

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

Tuesday

July 22nd, 2025

8:43 a.m. – 12:08 p.m.

Commissioner Chambers

Meeting Called to Order:

Chairman Hurwitz called the meeting to order at 8:43 a.m.

Commissioners Present:

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

Minutes:

ACTION #1

Vice-Chairman Galt moved to approve the minutes from July 15th, 2025. Chairman Hurwitz seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved.

Meagher County Fire- Kate Dinwiddie

Fire Law Attorney Kate Dinwiddie, Secrest Fire Solutions Jess Secrest, County Clerk and Recorder Liv West, Rural County Fire Chief Ron Teig, County Attorney Burt Hurwitz, Crime Victim Advocate Laura Taylor, White Sulphur Springs Mayor Rick Nelson, White Sulphur Springs Fire Chief Sam Peeler, Grassy Mountain Fire District Member Chair Ben Haugan, Grassy Mountain Fire District Secretary Valerie Siebken, County Treasurer Dayna Ogle, Sheriff Jon Lopp, and Signe Freeze entered the chambers at 8:40 a.m.

Secrest opened the meeting by stating that the purpose was to review available options for improving the organizational structure of the county fire departments. Dinwiddie outlined two primary options under the current framework: forming a fire district or operating within a series of interlocal agreements. Under the Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-2101, a rural fire district can be established through a petition process without requiring a public vote. To proceed, the petition must be signed by both: Property owners of 40% or more of the real property in the proposed district and by property owners representing 40% or more of the taxable value of property in the proposed district. Once these thresholds are met, the fire district would be formally established through a resolution passed by the County Commissioners. A new fire district may be created outside of existing designated fire districts and fire service areas. Upon establishment, the Board of County Commissioners may either retain direct authority over the district or appoint a five-member board, which may later be subject to election. This structure allows for centralized governance and the potential appointment of an administrator responsible for filing documentation and ensuring legal compliance.

Under the second operation, a series of interlocal agreements would be executed with participating jurisdictions. Ultimately, Meagher County Fire would be tasked with securing funding to hire an administrator who would manage documentation and ensure compliance across multiple jurisdictions. Such an agreement could potentially include Grassy Mountain Fire Department, Martinsdale Fire Service Area, and the existing White Sulphur Springs department. Other areas in the county-such as Ringling, Checkerboard, and Lingshire-could form entities and join the agreement. Dinwiddie explained that volunteer firefighters have the option to participate in the Montana Volunteer Firefighters' Compensation Act (VFCA), a state-funded retirement program. However, current statutes prohibit fire districts from incorporating an already incorporated municipality, such as White Sulphur Springs, without a legislative change. This restriction exists to protect the retirement eligibility of volunteer firefighters, ensuring they do not lose access to VFCA benefits. Sam Peeler noted that there are currently twenty-three volunteer firefighters serving county fire operations. Dinwiddie added that these volunteers could qualify for both district and city retirement benefits, provided they complete 30 hours of training for each entity annually, as required under VFCA guidelines.

Ben Haugan raised concerns regarding the Grassy Mountain Fire District, which has faced challenges securing a lease and funding for the construction of a firehouse and well. The association currently lacks volunteer firefighters. Dinwiddie suggested that one potential solution for Grassy Mountain could be to designate it as a substation of a larger fire district.

Dinwiddie will initiate preliminary research into the formation of a county-wide fire district, although no final decisions have been made at this time.

Ron Teig and Jess Secrest talked with Commissioners about the Rural County Fire Chief position. The hourly pay rate to offer Ron Teig for the position was discussed with discussions continuing on August 5th, 2025.

Discussions on Meagher County Fire reorganization discussion will resume on September 9, 2025.

ACTION #2

Resolution FY 25.26 #8

Commissioner Brewer moved to make the position of Finance Assistant permanent effective immediately. Vice-Chairman Galt seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

New Fund Creation-Jennifer Deems

Chief Finance Officer Jennifer Deems asked to create a new fund for the Montana Healthcare Foundation's Rural Health Small Grant for public health in small communities.

ACTION #3

Resolution FY 25.26 #9

Commissioner Brewer moved to create a new fund for the Montana Healthcare Foundation's Rural Health Small Grant for public health in small communities. Chairman Hurwitz seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed. The issue is hereby resolved.

Final Audit Review

Chief Finance Officer Jennifer Deems and County Treasurer Dayna Ogle entered the chambers at 10:48 a.m.

Ogle reviewed the Final Audit Report with Commissioners. The audit had two findings, the first being grant revenue. It was identified that the funds were being recorded incorrectly. Specifically, the Care's Act funds were mistakenly classified as federal grant revenue, when in fact they were reimbursements. The error has since been corrected. The second finding was regarding accounts payable, invoices that were received in July but dated in June (from the previous fiscal year) were entered in July with a June date. However, Black Mountain did not recognize them as accounts payable, resulting in a zero-balance reported in June on the annual report. The issue has also been corrected.

ACTION #4

Resolution FY 25.26 #10

Chairman Hurwitz moved to approve the Road Viewers Report for the Moss Agate Road. Vice-Chairman Galt seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed. The issue is hereby resolved.

Budget Workshop-Jennifer Deems

Chief Finance Officer Jennifer Deems, County Treasurer Dayna Ogle, and County Clerk and Recorder Liv West entered the chambers at 11:20 a.m.

Deems, Ogle, West, and Commissioners reviewed the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 proposed budget for the Clerk and Records Office.

Budget workshop will continue on August 5, 2025.

Public Comment:

No public comment

Claims Approved:

Commissioners were presented with Check #62714 through Check #62729 totaling \$10354.34. Electronic Check #-99521 through #-99516 totaling \$1934.87. All Checks were signed as presented.

Meeting Adjourned:

Meeting was adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

Next Meeting:

Commissioners are scheduled to meet Tuesday, August 5th, 2025.


CLERK & RECORDER
Deputy

SEAL




CHAIRMAN


VICE-CHAIRMAN


COMMISSIONER

Note: Minutes taken by Clerk to the Commission Briana Frasier
Distributed August 5th, 2025 to Chairman Hurwitz, Vice Chair Galt, and Commissioner Brewer, and Clerk & Recorder Liv A. West.