use of the chain of command, officers that are allowed to do the job they are in a position to do, and backing from their chief, they will excel in their rolls and pride and ownership will emerge.

I want you to be rest assured that I accept this position with a plan in place to provide top notch response to any emergency the department is called to. As stated earlier there is a top notch group of officers on this department that are more than capable of handling any situation. I will be appointing an Assistant Fire Chief that I have total faith and trust in. I am confident in this person's abilities to manage scenes and knowledge of wild land fires. At the meeting with membership last night, I asked Terry Gembala to fill the position of Assistant Fire Chief and Terry accepted.

I possess the management background and training to successfully lead this group of individuals and am looking forward to joining their ranks. This is the memberships department and I look forward to serving them and this community in this capacity.

I look forward to future communications with all of you.

Clint Cottle

Clint provided a quick background. I began a career in public service in 1999 with Lake County Sheriff Department as a 911 dispatcher. Clint joined the Polson Police Department June, 2002 as a patrol officer, then advancing to detective, and patrol sergeant with the last assignment as Assistant Police Chief. Throughout the time on the department, Clint was dedicated to training and currently possess every possible certificate that is available for Montana police officers standards and training including a command certificate, administration certificate and math certificate. Clint is a quick study and offers management skills that are needed for this position. He plans to learn the fire service quickly with the help of all the members and leadership in place. Clint clarified a statement made at the membership meeting last night. He commented the fire chief doesn't need to respond to every situation. The intent was one person can't be on call 24/7, 365 days which will lead to burnout. He does intend to respond to as many calls as possible with the assistant chief and members in command position to learn quickly. There needs to be time to take the day off and a structure plan in place. Clint offered time for questions from the board and public. Chair Clapp set the perimeter for the board to field questions and then the public. Please state your name for the record. The board had no questions at this time.

