

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF THE COMMISSIONERS
MEAGHER COUNTY, MONTANA

Tuesday

April 1st, 2025

1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Met in Commissioner's Chambers

Meeting Called to Order:

Chairman Hurwitz called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present:

Chairman Ben Hurwitz, Vice Chair Errol Galt and Commissioner Rod Brewer were present for the meeting.

Minutes:

ACTION #1

Commissioner Galt moved to approve the minutes from March 18th, 2025. Commissioner Hurwitz seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved.

Monthly Sheriff Report – Jon Lopp

Sheriff Lopp entered the chambers at 1:25 p.m.

Sheriff Lopp provided the Commissioners with the Complaint Report for the month of March. The Sheriff's Office received one hundred ninety (190) incoming calls, twenty-three (23) 9-1-1 calls and two hundred twenty-five (225) people coming into the Sheriff's office. There was a total of four hundred thirty-seven (437) people that contacted the Sheriff's Office in the month of March.

Sheriff Lopp, Finance Officer Dayna Ogle and Commissioners briefly discussed Sheriff's office property values for insurance renewal.

Southwestern Montana Insurance – Health Insurance Renewal – Julie Blockey

Southwest Financial Julie Blockey via Zoom, Finance Officer Dayna Ogle, Clerk & Recorder Liv West, District Clerk of Courts Candi Richardson entered the chambers at 2:00 p.m.

Blockey briefly discussed upcoming Health Insurance renewal rates. Blockey stated she should have the final renewal rates in 2 weeks. Southwestern Montana Insurance is on the Commissioner Agenda for April 15, 2025 at 4 p.m.

Fire Reorganization Discussion

Sheriff Jon Lopp, Grassy Mountain Fire District Chairman Ben Haugan, Secrest Fire Solutions Jess Secrest, County Attorney Burt Hurwitz, Clerk & Recorder Liv West, County Fire Chief Jake Kusek entered the chambers at 2:30, Attorney Kate Dinwiddie, Law Office of Catherine Locke Dinwiddie, PLLC - via Zoom.

Secrest mentioned that he doesn't believe any other county in Montana has a county-wide fire service area. He emphasized that the main issue is finding suitable funding options. Dinwiddie expressed her preference for a fire district over a fire service area, noting that a fire district offers more growth and flexibility, allowing the County to potentially annex with an incorporated city. Fire districts are funded with mill levies, while fire service areas are fee based.

Dinwiddie questioned why Meagher County would choose a fire service area over a fire district. Attorney Hurwitz explained that about 15 years ago, there was an attempt to create a county-wide fire district through petitions, but it was halted due to insurance concerns. Hurwitz appreciates the flexibility of having the Commission overseeing the fire service area or

appointing a board of trustees, especially given the challenges faced by current fire district boards.

Secrest inquired about the disadvantages of a fire service area compared to a fire district. Dinwiddie responded that a fire service area is closely tied to county government and utilizes the county's Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN), whereas a fire district board operates independently under their own FEIN and focuses solely on providing protection and emergency medical services.

Ogle noted that a resolution to create a new district along with boundaries and funding information must be submitted to the Department of Revenue by January 1st for the district to start operating in July. The earliest a new fire district or fire service area could be established is July 2026, and would operate for six months without any revenue since the tax bill wouldn't be issued until November. The issue has been tabled until June 10, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.

Monthly Road / Fire Report – Jake Kusek

Road Supervisor Jake Kusek, and RDO Equipment Sales Professional Damon Van Diest entered the chambers at 3:45p.m.

Van Diest presented the Commissioners with a quote for a new 2025 John Deere 672G grader valid through April 10, 2025. The Commissioners and Kusek discussed the quality of the equipment currently being used by the Road Department, including the 2008 CAT 140M, which recently received a brand-new transmission. The CAT 140M could be used as a trade in for the 2025 John Deere 672G. Although, the Commissioners agreed it was a great deal, they decided not to proceed with the purchase at this time.

