

# CITY OF POLSON COMMISSION & RURAL FIRE DISTRICT BOARD JOINT MEETING

Commission Chambers

February 20, 2014

7:00 p.m.

**ATTENDANCE:** Mayor Heather Knutson, City Commissioners: Dan Morrison, Ken Siler, Jill Southerland, City Manager, Mark Shrides, and City Clerk Cora Pritt.

**ABSENT:** Commissioners John Campbell, Todd Erickson, & Stephen Turner

**RURAL FIRE DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS:** Chairman Jack Clapp, Vice Chair Jack Konitz, Patrick Gembala, Secretary-Treasurer Drew Hoel, Bill Koberg, Rural Fire Board Finance Officer Bonnie Manicke

**Others present (that voluntarily signed in):** Lake County Commissioner Bill Barron, Elsa Duford, Alan & Leanna Fillman, Una Rose Graham, State of Montana Representative Greg Hertz, Rory Horning, Andrew Speer, Fire Chief John Fairchild.

## 1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Knutson called the meeting to order.

Chairman Jack Clapp called the Special Meeting of the Rural Fire District Board to order.

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Mayor Knutson explained the structure of the meeting.

Emergency Services Consulting International presentation  
Questions/Comments from the Commission & Rural Fire Board  
Public Comments/Questions of Mr. Wintermute  
This is an information meeting only. No decision will be made

## 2. APPROVAL OF PROPOSED AGENDA

Commissioner Morrison motioned to approve the Proposed Agenda. Commissioner Southerland seconded. No discussion from Commission or Public. **VOTE: Unanimous Motion carried**

## 3. APPROVAL OF PROPOSED AGENDA BY THE RURAL FIRE DISTRICT BOARD

Board member Mr. Hoel motion to approve proposed agenda. Mr. Koberg second. **Vote: Unanimous Motion carried.**

## NEW BUSINESS

4. **ESCI AGENCY EVALUATION**-presented by Lane Wintermute, Emergency Services Consulting International. Mr. Wintermute explains that ESCI was commissioned last summer to conduct a

modified agency evaluation. To take a look at the Fire Department and Fire Stations, where things stand currently and look at what source of improvements or changes need to occur to do things better. The 91 page report is not meant to be critical of the Rural Fire District. This agency is a sound Fire Department, well run, organized, and has good response time. The citizens of Polson and the District are well served. The presentation tonight will be a very high level overview of the content of the report.



## Primary Study Components

- Evaluation of Current Conditions
- Future System Demand Projections
- Recommended Future Strategies
- Conclusions and Discussion



## Evaluation of Current Conditions

- **Organizational Overview**

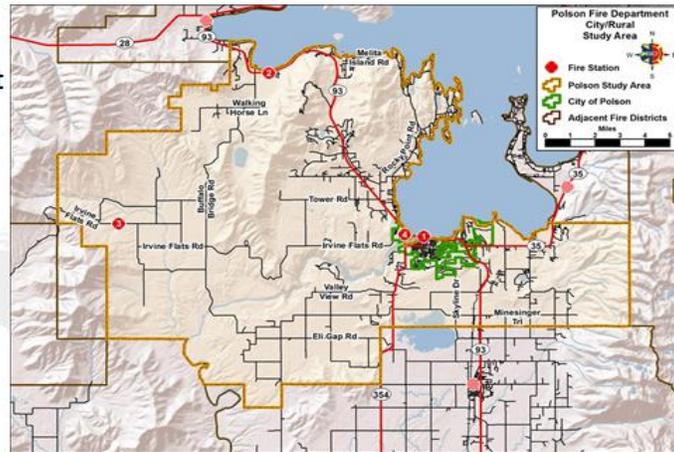
- Polson Rural Fire District
- City of Polson
- 4 Stations

