

**Stevensville Town Council Meeting Minutes**  
**for THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 09, 2023, 6:30 PM**  
**206 Buck Street, Town Hall**

**CONDENSED MINUTES**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Gibson called the meeting to order. Councilmembers Barker, Brown, Lowell and Michalson are all present.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comments (Public comment from citizens on items that are not on the agenda)

4. Approval of Minutes

a. Town Council Meeting Minutes for 10/26/2023

Mayor Gibson: Introduced approval of town council meeting minutes for 10/26/2023.

Councilmember Barker: make a motion to approve the town council meeting minutes for 10/26/23.

Councilmember Michalson: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. Public comment? Any further discussion? Seeing none, Jenelle please take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Lowell: aye.

Councilmember Michalson: aye.

Mayor Gibson: passes 4-0

5. Approval of Bi-Weekly Claims

a. Claims #18654-#18681, #18682-18684

Mayor Gibson: introduced claims #18654-#18681, #18682-18684.

Gina Crowe, Finance Officer: yes, there are three more added.

Councilmember Michalson: make a motion to approve claims #18654-#18681, #18682-18684.

Councilmember Lowell: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. Public comment? Any further discussion?

Councilmember Barker: #18666, Miller Enterprises, stump grinding. Where was that at? Stumpo grinding around gas lines, \$850.00.

Stephen Lassiter: on College street, the big tree that we cut down on College.

Councilmember Barker: also #18669 on the visa, Sure Charging for \$992.25.

Gina Crowe: those are for the AED's, fire department.

Mayor Gibosn: anything further? Seeing none, Jenelle please take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Lowell: aye.

Councilmember Michalson: aye.

Mayor Gibson: passes 4-0.

## 6. Administrative Reports

### a. Airport

Will Rowe: as far as the airport go, we are getting back in compliance with the FAA for lighting. Runway lights are up and running. Have been working with Jenelle and Gina to get all of the past lease payments and getting those sent out in chunks so that we are not getting inundated all at one time.

### b. Building Department

In the packet.

### c. Finance

### d. Fire Department

Chief Motley: monthly report is in the packet. Pretty much normal. Three mutual aids, Victor and Florence and then they came and helped us. Christmas lights are going up next Sunday.

### e. Police Department

Chief Schaffer: read from the police report provided in the packet. Officer Kopsa has secured a spot at the academy for January.

### f. Public Works

In the packet.

Mayor Gibson: Mr. Kruse's last day is November 17<sup>th</sup>.

## 7. New Business

a. Discussion/Decision: Appointment of Stephen Lassiter as the New Public Works Director

Mayor Gibson: introduced new business item a. Appointment of Stephen Lassiter as the New Public Works Director. Councilmember Lowell, Gina and I conducted interviews, and it was very close, and both candidates were good. We decided to appoint Mr. Lassiter.

Councilmember Lowell: make a motion to appoint Stephen Lassiter as the New Public Works Director.

Councilmember Barker: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. Public comment? Seeing none, further discussion?

Councilmember Michalson: so, you are working on the water and the sewer certify?

Stephen Lassiter: yes, I will be, it is my top priority.

Mayor Gibson: he will start on November 20<sup>th</sup> and in that hiring letter it was state that he will work for his water and sewer certifications. Further discussion? Seeing none, Jenelle please take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Lowell: aye.

Councilmember Michalson: aye.

Mayor Gibson: passes 4-0.

b. Discussion/Decision: RFP for Gravel Pit at the Stevensville Airport

Mayor Gibson: introduced new business item b. RFP for Gravel Pit at the Stevensville Airport

Councilmember Michalson: make a motion to approve RFP for Gravel Pit at the Stevensville Airport.

Councilmember Brown: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. Public comment?

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jenelle Berthoud, Town Clerk: read public comment from Kelli Weed. (the written comment is included in the meeting minutes.)

Craig Thomas, Airport Board Chairperson: we discussed this at considerable length at a special meeting. There was a vote on this. I have spent the last six years on this project getting it to this stage and the airport needs this funding and the FAA has approved all of the items that Ms. Weed has discussed. And have stated it as being safe. We have also been through our local

engineer. Mr. Thomas commented on the concerns that Ms. Weed made in her public comment. We would like you to consider this as a financial gain for the airport.

