

Stevensville Special Town Council Meeting Minutes

for **MONDAY, JANUARY 12, 2026, 6:30 PM 206 Buck Street, Town Hall**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Crews called the meeting to order. Councilmembers Bailey and Smith were present. (Town clerk observed)

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

NONE

4. New Business

a. Interviewing of Town Council Applicants for Ward 2

Mayor Crews: introduced new business item a, interviewing of town council applicant for Ward 2 before we get started we need to make sure that we are all aware especially the candidate and I am sure that he is, that working for the Forest Service and being on the council could be a very conflicting position because as a member of the Forest Service and being on the council there are things that you can vote for and things that you cannot vote for. For example, that member cannot vote for anything that has to do with the fire department because that would be voting for competing agencies, can't vote for anything to do with the Forest Service; land use agreement things like that. Has to be very careful about Planning and Zoning. We have to look at these things very closely when those items arise if the candidate is appointed. The candidate would have to abstain from all discussions and decisions regarding those items. I talked to the district ranger Seth Romocki and talked to him, and he is aware of the issue, and I believe that the candidate has talked with his supervision and this will be a learning process for everybody. With no further action on that lets bring the candidate up.

(Talon Ross was the sole applicant for Ward 2) asked to sit in the chair at the front or at the podium.

Mayor Crews: the council has to do the selection the mayor does not have anything to do with that, all that I do is guide the meeting, there are a set of questions that the council will present to you and then judge you on your answers.

Councilmember Bailey:

“Tell us about yourself, your qualities, or special talents and why you are applying for the Town Council.”

Talon Ross: my name is Talon Ross, my wife and I almost a year ago moved into Stevensville proper. We used to live outside of the town limits and before that I worked for the Forest Service in Oregon and Idaho. My main job is wild land fire and specializing in fuels technician a lot of field work and projects. As far as special talents I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I enjoy the outdoors and do a lot of hunting and fishing. The reason for applying, as mentioned, I may not be the most ideal candidate with the complications as well as some of the expectations of my job I do get called out a bit for several weeks at a time and especially July and August are a busy time around here. That is something where availability would be a concern but knowing that we did not have positions filled that is something that I felt important to at least see if I would be a good fit and if it would work, obviously there are some special circumstances with my job. I did not expect to be the only applicant.

Councilmember Bailey: how often are you called away?

Talon Ross: it is year dependent, safe to consider 2-4 times a year and that would be about 2-4 weeks at a time. Most commonly 16 days of work. It does directly impact my career as well and that is how you go up nationally. I am not sure how that works but there would be some protentional to video or call in. Not a guarantee.

Councilmember Smith: these questions here the ones that we are just now asking further down, we have not wasted anytime so you are looking good.

Councilmember Smith: Do you have a laptop or anything like that?

Talon Ross: yes I do.

Councilmember Smith: so, you can Zoom in because that is another way to get to the meetings is Zoom. Probably not the best but it does work.

“Have you discussed with family and friends about becoming a council member and about the time and commitment that the position can require.”

Councilmember Smith: I can tell you that it requires a lot more time then what you are paid for.

Talon Ross: I have had several conversations with my wife and colleagues. The big topic at work was obviously availability. I figure that I can apply and have this

conversation to see if I am a good fit. Don't want to jump into something if I don't have the time, definitely been a topic that we have discussed.

Councilmember Smith: you are a young man have you ever been involved in any type of political activities in school or outside as an adult.

Talon Ross: I have not, in 5th grade I ran for student council and lost. It has never been a really huge interest of mine to be involved in a political position. I felt like it was more important to at least attempt to fill a role that I think is a necessity for the town it is important to have a functioning council and town government.

Councilmember Bailey:

“What do you hope to accomplish as a councilmember?”

Talon Ross: learning a lot more, how the town works, and I know water is a big one for the city and trying to help get that all moving forward and cleaning up what we have.

Councilmember Smith:

“As a councilmember, how do you plan to involve our residents in the decision process?”

Talon Ross: I think that it is important that anything that we are discussing or making decisions on is dispersed among town through announcements or however that may be. It is important to reach out and figure out how to engage and hear back on what the town wants.

Councilmember Bailey:

“With the town facing growth and current water issues, how do you plan on addressing these concerns?”

Talon Ross: I think that it is important to take time and make sure that I am fully aware and knowledgeable on what we are making decisions on. Making sure that I am educating myself to a point that will be making a sound decision on fact and reason and listening to what is being asked or wanted.

Councilmember Smith:

“What do you believe, let's say, to be the top two most significant challenges facing our community?”

Sue Devlin: I did not hear the question.

Mayor Crews: I will repeat the question. "What do you believe to be the most significant challenges facing our community?"

Talon Ross: a big one would be, my personal opinion is Stevensville is in a flux of where it is going to go, how much the town is going to grow, improve, and how the town is going to approach this, and the direction that the town is going in. The second one would be the water; how do we fix the situation with the water. It is a hot topic, and it is important. I don't know everything about it, but it is important to make sure that the water is conserved.

Councilmember Bailey:

"How will you balance your current personal commitment with your duties as a town of Stevensville council member?"

Talon Ross: like we touched on before, that is a tough one for me, going into this I definitely knew it would be a tough one to balance more so than other professions I think that having a, I would just have to make sure that the expectations are being met and be as flexible as I can be.

Councilmember Smith:

"How would you handle a conflict of interest while serving as a town council member?"

Talon Ross: that is a conversation that I did have with co-workers and supervisors on the phone, for me I think some people look at it as a con for me and I am very black and white and for me if something is clearly stated I need to follow that and for me if there is a conflict of interest it is easier for me to say no, I need to step out and let the rest of you handle it and it is not worth handling it.

