

**Stevensville Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes**  
**for WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2025, 5:30 PM 206 Buck Street, Town Hall**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Michalson called the meeting to order. Councilmember Barker, Brown, Bragg and Smith were all present.

2. Discussion on the Following Items

a. Stevensville Fire Interlocal Agreement

Boe Anderson: when we talked the other day it was about the lease and sublease. I can give an overview of the interlocal, it allows for rural and the town to operate together. We have had this agreement so that rural can drive town equipment and town can drive rural equipment. We made the documents separate at request of the town. The interlocal agreement stands until one of us wants to change it or if there is a point where nobody wants an interlocal agreement then we would discuss on taking it away.

Mayor Michalson: I do have a question on the agreement number 3, municipal water and hydrant use. Should we take out, what I have been told is it is a gentleman's agreement.

Rex Olson: when we get water we make a pretty solid estimate on what we are going to use and how many water tenders filled up and I send that to Carlene, and she sends that to the town.

Boe Anderson: I think at one point we talked about topping off and not reporting that amount.

Councilmember Smith: the agreement that we see here signed in 2020 is there anything that you or the chief want to change.

Boe Anderson: we did not see anything that we want to change, we talked about this is our last board meeting. we wanted to keep it more operational as possible the last time we revised it.

Councilmember Barker: I think at one of the meetings we went over a little bit and we changed some of the wording. On page 4 and 5.

Chief Motley: one paragraph the district was in the same paragraph twice.

Councilmember Barker: just making sure that you were aware of those changes. There was another under page 5, I think that we were taking out excluding supplies. Is there a way under the agreement municipal water and hydrant use no reporting under 500 gallons are not reported to the town.

Boe Anderson: do you have a copy of those changes?

Councilmember Barker: these are little things that I had on our sheet. I think that we should have that in there that under 500 gallons not reported.

Jenelle Berthoud: I know because we are leaking so much water right now, and Andrena is keeping track of every single gallon and where it is going under 500 gallons is a lot of water that we would not be accounting for or that Andrena is keeping track of. Even the water that we sell in bulk they may come in three times a day, but it is 200 gallons each time, that is a lot of water.

Councilmember Barker: so, do they need to report that, any time that it is filled up.

Jenelle Berthoud: I think that is what Andrena has thought she was getting when she gets that from Carlene it is a fairly true number.

Boe Anderson: whatever she is getting from Carlene is a true number as close as we can estimate. If you want it reported we can start that. When we talked earlier they weren't as concerned.

Rex Olson: type tows use about 500 or less given the time of year, what people are doing at other stations, they can get filled up and topped off, we can do our diligence to report all of it. At Etna and Sunset, they have reserves for their water. And they prefer to fill from there and we don't like to see the water sit for a year we like to circulate it.

Jenelle Berthoud: we are down from about 15 million gallons a month to 13 million a month because of the water meters and the hydrant water being tracked correctly I think until we get a handle on where it is leaking a figure that piece out.

Rex Olson: on average we are going to use 15-20 thousand gallons and that is a lot.

Jenelle Berthoud: I know that you are going to make that decision, but I wanted to let you know that Andrena is really tracking those numbers.

Councilmember Smith: my understanding if we do bulk that is metered?

Jenelle Berthoud: no, they go off of the size of truck or the tank that they use.



Boe Anderson: it is an educated guess and if we have about 500 gallons, there is a gage on the truck. Our tender is 2500-3500 gallons, and we have had 5 tenders fill.

Councilmember Barker: I really think that we need to report due to the situation where we are at with our water.

Boe Anderson: I am not sure how often she is reporting.

Rex Olson: we just send her a message, and she adds that, I am guessing that Andrena gets it once a month. If you think that we are slacking at that just let us know.

Boe Anderson: we will just have to get our guys to report the top offs.

Councilmember Barker: I just think that we need that reported where we are watching the bulk water.

Councilmember Brown: then we should change that to reporting within 24 hours or once a month.

Councilmember Barker: I think once a month.

Councilmember Brown: that would be a change then.

Chief Motley: if it is once a month and they have a fire at the beginning and then forget to report at the end of the month.

Boe Anderson: we have a meeting tonight, if we have some changes we will let you know.

Councilmember Brown: Jeff is there anything that you see to be altered or changed?

Chief Motley: just those clerical issues.

Councilmember Barker: those two changes.

#### b. Lease and Operating Agreement

Mayor Michalson: item c came up last time. Payment of \$5,000, and there was something about paying that back at \$2,500.

Boe Anderson: the two bays that are there, the history on that is we gave that lot and that building to the town. We right now are just using one bay; the town needed some space for his stuff and then there was a \$5,000 to lease it and sublease it back for \$2,500. Any questions on that. You can see the two bays when you go inside.

Robert Underwood: thought that it was the whole side.

Mayor Michalson: item h on the utilities.