Questions from the public. Dean Sams, a concerned citizen, questioned Clint's fire training. Clint replied he has no fire training. Dean commented Clint is the interim fire chief. How long will the search take to get a real fire chief? City Manager Shrives doesn't have a time line on the search. Dean commented the fire chief was replaced with a manager that has no fire experience; considering the current weather situation and the western Montana region potential for fire danger. Dean assumed the replacement was made between Monday and today, which was a quick decision. Mark commented it was not a quick decision. Dean commented perhaps the replacement was considered for weeks and did not communicate with the rural board. James McKee commented the fire chief resignation was with the city, therefore, who is the rural fire chief? Chair Clapp commented the rural board has not received a resignation. The board is in session to address the rural fire chief position and how to move forward. John Fairchild remains the rural fire chief. He has not submitted a resignation to the board. Trustee Nelson commented Mr. Sams question was not answered. Mark replied the fire chief is an employee of the city of Polson. There are personnel laws to follow so that is not a question I can answer based on what confidential conversations that have gone on. Trustee Nelson commented Mark claimed a working relationship with the board. Why haven't you talked to the board regarding your thought process? Fred heard rumors in Missoula regarding a plan to replace the Polson Fire Chief. Mark replied he had conversations with members of the board. He received a letter of resignation on Monday that is as far as our conversations goes. Chair Clapp commented Clint has been put in a difficult position. Mark the issue is that the communication that has come out of both Curt Belts report and the earlier ESCI report talked about either the need to try to work closer together or to act independently. Curt Belts recommended specifically having separate chiefs in his report. Clint did a very good presentation to the membership last night. Clint commented on the fire
ground in an emergency situation he fully expects the command people and myself to make decisions based upon the circumstance. When it comes to decision about general things that affect people or the department, he employs the democratic process that is to invite people to come in and talk and express opinion and then he arrives at a final decision. The problem is City Manager Strives provided no opportunity for the board to buy into this. The rural board found out yesterday who was appointed and the middle of what is predicted to be the worst fire season in ten or fifteen years. Jack appreciates personally Clint brings many good qualities to the table that this department needs. He sees the priority of the fire department number one to deal with the emergencies that arise. Yes the administration is important and can be improved upon, but Rome is burning and we are fiddling. Mark you missed a huge opportunity. Jack is not suggesting who will fill the position, but that the city manager is looking for an administrator and have given this board an opportunity to consider and maybe make some suggestions how best to implement that. Might it have been better to have asked the city chief to have stayed on during the fire season to work with Clint in some sort of cooperative basis and would the board have been willing to contribute to that. There was a huge opportunity missed that has resulted in what potentially is not as good a result as could have been. Mayor Heather Knutson, city of Polson commented the letter of resignation was received on Monday. She appreciates the fact that we were able to respond to that and put in an interim fire chief. Clint Cottle is a very outstanding person and great leader. We can have faith in that as an interim fire chief to do the best job. Furthermore we have a great fire team. Everyone in the fire department does a tremendous job with the job at hand that our community is safe and fire suppression takes place. She feels we already have that position in place and we can handle the response impact. At this point, we need to get behind this and work together to support our new interim chief and do our job. We have the experience necessary and we all do a great job of responding to that. Heather certainly understands and appreciates the concerns at this point. It is a critical situation. We need get through the situation and then work through things if needed at a later date. The bottom line is we need to move forward. She appreciates everyone's efforts to do the job, fighting the fires and making sure our community is safe. The department already does a great job of that. Chair Clapp appreciates Heather's comments. Jack has no quarrel with Clint's qualifications administratively. Although, he wants it to be clear that this just didn't happen on Monday. Perhaps the finality happened, but this has been at least on the radar for a couple weeks. Jack doesn't believe that Mark on Monday came up with a plan to put Clint Cottle in this position. That is where the rub is. We could have talked and tried to find a way forward. The city is saying to this board, “this is who you have, we hope you like it.” In the past, there has never been a fire chief chosen “ever” since the rural board's existence and the inter-local agreement in place that hasn't taken into account significant input from the board. This is new territory. The city is going to decide. If you like it and hope you like it like we do. In the past, when John Fairchild and others were chosen there was direct communication. Let's get some involvement. What are the rural needs? From Jack's perspective, the rural has the ability to go out and effectively control fires and emergencies. That has changed, the assist chief is a full time employee of the city. Jack assumes Terry Gembala will be free to leave his full time job 24/7 during the day. Mark hasn't addressed the issue at this time. Chair Clapp commented a major fire could break out and we don't have a plan in place. Jack noted new firefighters are not issued gear or equipment prior to training. He appreciates Clint's experience, but not on the fire ground. Karen Sargeant doesn't see that as being an issue. Karen has 17 years of fire experience on three difference fire departments. The officers collectively have a 100 years of experience, additionally firefighters have 27 to 20 years of experience, and firefighters completely trained up to engine boss for wildland fires. What the department needed is leadership. On the fire ground, the operations people are the firefighters not the chief. The chief is the operations person, command person watching over the crew to make sure they are safe. Karen is looking for leadership. She knows what to do on the fire ground. Every single person in the department knows what to do on the fire ground whether it is a wildland fire or a structure fire. Karen needs to know someone is watching out for her; that is what we didn't have before. Clint will pickup the fire tactics in a short amount of time. If that is what the rural needs to keep the
department together, Karen will be more than happy to teach Clint wildland basics on getting certified. Karen commented if the department separates – is an operations plan in place for the rural and city? The 2008 inter-local agreement, states the rural may appoint a rural fire chief. Curt Belts' report suggests if the department doesn't operate as one entity, a rural chief and a city chief will oversee fire operations. Chair Clapp commented this board has made overtures on more than one occasion how to operate as one entity. There hasn't been a receptive audience on the part of the city to operate as one entity. Karen replied the fire department has been operating as one department, although perhaps not administratively. Karen would like the department to continue to operate as one department. Jack assumes the department will continue to operate as one department.

Karen is concerned a different operational plan will be needed for two chiefs. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss personnel matters, moving forward and future with the city. Therefore at this time no decision has been made. James McKee questioned if the rural is looking for rural fire chief? Currently there is not an absence of a rural fire chief. John Fairchild remains the rural fire chief. Trustee Konitz commented through the inter-local agreement we hope the city and rural will continue to work together since the volunteer firefighters are one work force to cover each other both fighting fire in the city and in the county. James McKee questioned the rural fire chief's salary as an additional expense to the district. Chair Clapp replied the board does not have an answer at this time. Furthermore the rural does not have a need for a full time chief. Paul Laisy, retired Missoula Rural Fire Chief with 30 year career in fire service, commented on concerns in the fire district. At this time of the year and the season, an extreme fire danger exists with no relief until winter. During his career, Paul studied firefighter deaths. Many of the deaths are caused by inadequate command on the fire scene. This fire district has a fire chief job description and the requirement for the position. In part, the job description states the chief must be a firefighter. The interim fire chief should have credentials with a lot of fire experience background. Chair Clapp introduced Bob McCrea, Chief of Operations for Tribal Fire. Bob has been involved with fire service over 40 years starting out with a hot shot crew, four years as a Missoula smoke jumper, tribal member serving on type I teams with a thorough knowledge of leadership and the needs of wildland fire operations. Introducing a firefighter to wildland training for one or two days is not adequate training, which results in causalities.

