

**\*\* Page 1\*\* A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE JOINT THREE FORKS RURAL FIRE  
DISTRICT BOARD AND CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
CITY OF THREE FORKS, MONTANA, JANUARY 13, 2026**

**JANUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2026.** The Three Forks City Council met with the Three Forks Rural Fire District Board of Trustees at the Ambulance Barn, 2 E. Hickory Street. (Zoom was not offered for this meeting, which is a virtual meeting tool which the City began using due to COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines and continues to use to encourage participation from the safety of one's home.) The meeting was presided over by Mayor Randy Johnston. Mayor Johnston called the meeting to order at 5:15 P.M.

**ROLL CALL:** City Council members Gene Townsend, (Warren) Garret Buchanan, Ed Tharp, Robert Buchholz and Reagan Hooton were present. (Alex Blackburn arrived about 5:30PM.) City Treasurer Kelly Smith, City Clerk Crystal Turner, Fire Chief Keith Aune, and Asst. Chief Charles Eastty were present. Three Forks Rural Fire District Chairman Dale Kober, Trustees Linda Keene, Roger Nerlin and Wendell Ewan were present. Trustee Hannah Roadarmel was excused. (Gene Townsend is also the secretary for the Rural District.)

The Mayor asked Gene Townsend to introduce the Rural Board members, and then he introduced the City Council members.

The record reflects a quorum of both the City Council were present and four members of the Three Forks Rural Fire District present, and a meeting will be held.

The **Pledge of Allegiance** to the American Flag was led by Trustee Ewan.

Mayor Johnston reminded the audience that this meeting was recorded.

**GUESTS:** None.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS/CONCERNS** (For items not on the agenda)

There were no public comments for items not on the agenda.

**JOINT CITY COUNCIL / THREE FORKS RURAL FIRE DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING**

**A. Discussion and Update on the Following Items within the Interlocal Agreement:**

**a. Officers & Firefighter**

Chief Aune reported there are currently 18 volunteers, 11 of which are in "active" status and 7 are "probationary" status. He introduced himself to the newer Council members, then introduced the Assistant Chief saying, "Charles Eastty is the Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief is Trevor Aune, Captains are Cheryl Carrasco, Jason Kelsey and Josh Miller, who also serves as the Chaplain."

**b. Apprise Each Entity of any Other Outside Agreements**

Chief Aune said there is a mutual aid agreement with all [of the fire districts in] Gallatin County, and then also a verbal with Broadwater County. "We have been called to help for

**\*\* Page 2\*\* A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE JOINT THREE FORKS RURAL FIRE  
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a structural fire in Jefferson County too.” Robert Buchholz asked if there was any liability to not have a signed agreement? Chief Aune replied, “No, as we are covered by our own policies.”

**c. Update on Services Provided**

The Chief informed all that they put out fires and go to wrecks. “Depending on what happens with the Ambulance Service, we may have to move into medical service. I’ve been against it because I don’t want to do medical. I’m not interested in learning that. It would be a huge commitment, and we are already having issues staffing for fire needs,” Chief Aune said. Wendell Ewan said, having done that in the past, he does not see that being very fortuitous. Chief Aune explained the training requirements (30 hours/year for firefighters, and one has to respond to 10% of calls to maintain active status). “If you don’t do that, there is a very good chance you go back on probation unless you have extenuating circumstances. If we start doing medical, you have to have an additional 40 hours of medical training, so it’s hard to get all that for volunteers,” he said.

**d. Emergency Medical Response Statistics or Issues**

Gene Townsend said the committee he sits on for Gallatin County recently discussed this with the Three Forks Ambulance Board, as well as with the County. “No one is pointing fingers at the Three Forks Ambulance. They understand that sometimes they can’t take calls because they don’t have the personnel, and that’s when AMR or Central Valley responds. So, that is where they get the 30-60 minute response time, as well as Gallatin County having to respond to calls in the Broadwater County subdivisions. If AMR does a transport to Missoula, or Billings, or Great Falls – that leaves one less ambulance in the County. So, what they are trying to figure out is if there is any possibility of putting together a mill levy for the entire county that pays for more ambulance service, and what are strategic spots to station them.” Gene explained. He continued, “Gallatin County residents are pretty tax fatigued. The committee has also discussed that perhaps Bozeman Deaconess could start running its own ambulance. There is a BDH rep on the committee. Everyone realizes ambulance service is critical.”

Mayor Johnston asked Asst. Chief Eastty to talk about his handout on ESO statistics. Asst. Chief Eastty reported, “In November, we transitioned from one reporting firm to another and I have been working with ESO’s tech support to try to get a report that gives me valuable and required data. The December and January calls are in the system but not classified yet (see bottom of the report for 11/25 and 12/25 and 1/26).