Boe Anderson: we added that in there, our main lease the town said that they would pay the utilities because there was no way to separate. That was Mayor Dewey's thing, when we went to the sublease it says that the town would be responsible for 50% of the utilities but everything reverts to the master lease. If they were able to separate utilities to come and talk to us with a number. We have looked into it and it was quiet a bit of money to split that out.

Mayor Michalson: so rural is good with sharing the utility cost?

Boe Anderson: if you could hook up a meter we would.

Mayor Michalson: would that be possible to do Robert?

Robert Underwood: once again it will be expensive to put a meter in. most of the expense goes out those doors for heating, and we can't get around that.

Boe Anderson: you were looking at the backup generator, did that get installed? That was put in and Rebkee was looking at that.

Jenelle Berthoud: the building was not able to take on that generator.

Robert Underwood: we can ask what the cost of putting in a meter would be.

Gina Crowe: maybe we could come up with a flat rate, it is getting expensive.

Boe Anderson: come up with a number and I will take it back to the board.

Councilmember Barker: how did the sublease and the operating agreement come about.

Boe Anderson: we have the two bays, and the town needed space in the building, and they needed half of that building and the sublease is for half of that building and that is town equipment on that half.

Councilmember Barker: it just seems confusing when you have a lease and a sublease.

Boe Anderson: we did that for two reasons. We are pretty, remember Stacie, Brandon was telling us to a point, it was a unique conversation with him, we decided to pull it out of the interlocal agreement and then there was town equipment that needed space and then the sublease was developed if the town does not need the space anymore than we will pay the full \$5,000 and dissolve the sublease.



Councilmember Barker: is there some way to come up with a number for them so that they can take that back.

Gina Crowe: sure can, I will go back and see.

Councilmember Barker: I don't want to run you guys out but with rising costs of everything.

Boe Anderson: through a number at us and we are willing to listen.

Councilmember Smith: does rural use upstairs office at any time?

Boe Anderson: we have our own offices at the Westside Station, when we train together sometimes. The fire fighters can use the areas at both locations.

Councilmember Barker: I know with times changing we are going to see a lot more of the rural and cities combined together, how would this agreement look if we were to combine.

Boe Anderson: you are saying consolidate fire departments. That would certainly be a conversation that if this council would like to at least investigate rural has always been in the position of if you want to talk about it we will talk about it. we are not in a position and do not want to be in a position that we want to take you over, that has never been our goal but certainly worth the conversation. There is probably a half a dozen ways that it can happen. Stay with the agreement and with a monetary side of it the town will pay "x" number of dollars, and you take care of the fire protection or as far as you paying, and I was talking to Chilcott, and he said that there are possibilities that you annex the town into the rural fire district then the money would be collected on the tax rolls just like it is on the rural side. I think there is more than one way. That would just be, if the council would like to investigate something like that just send us a letter that you want to look at it and grab some people that are interested in looking at it.

Gina Crowe: have you consolidated with anyone else?

Boe Anderson: no, we operate, I have had the conversations with Stacie and Bob, we operate four rural stations, one here, Sunset, Westside and Etna. We technically operate four stations the town has a station and that would be five. Some of our fire fighters, everyone that operates as a fire fighter there is a roster for town and a roster for rural. I think that coming back to town 14 years ago and getting on the board I still see it operating pretty smoothly but I think with the economy and what we are going to see and the tax dollars definitely worth looking at.

Councilmember Barker: that was something that was brought up at the MMIA conference in Anaconda and they were talking about the fire departments coming together as one same with the police, the police is another one that is becoming one, because these towns do not have the funds to support what they need to, and it is all based on the tax dollars. We are not there yet, but.

Mayor Michalson: we were told not this year, but it is coming. And you might down the road when money gets tight and safety is number one.

Rex Olson: it would not be the first consolidation in the state of Montana.

Councilmember Bragg: if we consolidate do the taxes come from the county or both. How does it work?

Boe Anderson: that is one of the things that has to be decided, Bill Fulbright would be the one to talk to about what towns can do. That is one thing that you would have to decide, if rural took over and you paid rural "x" number of dollars I think it can be also annexing in that town land area and then it would fall on the tax bill as fire protection. You guys will be saving money in a sense.

Chief Motley: your taxes are not going to go down; we would still be assessing the towns tax just spending it somewhere else. It is not a cost savings to the town to shift the fire protection off to these guys they are going to charge you for it. they will not do it for free.

Boe Anderson: yes there is a fee, and it will cost money to do it, but if you are not having to front a budget for fire protection and it is coming out of county tax rolls then there would be cost savings.

Rex Olson: it is worth the conversation and we are certain that we will have the conversation with you and at the end of the day if it doesn't pencil out or work for you we tried. We went down this road once with Mayor Mimack and it just, he did not become mayor again.

Boe Anderson: Rex come in and offered some sort of proposal years ago. the PD side is where I see you guys get beat up all the time, your train officers and then they are off in two years, that is a tough thing when you are a small town.