Councilmember Smith: one of the reasons I can see is the relationship that your wife has with the town, being on the chair there. It does not seem to bother me much because it is just an advisory board and can you see that as a possible conflict of interest you being on the council and your wife being on the chair.

Talon Ross: that is a thought that did come to me and a question that I wanted to ask and refer to you guys and how you feel about it. Definitely I can see that would be a conflict of interest and I don't necessarily have a solution to that.

Mayor Crews: there were no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. Sometimes they are there to make you think, obviously there are more to this professional conflict of interest than what I led on, for example you cannot be in

uniform at any time that you are discussing town business, you can never discuss town business at your workplace because the governmental conflicts. That could burn you or the town it is, I just googled it real quick it is like a six-page dissertation. I did call your supervisor and the district ranger and talked to him, and he has not had this case before either, so it is going to be new for everybody. It is going to be learn as you go. If there is a doubt, go with the doubt. You can never go wrong doing that, we have a set of council rules, the council rules flat tell you that if there is a conflict of interest you are not allowed to participate in the discussion or the decision, you have to stand back, and I can tell first hand that you have to keep your professional life separate from your home life because it can cause problems with you and your wife, it really can especially if there is a difference of opinion. Are there any other questions that you would like to present to the council.

Talon Ross: my main thing coming into was to communicate quickly that my availability is limited, I guess my concern would be if I would be beneficial and if being on council would complicate things, I can see both ways, so I am not going to take any answer personally. Conflict of interest, like you mentioned at the beginning of the meeting or with my wife or the planning board.

Councilmember Smith: it is going to be different but not insurmountable.

Mayor Crews: there is a rule in town council rules that we have to consider to, there is a state law regarding vacation of an office and our town council rule will state that if you want to be absent from town for ten or more days that you have to submit your request in writing to the clerk and she will share with the council and they will have three days to make a decision on whether or not it is acceptable to leave town. So that is something that could be a little bit complicated during fire season if this happens, ZOOM meetings from the field could be considered but that is something your command staff would have to figure out how to release you from being on duty at that time and out of uniform at that time as you attend to these meetings or when you study the council agenda, you do not want to mix the two that might be something that might take a little working around.

Talon Ross: that is why I was looking forward to the conversation tonight and what those expectations are, I wanted to at least make myself available to the town and seeing if I would be a good fit.

Mayor Crews: these are the two folks that need to make the decision. I just wanted to make sure that you had all of the information up front, it is a two-part decision. It

is your decision and their decision and if it becomes too much on you, you have to do what is right for your family. That is the way that it works and we understand that.

Councilmember Smith: do you know what MCA stands for?

Talon Ross: No.

Councilmember Smith: I could just leave you hanging there, its Montana Code Annotated and that is our state law, if you are elected we can give you a place to learn this because it is necessary.

Mayor Crews: there is a training program that you can do online to learn how to be a council member there are a few trainings, look there are no trainings for a mayor you just do it. At least for the council there is the Montana Municipal Handbook that we supply to the council members and there is an online training course. You learn a lot about the law, just like being a wild land fire fighter I am sure that there are occasions that you run into that you need to know the law.

Talon Ross: you had mentioned the 10-day out of town, thinking about it more, it could be a fairly significant hurdle sometimes we do not know that we are going to leave until the day before and that could be detrimental to that, very rarely are we gone for less than 14-days consistently more like 16-18 with travel. That could be a big red flag.

Councilmember Smith: I need to ask you Mr. Ross, do you want to keep your name in the for consideration or do you wish to withdrawal.

Mayor Crews: may I offer an alternative to council. How about take three days to think this over and come back with another special meeting and make a decision. That will give the candidate more time to explore his options with the Forest Service and give you folks time to examine the issue more.

Councilmember Smith: his work is definitely different than we have ever faced before.

Mayor Crews: in order to do this, I will need a motion.

Councilmember Smith: to table it, we don't even have a motion to do anything yet.

b. Discussion/Decision: Appointment of an Applicant to the Town of Stevensville Town Council, Ward 2

Mayor Crews: you are right, you haven't, but you are at the point now. introduced new business item b. Appointment of an Applicant to the Town of Stevensville Town Council, Ward 2

Councilmember Smith: I move to consider Mr. Talon Ross as the Councilmember for Ward 2.

Councilmember Bailey: 2nd.

Mayor Crews: motion and a 2nd, any public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sue Devlin: I am in awe of you. I am proud of you for standing up, I do not mean that in a condescending way, this is what we need in this town; people that want to help you have some real drawbacks, but I feel that they can be worked around. I used to work with the Forest Service and in a minutes notice, that ten day could be a problem, there could be exceptions to this. I want to say thank you and I hope that you stay in the running, we need young people and again I am in just high admiration of you and thank you for stepping up and so many people won't.

Mayor Crews: any further comment, council. Are you ready to vote, Jenelle would you please call for the vote.

Councilmember Bailey: aye.

Councilmember Smith: aye.

Mayor Crews: okay.

c. Swearing In of New Town Councilmember

Mayor Crews: at this point we need to swear Mr. Ross in.

(side conversations took place before the swearing in)

Mayor Crews: who would like to hold the bible for him.

Talons wife Tamara held the bible for the swearing in.

Mayor Crews: swore Mr. Ross in as a councilmember for the town of Stevensville.

(side conversations in the audience and between the council)

5. Adjournment

Councilmember Smith: I move to adjourn.

Councilmember Bailey: 2nd.

APPROVE:



James Crews, Mayor

ATTEST:



Jenelle S. Berthoud, Town Clerk