- **Service Area**

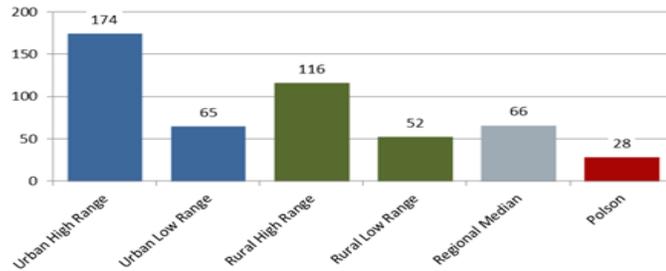
- 197 square miles
- 9,258 population

- **Governance**

- Multiple levels
- Decentralized



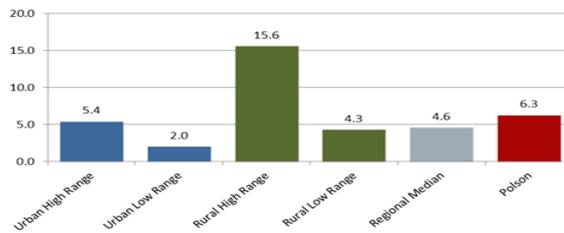
## Evaluation of Current Conditions Service Delivery Incidents per 1,000 population



- Combined number of incidents below regional averages



## Evaluation of Current Conditions Service Delivery Fires per 1,000 population



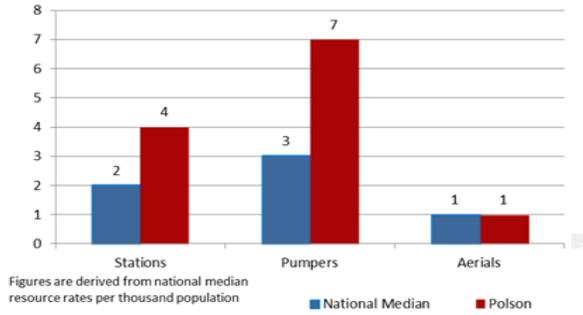
- Combined number of fires is above regional averages



# Evaluation of Current Conditions

- **Capital Assets**

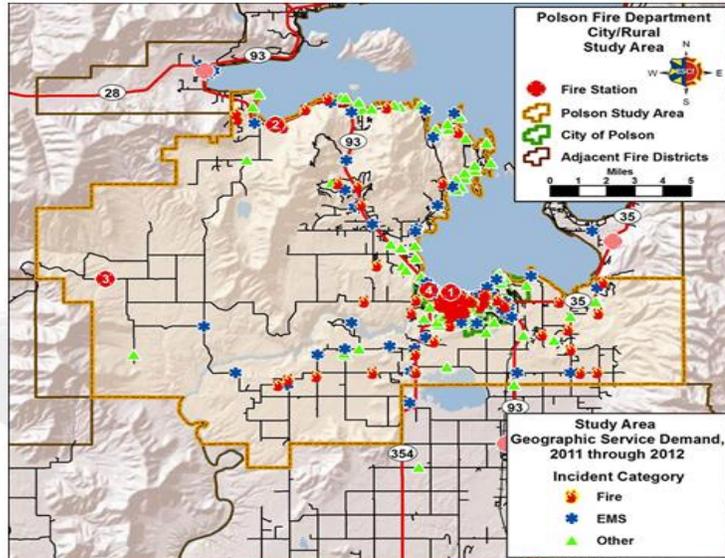
- **Stations**  
Station 1 has reached capacity
- **Apparatus**  
Generally good condition  
Some duplication in city and rural apparatus
- **Capital Improvement Planning**  
Future capital replacement is not planned for.  
Considerable cost associated with funding future needs



# Evaluation of Current Conditions

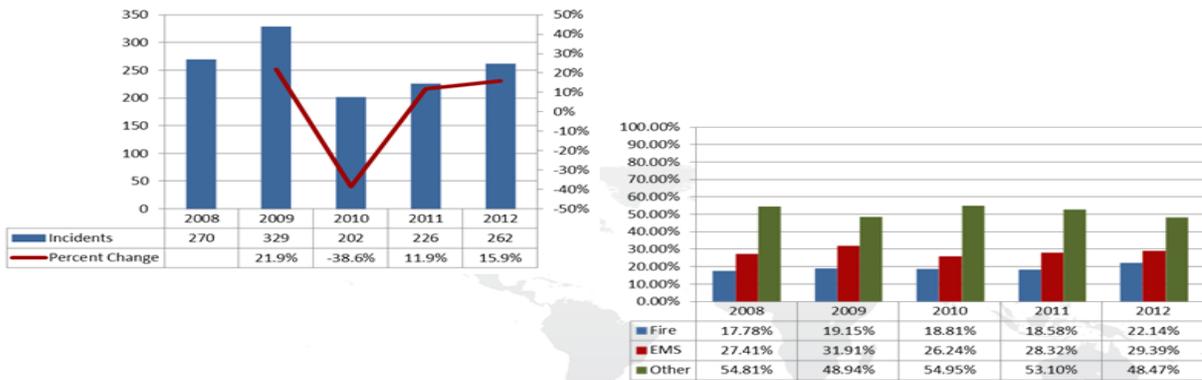
- **Service Delivery**

- Service Demand
- Resource Distribution
- Resource Concentration
- Response Performance