CS&KT Division of Fire Operations supports John Fairchild 100%. A letter of support was signed by Ron Swaney, Fire Management Officer, Bob McCrea, Wildland Fire Operation Specialist, and Darrell Clairmont, Prescribed Fuels Manager. Mr. McCrea's fire crew supports John Fairchild. He has not observed any leadership problems on scene and always felt he could rely on John. We are headed into a hot and dry fire season. Tribal division of fire does not have the manpower to deal with the fires. The Tribe relies on the rural fire district volunteers. Bob appreciates each and every one of the volunteers. The volunteers are dedicated to the job and safety of our people. They have a lot of training and background training. With no offense to Clint, the city people don't realize the issues regarding liability with Clint as fire chief. IC-1 and IC-2 have quit being IC's because of the liability. The liability is a huge factor. Bob is required to carry a two million dollar liability insurance policy. The people in the wildland fire department quit being IC's because of the liability issue. Clint has administration qualities. Division of Fire will still use Polson Fire. The Division of Fire will be somewhat hesitant and will not go unified command. The fire season will be hot and dry throughout October. It is extreme on the west side and very high on this side. These records haven't been set this early in his career. He responds to fires in Alaska and North Carolina and all places in between. Mr. McCrea is hopeful the district retain John Fairchild as the Rural Fire Chief. The Division of Fire votes to retain John as the rural chief. Kevin Straub, Polson Fire Department commented the board hasn't received a letter of resignation from Chief Fairchild. The board has not discussed the release of John. What Kevin sees currently, the department gained an administrative chief and maybe not able to cover the city and rural wildland areas which is small. Thanks for your vote of confidence the firefighters and officers can't handle the wildland areas. Kevin thinks the officer and firefighters can handle the wildland areas. Rural Chief Fairchild will respond to the rural wildland fires. The rural board needs to come up with a plan to deal with the issue that will arise with two chiefs, one set of
workers and how the workers will respond. Another point regarding lack of communication. At the
last board meeting the board commented I don't care what the city does we are going to move
forward with a vote for the deputy chief, safety officer, and training officer job descriptions. Then
someone suggested the board wait and contact the city. The board chose to move forward with a
vote. A vacancy needed to be filled. The vacancy was filled with who they thought was appropriate
and would take care the issue at hand. The board will rely on the officers that we have and a new
assistant chief will take on operations. Trustee Nelson indicated the board is going to move on. This
just didn't come up on Monday morning. The issue has been brewing with the city for two weeks.
The trustees heard what was going on through the grape vine and you could not talk to this board
about what was going to happen. Steve Stanley, retired Polson firefigther, former Rural Fire Board
Trustee, involved in emergency management for 40 years. Steve communicated with previous city
manager Jay Henry regarding issues in the fire department. Steve was asked to be on a committee to
research the possibility of Polson Rural District offering fire services to the city of Polson. Three
meetings were held involving the city attorney Rich Gebhardt, rural board members, and residents in
the district as lay members. Steve opposed Paul Laisy for a trustee position on the Polson Rural Fire
Board. Steve apologized to Paul recently. He didn't have clear vision. The committee is going to
continue to meet to develop a proposal for the rural board to offer fire protection to the city. The
committee feels it would save the city a lot of money. During the first meeting, City Attorney Rich
Gebhardt commented the rural can keep the $15,000 payment for the inter-local agreement and go the
direction the rural want to go. The comment was two and half months ago. Steve was disappointed
and the comment set the tone. The comment certainly did not offer a working relationship. Jason
Edwards rural firefighter and rural resident commented there is a lot of frustration with the
philosophy among the volunteers and the issue continues. The issue continues with the volunteers
not trusting each other. We need to consider what is going to happen in the future. There is a bigger
issue on the table. How is the fire department going to persevere with the current situation. The
issue has to be addressed and city will handle addressing the process. The second issue is how the
department responds to calls. The department responds quickly and dividing the volunteers will
increase response time. There is a lot of internal turmoil in the department that needs to be dealt
with. Chair Clapp heard the issue on different polar extremes. Clint commented last night that we
try to start out with a fresh slate. The goal is to try to find a way move forward. John Fairchild has
indicated that he hasn't resigned the rural fire chief position. He would stay on during the fire season;
but that doesn't indicate filling the position forever. Clint brings some very good qualities to the table
as Jason just addressed are very much needed as well. Jack suggested the creative minds in the
various bodies to figure out a way to make the current issues a win win. It warrants some
consideration. We know what the issues are on both extremes, the wildland and administrative side.
There should be a better way to work through the issues. Julie Sisler commented the board decisions
affect volunteers. Julie suggested the board meet with each one of the firefighters for their thoughts
and opinions. Trustee Konitz commented we need to hear from more of the volunteer firefighters.
Can it work under John's direction in the wildland fire season for three months and allow him to work
with Clint to provide training help each other out. Clint will bring managerial experience. The
volunteer fire department will work under John with the officers in place for rural firefighters for a
three month period. A reply from a volunteer commented will the rural chief and city chief be willing
to work together through the interim period? Currently the fire department is divided and there is a
morale issue. He doesn't want to divide the department. The department is comprised of volunteers
who give their time to this community. We all have concerns and have completed many hours of
training with capable people that can continue to provide service. But we have to hear from our