Catalyst for Change – Amber Martinsen-Blake

Catalyst for Change founder & CEO Amber Martinsen-Blake, Catalyst for Change Operations Support Oliveah Shaeffer, Catalyst for Change Development and Funding Emily Post, Sweetgrass County Community Health Supervisor Dan Tronrud, Wheatland County County Commissioner Jeff Sell, Wheatland County Community Health Supervisor Mike Peterson, Mountainview Medical Center CEO Rob Brandt, Work in Progress Owner Jen Hurwitz, Mountainview Medical Center Director of Finance Sarah Schlepp, Superintendent of School Meredith Feddes entered the chambers at 4:00 p.m.

Martinsen-Blake explained that she founded Catalyst for Change in 2019 to address the need for mental health resources. The organization's mission is to combat Montana's mental health crisis through integrated community-based care. Catalyst for Change employs a virtual-meets-local model to connect individuals with high-quality services. Martinsen-Blake highlighted that Catalyst for Change collaborates with counties to implement a tele-health model for mental healthcare via a Community Health Worker program. This initiative has been successfully implemented in Wheatland and Sweetgrass Counties, serving over 330 people in 34 months.

Wheatland County Commissioner Jeff Sell noted that Wheatland County launched the program with a \$250,000 grant from the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), which provided \$150,000 in the first year and \$100,000 in the second year. The program is now fully funded by Wheatland County. Sell emphasized that the program's significant impact on the community during its initial two years made its continuation essential.

Superintendent Feddes mentioned that the school currently uses a grant to provide a therapist on-site one day a week, with tele-health services available two days a week. However, the grant is nearing its end, and the school will soon lose this therapist. Jen Hurwitz shared that she has spoken with the Sheriff's Office, the Hospital Clinic, the White Sulphur Springs School, the Community Center, and the HRDC Office, all of which agree that the community needs more mental health resources.

The Commissioners concurred that Meagher County should apply for the DPHHS grant. Brandt and Jen Hurwitz agreed to draft a letter of recommendation to the Commissioners to collaborate with Catalyst for Change. This matter will be discussed further at the Commission meeting on April 8, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.

Public Comment:

No Public Comment.

Claims Approved:

Commissioners were presented with Check #62411 through Check #62437 totaling \$45,305.94. Electronic Check #-99639, -99638 and #-99630 through #-99624 totaling \$7,536.49. All Checks were signed as presented.

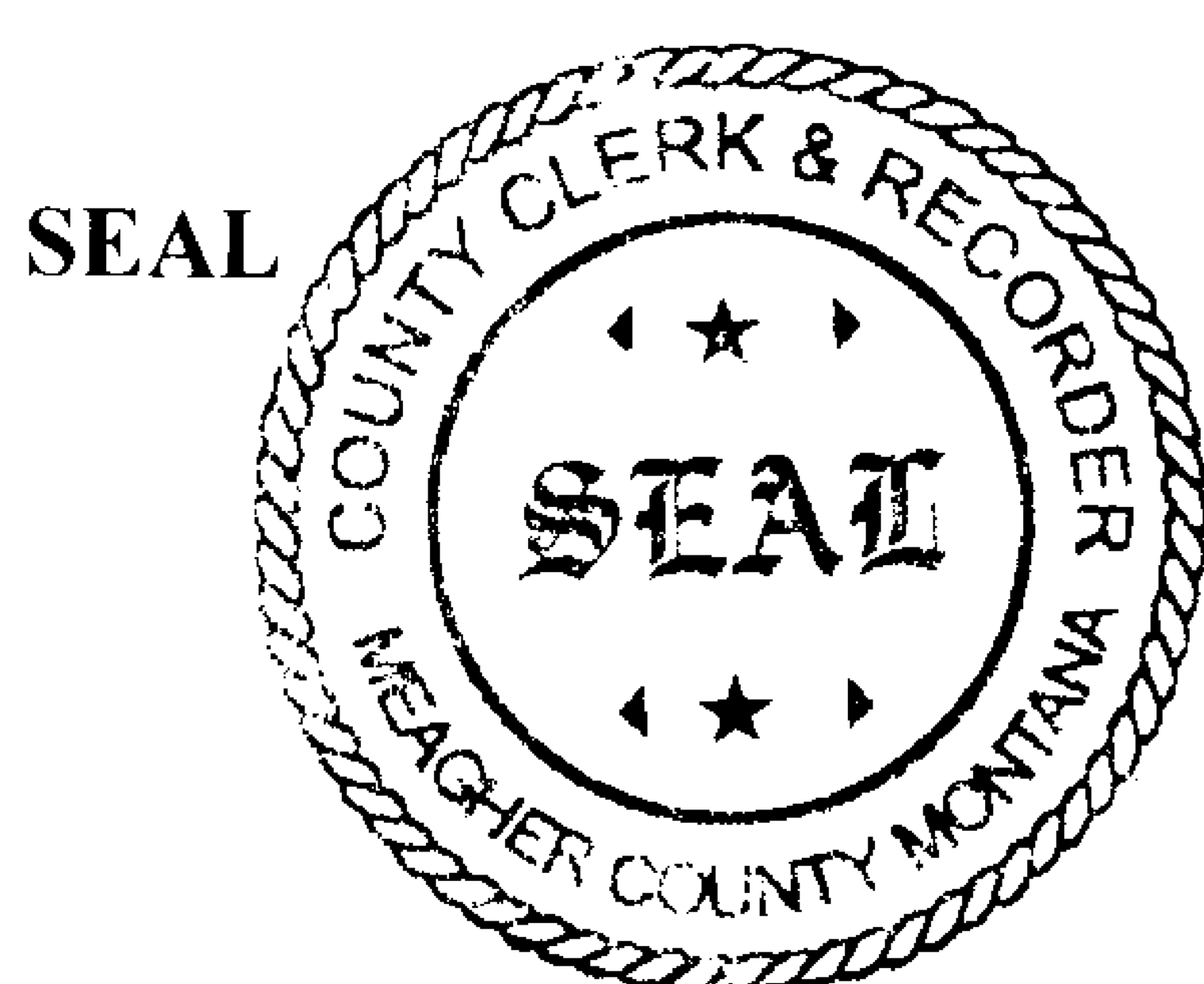
Meeting Adjourned:

Meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

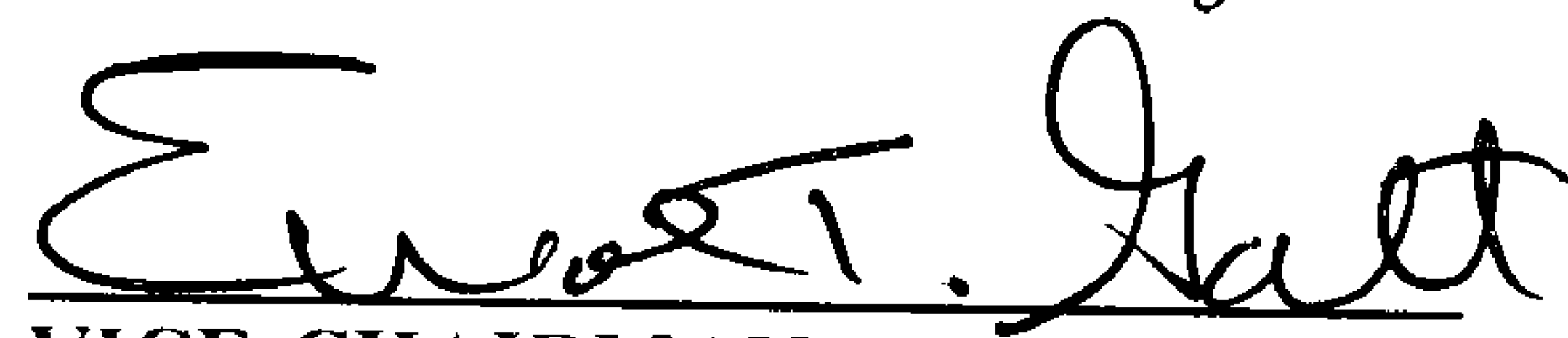
Next Meeting:

Commissioners are scheduled to meet Tuesday, April 8th, 2025.


CLERK & RECORDER




CHAIRMAN


VICE-CHAIRMAN


COMMISSIONER

Note: Minutes taken by Clerk to the Commission Jennifer Deems
Distributed April 8th, 2025 to Chairman Hurwitz, Vice Chair Galt, and Commissioner Brewer, and Clerk & Recorder Liv A. West.