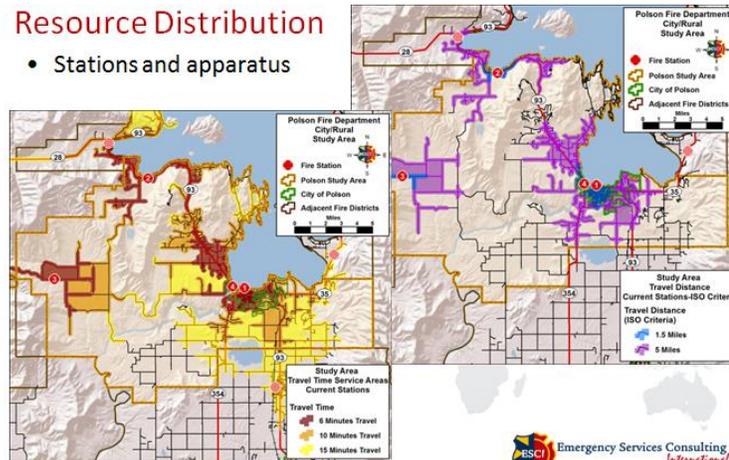
# Evaluation of Current Conditions

- **Historic Service Demand**



# Evaluation of Current Conditions

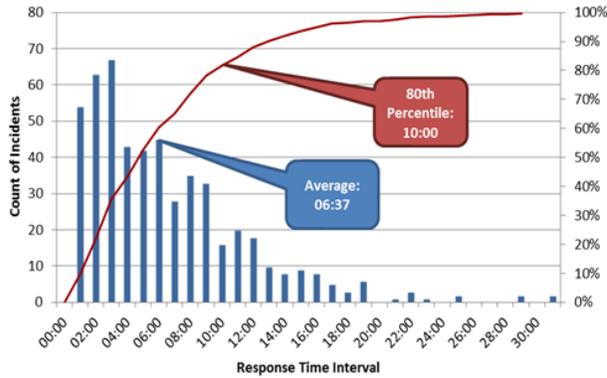
- **Resource Distribution**
  - Stations and apparatus