current chiefs. Trustee Nelson asked why can't the volunteers take care of the internal issues.
Perhaps those causing issues should be removed from the department. Scott Kiser Polson Volunteer
Fire Department 21 years volunteer commented the board needs to request the volunteers work
together so they can continue to provide fire service. During previous administrations, the city and
rural were not working together. The rural board and the city needs to work together. Terry Gembala
served in two different departments commented the city and rural public will suffer the current issues.
It will not be the firefighters, the rural fire board, or the city manager. Terry agrees with Scott to figure out the current situation. Trustee Hoel questioned if the city and rural is not trying to communicate? Terry replied they need to work together. Terry commented in the Columbia Falls Fire Department the city rural volunteers would not communicate at the fire hall. Clint commented seriously this all about service to the public. He is willing to work with John Fairchild or who ever it takes to provide service to the public with no questions asked. Bob McCrea commented the department has good people and they know their jobs. He has a trust in each and everyone of them. People don't understand the year we are going into. This is not a year to be fighting, let your guard down, or say this is just another fire season. This is a different fire season with the potential for people to get hurt. Fire departments in Washington and Oregon are being sued. Bob wants the great people on the department to be considered. He plans to use the volunteers to assist. John Stevens retired firefighter 20 years commented the current information has not had time to be analyzed. The issue needs to be worked out. The rural board heard about the chief issue on Monday, which is two days to try to digest something we have never been involved in the history of this fire department. The rural board doesn't know what John's plans are. The city and rural needs to get together and talk about a plan. It not fair to expect decisions for the city or rural in the short time frame. This is a time when the rural and chief need to come up with a plan. Chair Clapp suggested one word “communication”. James McKee Polson Fire Department volunteer commented a number of details need to be worked out. The membership needs to know and there wasn't at least some conversation among the leadership that talked about what was going to happen. It takes time to put details in place, although the volunteers need to know who to listen to. Direction is needed from the leadership to know what is going on. As of 5:00 p.m. tonight John is the rural chief and Clint is the city chief. The volunteers need to know who to respond to and how to function on a daily basis. Chair Clapp commented the rural board is an elected board. The rural board cannot meet outside a public meeting except for personnel matters or litigation to formulate any decision. The city manager has the opportunity to operate in a different manner. Lt. Martin Sago, station 2 commented to step back with an opportunity for us make a bit of a jump to get to where we talked about getting over the last year or two. Perhaps it will be possible for all the decision making to be set aside until the fire season is over and chose to operate in a certain way. Chair Clapp commented the decisions would be less of an issue in November. Mayor Heather Knutson commented the rural board has decisions to make regarding John Fairchild's position. In order to start moving forward, all the comments were great, and continue to focus of moving forward. The decision by the rural fire board who the fire chief will be. The board should submit a plan to the city regarding response. She respects the membership would want to know what the plan is. The plan needs to be concrete and recommends to do it sooner, rather than later. Paul Laisy commented John has a terrible job working for too many bosses and it especially doesn't work in the fire service. Paul suggested the board move forward and look at the whole picture. Decide for the fire district to operate as it should with one boss, one fire chief, and officers to provide fire protection. Kevin Straub requested comments from Chief Fairchild regarding moving forward. Chief Fairchild commented during conversation today with Chief Cottle, the goal is to work together and take care of the people in the community. If it is in the city, John envisions we can still operate the same way; in the rural John will respond and if Clint wants to respond in the rural with John. Currently Chief Fairchild envisions no change. The goal is for John and Clint to work together. The bottom line is take care the people with the service we provide which is very important. Trustee Hoel commented the rural and city chiefs already discussed a plan. Clint replied he worked with John the past two days to get information on duties, and the working relationship should the rural board appoint John as rural chief. Clint has known John a long time and is willing to work with John. Trustee Hoel indicated since John and Clint are willing to work together there isn't an issue. Drew's concern is if the assistant chief is going to be able to respond to the rural. The board makes the decisions for the rural; while the city makes the decision for the city. If that means during this fire season, two people are in change, Clint is willing to work with the rural chief. Trustee Konitz commented the statement is a real strong statement. Liability wise the city and county would be far ahead to utilize both your experiences together during the fire season. Perhaps Clint can
provide a new light to managerial issues. While John knows a lot about fire service. Chair Clapp commented the board recognizes John's ability on the fire ground. At the same time do you think you can work with Clint in terms of the administrative side. John replied as we talked earlier, he has no problem working together. We actually said we have to work together; which was clear on both sides. Clint commented to John's credit. John offered communication with Clint any time of the day. There is no issue between John and I. Grant Clapp thanked John for the years in the fire service and the personal training. Karen Sargeant made a point of clarification with plans to teach Clint basic wildland training. Karen is not able to complete all facets of the training in a short time, but will provide the basics. Scott Kiser appreciates John's ability to serve the rural district. As a taxpayer in the district, Scott has a concern with employing a rural fire chief. Chair Clapp responded the rural citizens will not experience a tax increase. The city command vehicle 301 is assigned to City Fire Chief Cottle.