Mark Adams: I am a taxpayer inside the city limits; I speak from experience. When my wife and I got married we were paying \$82 for water and sewer for three months now we re paying \$115 per month for 3,000 gallons and if it goes over that we are charged more, I am using that as an example. You look down the road you don't see costs coming down. Another example, the rural fire district just lost a grant



application for a new tender if they had more resources maybe they would not have to apply for a grant. A tender you might say what good does that do? Well, if it is outfitted with a pump and hoses like the rural tenders are it all of a sudden becomes a piece of firefighting apparatus that is useful to the city of Stevensville, but we have a ridiculous, redundant situation here we have two sets of fire engines, two sets of turnouts, two sets of equipment, two part-time administrative assistants. Do you see what I am saying, you can't. You are going to have to consolidate, because the taxes are going to go through the roof. You have to go to the people to get the taxes to increase, and I don't know about you but my wife's and I taxes have gone through the roof. We need to start down the road to consolidation one way or the other, knowing full well that it is not a destination it is a journey. When you start out with the rural district contracting for services and then at some point annexing the town of Stevensville into the rural fire district, maybe a few more years down the road annexing Three Mile in. The simple fact is in the state of Montana with all of the growth that we have seen there are still too few people into large of an area for everybody to have their own little kingdom. Do you see what I am saying?

Boe Anderson: there are some things through the Ravalli fire council that they look at as all rural organizations. There is an effort, and they keep their eyes on it. Hamilton and us have been talking about having a maintenance agreement. Right now, we all do whatever we can do to get our mechanic in to work on our equipment. Rex used to have a shop, and we still use that shop to do some of our repairs and Hamilton use guys that come from different parts of the state. We are looking at certain ways that can save money. We need to have a conversation when you guys are comfortable.

Councilmember Brown: I was just going to explain that when you pull up your tax bills they have a breakdown on what each thing is getting on your tax bill, if the town had to go over there then there would be another line saying this amount is for that, I don't see your actual tax bill going down it will probably go up because of the amount of money that they would be asking for, it would be another line item on each resident.

Boe Anderson: I was not referencing that it would go down it could get cheaper if we decided that we did not need an administrative assistant and on equipment and it will get paid by somebody, but it is not going to get doubled. The citizen sees on their tax bill that they are paying for fire service it can be explained. It would be the town is not collecting it the county is.

Councilmember Brown: the town will not decrease their taxes it will probably be the same, and what Jeff was trying to say that money that we are budgeting for the fire district or for his fire department would no go to another department.

Boe Anderson: that is up to you guys, your citizens could be mad about that.

Mayor Michalson: yeah, because they would not see a return on their investment.

Boe Anderson: if you decided that the sheriff's department was going to handle it and now your money is somewhere else, be ready to explain that.

Mayor Michalson: what is the council's wishes, are you going to accept these changes.

Jenelle Berthoud: are you going to take these to your meeting tonight?

Boe Anderson: yes, I noted them and will take to them.

Councilmember Barker: if we could get it back in time.

Jenelle Berthoud: I have until next Tuesday.

Councilmember Smith: you were making a reference, are you talking clerical.

Chief Motley: where it says District it should say Town. It is not a big deal, paragraph e reads the same in both areas and should reference each other.

Boe Anders: we have a few days.

Mayor Michalson: I would recommend with changes on the meeting of the 26<sup>th</sup> and I would like to see a lease agreement signed and then start conversation about consolidation and get ahead of the curve before it gets us down the road, it is going to come. Stacie and I have heard it so many times, Jenelle heard it at the Summit. They are trying to tell us that our property taxes are going to be short.

Jenelle Berthoud: Mr. Anderson is correct it is not just fire it is law enforcement.

Mayor Michalson: yeah all of it.

Jenelle Berthoud: we have to have all of those discussions as a small town.

Chief Motley: so, if there are no more changes to the local agreements then why are we bringing them forward.

Councilmember Brown: they are coming due.

Chief Motley: the lease, not the other.



c. Sublease and Operating Agreement

3. Public Comment

Gina Crowe: I have one statement when you talk about consolidation. I don't want there to be a misconception that this is going to save the town a \$100,000.00 because it is not. I mean like having a conversation on what is it really going to cost and the services. There is a lot that goes into it.

Rex Olson: I have been on for 29 years it has been a "we should talk about this" Jeff and I have been through this. It is worth looking into and at the end of the day you can say it is not worth it because it is not going to save our towns people any money and that is fine. But I think that it is worth having that conversation so that you can say that you have done your due diligence for the taxpayer.

Mark Adams: there is three ways to save money you can spend nothing and hope for the best or you can spend less and get the same level of service, or you can spend the same and get a higher level of service and that is what consolidation would do for the city of Stevensville.

4. Adjournment


Councilmember Brown: move to adjourn.

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

APPROVE:

  
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Bob Michalson, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
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Jenelle S. Berthoud, Town Clerk