# Evaluation of Current Conditions

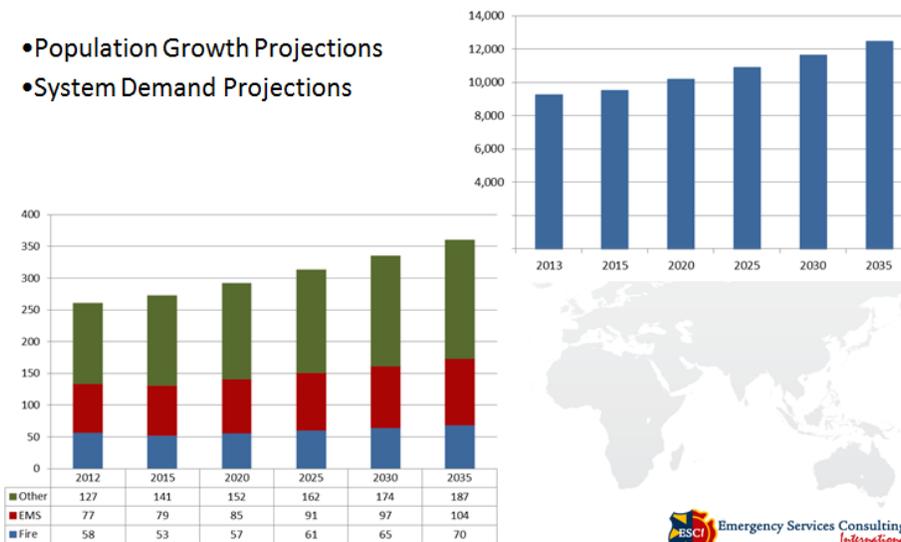
- Response Performance

- Call Processing
- Turnout
- Response

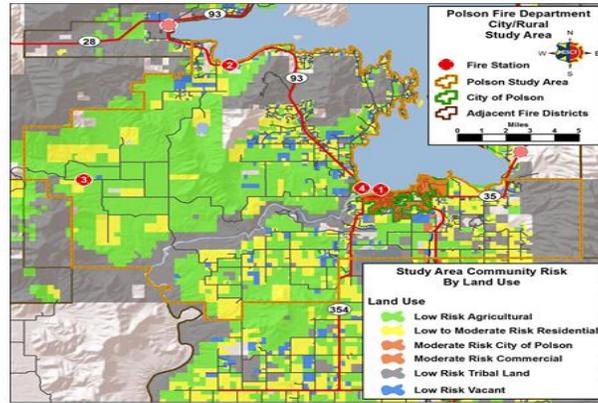


# Future System Demand Projections

- Population Growth Projections
- System Demand Projections

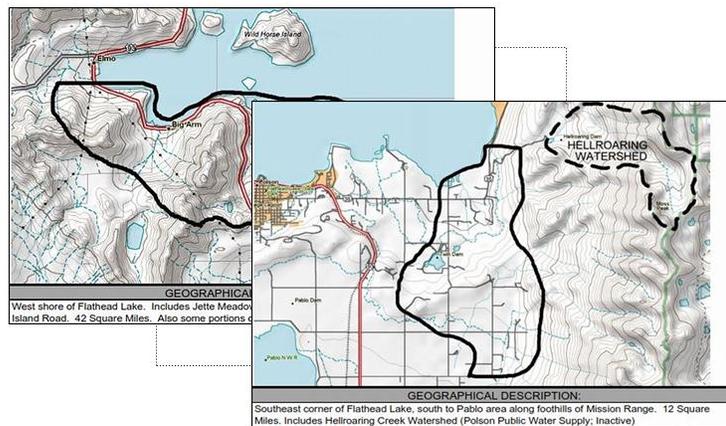


## Community Risk Analysis



Emergency Services Consulting International

## Community Wildfire Protection Plan



Emergency Services Consulting International

## Recommended Future Strategies

### Governance and Organizational Composition

- Current governance is multi-faceted
  - District
  - City
  - Volunteer Membership
- Need to centralize decision making
  - Budgeting, purchasing, financial planning
  - Risk management
  - Human resources functions
    - Hiring (voting)
    - Promotion
    - Disciplinary practices



## Recommended Future Strategies

### Governance and Organizational Composition Continued

- A single, unified governance model is recommended
  - Annexation
  - Consolidation
  - Contracted services
  - Joint Powers Agreement
  - New Fire District formation



## Recommended Future Strategies

### Future Station Locations

Make future station decisions on appropriate criteria

- Defined response time performance goals
- Community expectations
- Risk exposure
- Availability of volunteers
- ISO criteria
- National standards and best practices



## Recommended Future Strategies

### Future Station Locations

Avoid making future station decisions based on

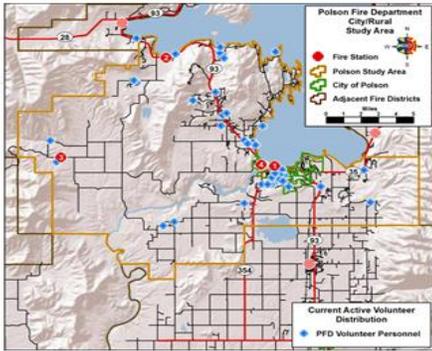
- Reaction to a particular fire or incident issue
- ISO criteria alone
- Availability of free land

Avoid adding more stations unless staffing and risk warrants – balance new against relocating or restructuring