Brian Germane, Airport Board Member: 3464 Baldwin Rd. Stevensville: a lot of the items that were addressed in that letter were to airport runway protection. This gravel pit is outside the runway protection zone, by 600 feet. The concern that has been brought up relative to it being in the runway protection zone is not really applicable the reason is the runway protection zone will go over that if the runway was to be lengthened, the FAA states that runway extension is out 10 years. During that time the gravel pit would run its course. This gravel pit would exist over the next six years and beyond the runway protection zone. When I wrote that letter I gave two options, the first one would be preferred to allow the airport board to negotiate and find interested parties. Couple of reasons, one would be to work through these issues and find solutions, going to an RFP process is somewhat difficult. What if the product like 30-50 feet down the company does not know what is down there. My request would be that the town council allow the airport board to negotiate with these parties and come up with the best plan with all of these things in mind and the come to you with that best proposal.

Jerry 4493 Sunnyside Cemetery Road, Stevensville : as an interested observer. I belong to the Stevensville Airport Foundation, pilots and hanger owners that got together to try and help the airport. The airport needed help and we volunteer and try to fix things up and help to improve the airport. The Stevensville Airport is a beautiful airport, and it has the opportunity to be the destination airport for all of the people from Idaho and Montana. The facts that Kelli put on there are facts, they are not wrong, she took worst case. The perfect airports out in the desert you ride it out, here a safety zone is important, the FAA requires a safety zone. Engineers and FAA would not allow us to have a gravel that impeded on the airport. We need this for income for the airport.

Councilmember Lowell: I am confused about what she is talking about when taking off, like over Whitehair's house, is that what she is meaning?

Brian Germane: may I approach the table? (provided a picture/map to the council) Here is an ariel of the airport itself with the existing runway as it is right now. The current runway protection zone comes out like this, the area in yellow is where the pit would be. What Kelli is referring to is here, in a perfect world you would want no trees or anything in this area, but that is not the case, we have homes and business. The current runway protection zone extends out 1200 feet the gravel pit that is proposed would be another 600 feet past that and would encompass this area (referred to an area on the map) that it would be cutting into.

Councilmember Michalson: just so I can get this you want two options and the first one you guys want to work with the two or three people that you have working with to bring a proposal to the council and then option number two the council would put out an RFP to basically do the same thing. My question is if you are working with these two of three people wouldn't they bid on that.

Brian Germane: yes, they would bid on that potentially, the county who is the first that approached us with this idea, the county is probably going to go away, they just wanted to come in and do this, and if there is going to be completion then they are not interested. The other two

companies that I am talking to have done a little bit of research on their own one of them has gone out there and did some tests at their own cost. They could only get down 8 feet with the equipment that they brought to really understand it you are digging down as deep as you can to see the material.

Mayor Gibson: it is up to the council it is the word negotiate is the problem. it will have to come to the board for their decision with an RFP.

Councilmember Michalson: to stay with the rules this does need to go to an RFP.

Brian Germane: I am pretty close to this line of work so I understand.

Mayor Gibson: it is the money, the word negotiate.

Councilmember Barker: I see this as a money-making issue. Have you contacted the people around this area that you are looking at doing this?

Brian Germane: not yet.

Councilmember Barker: because they need to know. Is this going to look like the pit that is already there.

Brian Germane: very similar, the other side is the county, the reason that the county approached us is because they are running out. Nearly identical to this process.

Councilmember Michalson: I would make a motion to approve option number two an RFP out for this process.

Councilmember Brown: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. Public comment? Further discussion? For option number two.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Lowell: aye

Councilmember Michalson: aye.

Mayor Gibson: passes 4-0.

c. Discussion/Decision: Suspension of Town Council Rules to Cancel the November 23, 2023, Town Council Meeting in Observance of the Thanksgiving Holiday and Authorizing Claims to be Paid out of Cycle

Mayor Gibson: introduced new business item c. Suspension of Town Council Rules to Cancel the November 23, 2023, Town Council Meeting in Observance of the Thanksgiving Holiday and Authorizing Claims to be Paid out of Cycle

Councilmember Barker: make a motion to suspend Town Council Rules to Cancel the November 23, 2023, Town Council Meeting in Observance of the Thanksgiving Holiday and Authorizing Claims to be Paid out of Cycle

Councilmember Lowell: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. Public comment? Any further discussion?