The rural board will address several concerns including response and a command vehicle in the executive session. Trustee Hoel commented the rural chief could respond to a station and board a truck. Chair Clapp asked John if he is willing to continue in the interim as rural fire chief during fire season? John replied “yes”. The district has a liability policy in place. Jane Clapp commented in regard to the liability, Montana Code states the fire chief of a governmental fire agency is the highest ranking officer and is responsible for the operation of the agency. A fire chief must be appointed that has some knowledge and experience. Chair Clapp thanked everyone for attending and appreciates everyone's comments. The board will adjourn to executive session to explore the issues and come up with some determination. Trustee Nelson motion to move to executive session. Trustee Hoel second. Motion carried unanimously. Adjourn to executive session 7:09 p.m.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC SESSION {00:52}- Trustee Nelson motion to reconvene. Trustee Hoel second. Motion carried unanimously. Reconvene at 8:00 p.m. Trustee Konitz read the following statement.

In the best interest of the taxpayer and their fire protection and liability, due to the lack of firefighting experience of the newly elected fire chief hired by the city and considering the current fire season threat. The rural board elects to retain John Fairchild through the current fire season. This decision was also based on the fact that John and Clint have agreed to work together on all mutual aid calls. John being liable for the rural and Clint being liable for the city. We are asking all volunteer firefighters to respond mutually like you always have. Clint will be in command in the city and John will be in command in the county. Trustee Nelson requested Clint and John notify dispatch regarding radio traffic. Clint will be 301 and John will be Polson Rural 1. Trustee Konitz commented the rural board is excited to work with Clint as the city chief with his administrative abilities. John and Clint also expressed the ability to work together.

FORMAL ADJOURNMENT {04:43}- There being no further business the Polson Rural Fire District Board meeting was adjourned 8:04 p.m. Trustee Hoel motion to adjourn. Trustee Nelson second. Motion passed unanimously.

R. Jack Clapp, Chair
Drew Hoel, Secretary-Treasurer

Polson Rural Fire District Board Special Meeting Minutes July 1, 2015  Page 7
1. Discuss personnel matters, moving forward, future with City.

2. Recess

3. Executive Session

4. Re-convene

5. Adjourn