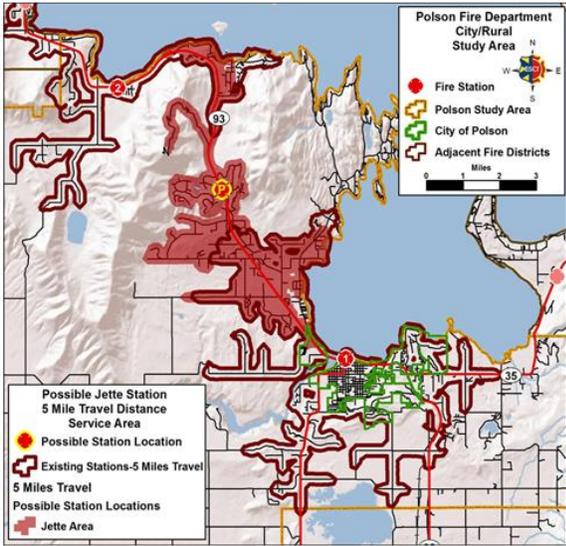
# Recommended Future Strategies

## Existing Station Location Comparison

Station	Proximity to Risk	Proximity to Volunteers	Response Area Call Volume	ISO Rating Advantage	Coverage Overlap
1	High	High	High	High	High
2	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low
3	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low
4	High	High	High	Medium	High



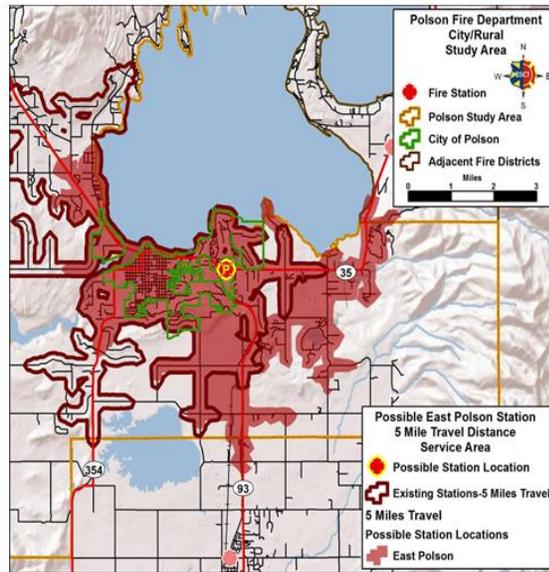
## Station 4 Relocation



- Improves 5 mile coverage
- Volunteer availability
- 2 to 5 year time frame



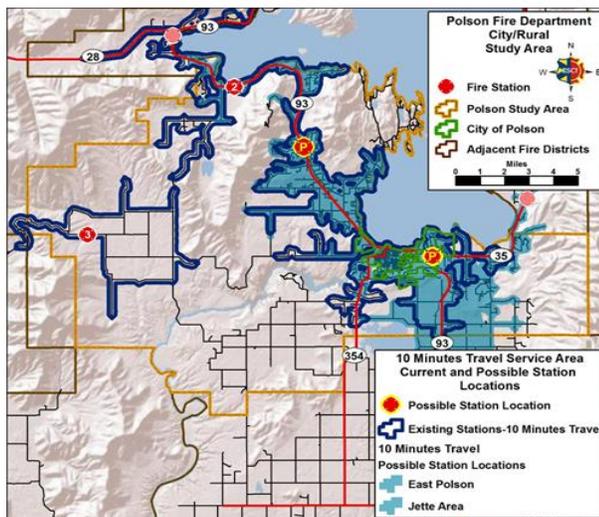
## Station 1 Relocation



- Long range initiative
- 10 years or more
- Station is over capacity
- New station farther east provides good 5 mile coverage
- Current Station could be closed or retained in a smaller capacity



## 4 Station Configuration Coverage Results



- Increases 10 minute travel time coverage





Emergency Services Consulting  
*International*

## Questions, Comments and Discussion

Mayor Knutson opened the meeting for any questions or comments from the Commission or the Rural Fire District Board. The question was asked what will we do with this report. Mr. Wintermute responded by answering that the Fire District, City, and the citizens develop a common vision and to get to the point of fire protection in Polson. There is still a lot of work to be done.

Mayor Knutson pointed out the need to repeat that the staffing is appropriate, the citizens are getting good service, and that the report is only the tip of the iceberg.

Mr. Clapp pointed out that last year there were 313 fire calls/responses. This number exceeded the expectation of the data for 2025. Does this need to be plotted out over a period of time? There was a significant increase of wild land fires last year. Mr. Wintermute suggested looking back at the prior data and determine if something changed. Mr. Clapp commented that so far in 2014 the department is above normal. Mr. Wintermute again commented to review the data. Did something change?