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Lowell: aye.

Councilmember Michalson: aye.

Mayor Gibson: passes 4-0.

d. Discussion/Decision: Approve Process to Replace the Mayors Position

Mayor Gibson: introduced new business item d. Approve Process to Replace the Mayors Position

Councilmember Michalson: Due to the fact that one of these options directly involves the council president I would ask for the council's permission to recuse myself tonight.

Councilmember Lowell: I would like to make a motion to take applications to replace the mayor's position.

Councilmember Barker: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mayor Gibson: motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup> to take applications. Public comment?

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jenelle Berthoud, Town Clerk: read a letter from Susan McCreary, (the public comment will be included in these minutes).

Mayor Gibson: that has been some confusion on timelines and ages to be a mayor. We have a motion and a 2<sup>nd</sup> Jenelle please take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: no.

Councilmember Brown: very hard decision, pros and cons for both sides, aye.

Councilmember Lowell: aye.

Councilmember Michalson: abstained.

Mayor Gibson: passes 2-1

## 8. Board Reports

NONE

9. Town Council Comments

NONE

10. Executive Report

Mayor Gibson: my last meeting will be the 29<sup>th</sup>.

11. Adjournment

APPROVE:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Steve Gibson, Mayor

*Bob Mick*

ATTEST:

*Jenelle S. Berthoud*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jenelle S. Berthoud, Town Clerk





P.O. Box 358,  
Stevensville, MT 59870  
November 8, 2023

Public Comment Letter concerning filling the vacancy left by  
resigning Stevensville Mayor Steve Gibson.

Dear Council Members and Citizens of Stevensville,

I moved to Ravalli County Montana in 2002, and lived in the Three Mile Creek area. In April of 2012 I moved into the Town of Stevensville, just in time to experience the cost of city water and sewer going from \$35 a month to \$82 a month, thanks to a newly elected mayor.

After the last young mayor we had was voted out of office, under the steady Mayor ship of Steve Gibson, the experienced Stevensville Town Council, and the then Police Chief, the Town of Stevensville was able to find where and how monies were disappearing from Stevensville Town funds. Once that hole was plugged, and some semblance of Stevensville Town budgets and expenses were established, Stevensville has been a quiet and safe place to live in.

In order to keep Stevensville a quiet and safe place to live, I recommend that the Stevensville Town Council appoint the current Council President, Bob Michalson, to be the Mayor of Stevensville. To take applicants for the Council seat left vacant, by Bob Michalson becoming mayor, would give citizens of Stevensville time to develop knowledge and experience of anyone filling that council seat vacancy. And then maybe that person would consider running for Stevensville Town Mayor in 2025.

I am sure that there are many new residents now living in Stevensville who have lived here only 6 months or more, and being over the age of 18 years old, would have many new ideas on how to make Stevensville look like where they came from. Please be careful what you wish for.

Respectfully yours,

*Susan McCreary*





November 11, 2023

To Stevensville Council and Citizens:

As a member of the Airport Board, I see the single most defining purpose of my role to advocate for maintaining and improving the safety of the airport as a public resource for general aviation. In light of this purpose, I cannot condone the development of a mining operation located on airport property in line with the airport runway. Primarily, the board should be making choices that increase safety and protect the airport in the long term for aviation activities, not decrease it permanently for short-term financial gains. Although I can entertain the fact that the airport is in need of sustainable income, I believe there are other ways to do so that welcome aviation activity that is supportive and aligned with the goals of our small community. Any industrial operation in line with the end of any airport runway adds inherent risk. At Stevensville Airport, runway 30 departing to the west is used almost exclusively for take-offs, especially small general aviation aircraft due to the relatively aggressive downslope of terrain (and continuous upslope of terrain to the east) as well as the prevailing west winds. Take-off and climbs are among the most critical phases of flight, and among the most likely time for engine failures to occur.

The following is an excerpt from the AOPA article "Engine Out!" <https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/2002/july/pilot/engine-out>

"According to the National Transportation Safety Board, there were 4,187 accidents attributable to engine failure during a recent five-year period. That's an average of 837 per year or more than two per day. Of these, a significant number were likely the result of a powerplant failure in a single-engine airplane shortly after takeoff... NTSB accident records describe in graphic detail the often-fatal stall/spin results of those who have attempted a 180-degree return to the airport from too low an altitude. Many pilots, however, have returned successfully but gone unnoticed because the engine failures did not result in accidents."