The Chief segued that the Department will be transitioning from ESO to First Due which should be comparable in price and way more user-friendly. “You cannot print reports from ESO with the data I input. So far, only Three Forks and Amsterdam are the only ones still using ESO. If we switch to what the other districts/cities are using, we can easily communicate with other entities as well,” the Chief said.

Asst. Chief Eastty said from 2024 to 2025 they were only up about 9 calls, but more last year were fire over EMS calls.

**\*\* Page 3\*\* A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE JOINT THREE FORKS RURAL FIRE  
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**B. Update of Discussions with Broadwater County Regarding Subdivision Regulations Submitted to Commissioners in FY24/25**

Gene Townsend said we did submit those in 2025 and waited a few months, but never heard back from them so assume they accepted them. "I contacted our attorney, and she hasn't heard anything and has been in the courthouse several times. Kitto was happy to see them. The Broadwater County Fire Chief said he wished the County Commissioners would adopt those for the entire county. The Rural has not had to review any subdivision applications since it submitted the sub regs," Gene said.

**C. Finance & Budget**

**a. Anticipated purchases split costs for FY2025/2026**

1 dual-band portable radio to be purchased by the City, 1 by the Rural; 2 sets of structure turnouts for each entity which are \$5,000 each so \$10,000 to each entity. "I am looking at the new probationary firefighters coming in and we will need to purchase boots, helmets, gloves, and turnouts are good for 10-years. The SCBA bottles, we are looking at replacing 12 bottles for each entity in 5 years. I don't like the rotation of a couple bottles a year because it's hard enough to get someone to document inventory accurately. We have 12 [SCBA] packs and 24 bottles total," Chief Aune said. Robert Buchholz asked if they were aluminum and could be tested to verify their still good after the suggested lifespan? Chief Aune said they are fiberglass and they still go bad, "Or you can spend more on bottles that are rated for 25 years." Kelly Smith confirmed that for the upcoming budget to set aside \$3,600/year towards purchasing new bottles in five years. The Chief confirmed.

Gene Townsend reported the Rural Board's budget is in good shape, "We are just past 50% of the year, and we have spent less than 50% of the budget. Keith said some truck maintenance may come up, but that's all he could foresee."

**D. Property and Inventory**

This is in process of being updated, a couple nozzles and small items need to be added.

**a. Joint Existing Property & Future Joint Purchases**

SCBA bottles and maybe some turnouts.

Gene Townsend explained the difference of the City and Rural duties to the newer Council and Rural Trustee members, but the City "owns" the firefighters. "If you need a rural truck for a city purpose, it goes, and vice versa. We split a lot of the costs because we each use the same equipment, but were doubling up on of the same purchases."

**b. Station Maintenance – Updated on Fire Hall Additional**

Mayor Johnston said this project was delayed, but the siren is down and to be moved. Waiting for locates. Chief Aune said, "We have been working towards this for a few years, we don't have showers now, and there is a necessity with the cancer brought on by the firefighters' duties. This will be a big plus for the Fire Station." Kelly Smith said the sky lights just got insulated and fixed last week, and paperwork was sent to Northwestern Energy to move the gas line and meter. "It's moving along, we continue to get quotes for each step, and we will need to talk about the heating and A/C about the bids. The heater installed last

**\*\* Page 4\*\* A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE JOINT THREE FORKS RURAL FIRE  
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year is not big enough to serve the existing and the new space. We could install wall (electric) heaters in the bathrooms, but then the common area would be without heat. Hollowtop will give a small credit to return the slightly used equipment if we decide to purchase a bigger system," she explained.

**E. Liability**

Crystal Turner explained to the Council that the City covers liability on the building and equipment, work comp and presumptive cancer work comp as well for the firefighters. "I get a little heartburn, and Susan Swimley made me live in the liability world this way, when I see kids sitting on top of the fire trucks during parades and throwing candy. It wouldn't take much to have someone lose their balance and fall off. We've talked about having parents sign waivers, but sometimes these parades get planned in a day and parents wouldn't have time to return documents or even know which kids would be on the trucks. It's just something to note and be safe when doing," Crystal said. Chief Aune said they ceased allowing throwing candy in an effort to minimize any balance issues.

Gene Townsend announced that you may see Fire District board seats in the paper. These are 3 year terms, 5 board members, each serving a staggered terms. "The filing deadline is in February, so if you see a notice in the paper it's for those elected seats. There is no filing fee," he added.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Gene Townsend made a motion to adjourn. Ed Tharp seconded the motion.

**Motion Passed Unanimously** and the meeting was adjourned at 5:52PM.

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Randy Johnston, Mayor

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Attest: Crystal Turner, City Clerk

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Dale Kober, Chair TF Rural Fire District

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Attest: Eugene Townsend, District Secretary