Mr. Wintermute reminded the boards that data/decision making is like a puzzle with a lot of pieces. Separately the pieces don't mean much but together it creates a picture. Also remember that data is constantly changing.

Commissioner Siler asked if the bridge is a choke point. Mr. Wintermute answered that currently there was no data to support the bridge being an issue.

Rural Fire District Board member Bill Koberg asked if the governance was the main priority. Is there a trend nationwide where they are consolidating? What is the trend there? Mr. Wintermute answered that yes, very much so. This is what ESCI has done the most over the years is helping in the consolidation. 75% of our workload is related to that type of work. Agencies don't save by consolidating but what is gained is efficiency. There is a savings in the future of purchasing equipment.

Rural Fire District Board Vice Chairman Jack Konitz asked if there were any real benefits to combining county funding and City funding. Mr. Wintermute explained that yes, in general terms, the pitfalls to working together are turf, money, power, and politics. A lot of these are not present in Polson and this situation. The other barriers that are revealed in Feasibility studies, the biggest is financial. The other potential barriers are underlying liabilities and financial liabilities.

There were no more questions from the Commission or the Rural Fire District Board. Mayor Knutson then opened the meeting for questions from the public.

Matt Sisler had two questions. 1). what does consolidation do to volunteer numbers? Mr. Wintermute answered that in his opinion, if the structure is such that volunteers feel like they don't have a voice, then you will lose them. To avoid this, engage them make them a part of the process. They need to be directly engaged and be able to have a say in how it all works. 2). is there a comparative cost analysis available? What is the cost advantage and disadvantage? Mr. Wintermute responded by saying that a financial analysis was not done. It wasn't in the scope. That's a whole other undertaking.

Mayor Knutson commented on the report being very thorough. The Commission and Rural Fire District Board were asked if there were any further questions or comments.

Rural Fire District Board Chairman Jack Clapp clarified a comment that Mr. Sisler raised, just for the public's benefit, the consideration currently being given by the Board to possibly sell station 4 and build a new station at Jette would essentially be at no additional use of taxpayer dollars. The Board would be looking at taking the funds generated out of that Station sell and using that to build something comparable. Currently there is nothing before this Board to strike out and build a new station up at Jette with use of new tax dollars. It was an opportunity that fortunately or unfortunately befell the Rural Board. The Rural Fire District Board did not go looking for it. We had an obligation to the community to at least explore that, and it's still in that process. Mayor Knutson asked about the status of that right now. Mr. Clapp answered that it's looking at options, identifying what a building would cost, Chief Fairchild is looking at getting some land that fits the need. We won't hear about that until April. Nothing definitive would be happening before April at the earliest. At that point we would have answers to these current questions.

Rural Fire District Board member Drew Hoel commented that throughout the State of Montana volunteer numbers are dropping. This can change from year to year. There were a lot of variables that were put together in the study. There's going to be a lot of research. Mr. Wintermute commented that the department needs to step back, take a long look at where you are going, almost a Master Plan. Volunteers everywhere, not just in Montana, are dropping. Departments are trying to use incentives to retain volunteers. People's lives are different and there aren't as many volunteers available. Think about incentives. If you are going to build another fire station, think some form of housing at that station for the volunteer.

Tom Eddy commented that one of the major issues identified is the multiple organizations. Since the major players are here tonight I would like to hear some discussion on what plans you will be taking or have taken to try and make progress on things. Mayor Knutson answered that this is going to continue to be a conversation but the specifics will have to be in in very detailed meetings where we sit down and have more discussion about this. We have been shown about five different options on ways of doing that, and so it's a matter of looking at all of those possibilities and coming to one that would potentially works best for our community here. Mr. Eddy asked if there were any specific plans. Mayor Knutson said that this is the first step. This is the first time that everyone has gotten together as a group. We haven't really discussed the plan from this point on. We need to make a plan of attack on meetings, and working together on that process and what would work for us. From the City's perspective, right now

that is something that we would like to do is talk as a Board on a decision night. Tonight we're not making any decisions. Mr. Clapp answered next. From the Rural Fire perspective, the real step was to do exactly what we have done, engage the study, and identify those areas. We've had a change in the governance on the City side in the last 4 months. The Rural did appoint a liaison committee and we have met with the City Manager prior to tonight. We plan to use this meeting as a springboard and we plan to meet with Mark again and see where the City Commission wishes to go and begin to coordinate those efforts. It's going to take a while. There's not one clear cut path. Mr. Eddy then stated that he would like to hear someone take responsibility and make that first step happen. Mayor Knutson answered that the next step will be between the City Manager and Mr. Clapp and plan the next stages. We need to make some decision on how we want to approach it. Mr. Clapp commented that it will happen. We'll talk about it at the next Board meeting, see which channels we can pursue, but it will happen.