One such fatal accident occurred at Hamilton just this last summer. Imagine had the pilot attempted to turn around and land the plane at Stevensville, only to come up just short. Instead of having a chance at landing in nothing but brush with an upslope towards the airport, the pilot hit a mining operation cut into the hill just off the end of runway 12, increasing the risk of injury and death to both the pilot and those working at the pit. The existence of industrial operations in this location increases the hazard not only for aircraft in emergencies, but any mining personnel at the gravel pit site.

Contrary to some opinions, Stevensville Airport is not used solely by experienced backcountry pilots in expensive high-performance aircraft who routinely fly to hazardous backcountry airstrips and are comfortable with the added risk. Bitterroot Aviation is an active flight school operating out of Stevensville Airport, which trains several local students, a large portion that continue with careers in aviation, which in turn supports the local economy. Potentially a vast

majority of traffic at the airport is conducted by student pilots, who unlike drivers, can start flying with an instructor at any age, and be flying airplanes solo as young as 16 years old (14 CFR 61.87). Stevensville Airport is used extensively for flight training throughout Western Montana and beyond as a destination for students learning to land at different airports or fuel stops on cross-country training flights. Other small training aircraft such as a light twin, used mostly by students to obtain a multi-engine rating before becoming eligible for several smaller operators at an entry level, may use a much greater length of runway to become airborne. Just after lift-off, the aircraft is still slow enough to fall in the speed range at which a loss of an engine would result in total loss of control of the airplane. These commercial aviation activities are the bedrock of a healthy small airport activity and positive local economic impacts that a general aviation airport should seek to encourage. As an airport board member, I am compelled to advocate on their behalf to make choices that consider their safety as much as older or more experienced pilots who may have a more honed set of decision-making skills when faced with emergency situations.

Runway protection zones are configured by the FAA based on standard airport size designations and standard risk analysis. The FAA may approve activity that may be within the limits of their standards, but it doesn't mean that an activity or establishment does not increase risk significantly. The consideration and maintenance of protection zones and ends of runways are left largely to the discretion of the airport owner:

**"212. RUNWAY PROTECTION ZONE (RPZ).** The RPZ's function is to enhance the protection of people and property on the ground. This is achieved through airport owner control over RPZs. Such control includes clearing RPZ areas (and maintaining them clear) of incompatible objects and activities. Control is preferably exercised through the acquisition of sufficient property interest in the RPZ." (Advisory Circular 150/5300-13).

Last year, a pilot was killed after impacting an unlit smoke stack at a fully FAA approved airport on an FAA approved instrument approach. <https://www.eastidahonews.com/2022/04/pilot-killed-in-plane-crash-was-adventurous-beautiful-woman-who-brightened-the-room-with-her-smile/>. There was such a small margin of error between safety and a fatal impact on this particular instrument approach, in typical winter weather operating conditions through an especially dangerous smoke stack known to cause problems to aircraft, led to this pilot's untimely death. Although the FAA examines risk, the burden is placed entirely on pilots to assess those risks and decide to proceed or not. As airport board members and airport sponsors, it behooves us to maximize airport safety and protect the airport's use for general aviation activity, especially in light of the high student pilot traffic as well as the variety of conditions that pilots may inadvertently find themselves in.

With regard to the discussion of safety in terms of gravel pit specific activities near the airport, there are two additional concerns I would like to consider. First, gravel pits may create dust. Since prevailing winds are generally out of the west, this would blow any dust towards the airport, and into departing traffic. Dust is especially hazardous for pilots due to decreased visibility that may

cause disorientation and distraction leading to an all-too-common stall spin, which is typically fatal on take-off. Second, any pools created may encourage bird activity close to the airport, especially since there is a wild bird sanctuary just to the northwest of the airport. The impact of a duck let alone a goose is enough to stop an engine, injure a pilot, and cause an engine-out emergency - only the pilot may be additionally shocked, incapacitated, or blinded.

I hope that my concerns will be considered with the decision to approve a gravel pit mining operation at Stevensville Airport.

Sincerely,

Kelli Weed

Stevensville Airport Board Member  
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Stevensville, MT 59870  
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(360) 808-3148