Una Rose Graham-commented that as a member of the Rural Fire District there were a couple of questions. Una Rose felt that the Rural Fire District Board was quite definite on wanting to sell Station 4. The study found that it was a good possibility for the City to move out to that, but that the City had never been offered that opportunity up to this point. The two entities need to work together. The other question about the study is the possible construction of the new station in Jette. Una Rose wondered if that was necessary as far as ISO rate what is the smallest that will give them the best ISO rates. What is the cost of the different size building? Mr. Wintermute answered that ISO is going to want to see a fire engine within a five mile travel distance. Una Rose then asked what is the smallest station that it could be, a five truck station. Mr. Wintermute answered that if the decision was going to be totally based on ISO then the answer is one bay, one engine, and some people. You need to think further beyond that and different exposure maybe an inner face engine. You need to be able to staff the station. Don't build the smallest station possible unless you build with a way that it could be added on to in the future should things change.

Mr. Clapp commented that the Rural Fire District Board had just approved the purchase of a tender truck. The location of the vehicle will be up the Chief. It may go to the current Station 4 to replace Truck 337. The study suggested that Truck 337 be placed into a reserve status. Mr. Clapp further commented that he disagreed with two of her points; it was mentioned six months ago, when this first came up, that it would be of great interest to the Rural to have the City be interested in that station. It has been discussed in Board meetings as well. It is still very much an open question, this Board member is not about to consider selling that station if we cannot replace it with something comparable without an additional expenditure. It is very much a work in progress. We will explore the options with the City and see where it goes.

Mayor Knutson asked Mr. Wintermure if in his opinion, the first thing that needs to be determined is the governance. Mr. Wintermure answered that yes. Step back and look at fire protection in the community as a whole not separated between District and City. Erase the boundary lines, erase the notion that we need to do this because it's City. Get past that, get a whole new map out, and treat it as if you are starting from scratch and form a whole new fire department. Look at it from need, risk, ability to serve, look at it like you are starting all over. Maybe even erase where current fire stations are.

Bill Barron, Lake County Commissioner commented that the operation, departments, and right now the majority of the Board are firefighters who work for Chief Fairchild, yet he answers to them.

Mr. Wintermure commented that this is a very common practice. It happens because these are the people that have the interest and willing to endure the process of becoming an elected official. You make a valid point. It should be addressed but I don't know what the answer is. Drew Hoel stated that when he put his name in for the election, there was no one else did. It can be problematic for Chief Fairchild. When we exchange emails, I identify who I am, the firefighter or the Board member.

Rory Horning-commented to what was said. There's an election process that may give you the impression of the lack of concern or involvement. In Montana, if you are the only applicant to apply for a particular post, the office will not appear on the ballot. If you get enough of those, then almost that candidacy where that office goes away from the public spot. You got your seat, but the public loss the understanding that that seat was up for election. That's no one's fault, but if you follow voting the way it should go, if you put that seat on, even if you are the only candidate, you will see whether you have the majority or whether there's a group that doesn't agree with you. Let's say 500 people vote in the whole election but you only get 100 votes. Then you know that 400 people either didn't care or they didn't like you. I ask you to understand that it may not be a lack of concern. We have the same problem with the Conservation District. Guys have been on there for 20 years and never stood for an election once. They filed, but no one knows, so no one runs against them. That's a thing about elections. You understand that. So I just give you that as food for thought.

Seeing no other comments, Mayor Knutson thanked everyone for coming. She thanked Mr. Wintermure for coming, and for putting the report together. The City looks forward to future conversation with the Rural Fire District Board. Any further conversation about this matter will be on the agenda, please watch for those.

City Commission Adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Mr. Clapp asked for a motion to adjourn the Rural Fire District Board meeting. Bill Koberg motion to adjourn. Drew Hoel second. VOTE: Unanimous Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor Heather Knutson

ATTEST:

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Cora E. Pritt, City Clerk