

**AUGUST 9, 2006**

**FISHER RIVER VALLEY FIRE SERVICE AREA PUBLIC HEARING  
CONTINUATION**

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioner conducted a Public Hearing to hear the residents of the Fisher River Valley Fire Service Area on the issue of increasing the fire service area fees from \$50.00 to \$125.00. All members present: Chairman Marianne B. Roose, Members Rita R. Windom and John C. Konzen, and Clerk & Recorder Coral M. Cummings.

Also present were Edward LaBudde, George Neils, Ken Preston, Mary Brist, Suzy Roberts, Dolly Madison-Purdy, Billie J. LaBudde, Agnes M. Kemp, Glenda Dean, Pierson Dean, Leone Sandridge, Sandy Sandridge, Len Howells, Tom Hoeltzel, Jane Hoeltzel, Julie Lewis, Damon Lewis, Neil Bertelsen, Phyllis Bertelsen, Lyle Brist, Kirk Kraft, Joe Kelly, LeLand E Hoeltzel, and Pierson Dean.

Commissioner Konzen opened the meeting for public comment.

FRVFSA Board Member George Neils said the FSA is requesting additional funding to provide adequate fire protection and feels this increase is appropriate. Neils stated the hours put in by members and there is no time for fundraising measures. It is necessary for the community to provide funding.

Madison-Purdy read a letter from Frank Anthony stating he is on a fixed income and is against the increase. Madison-Purdy said she is attending the meeting on behalf of Mr. Bertelsen and feels there has to be a way to get the community involvement back in the fire service area. Madison-Purdy would like for the fire company to feel the community owns the equipment, not the fire company. Residents pay taxes and the community should have some ownership. Commissioner Konzen said ownership is a good point. Pete Hoetzel, Fire Chief for thirteen years, explained how Commissioner Jim Morey had him select five people from the area who were not in the fire company due to conflicts of interest, how procedures were established, and the books kept open to the public. The people who live in the FSA are the backbone of the community and pay the fees. A budget was established to cover a bare minimum to keep the fire company functional; all other improvements were paid by fundraising. Everything was paid for by the fundraising efforts, even the building that was built as a community center. Hoeltzel continued, saying he kept the rate at \$35 and cannot see why such an increase is needed. Preston thanked the volunteers for their work, and said he is in favor of the increase with reservation. What worked in the past is in the past.

Preston presented a comparison of \$125 rate vs. the cost of a fire district. Taxpayers should be paying the bills for their services and a reserve provided for future needs. The County Commissioners appoint the FSA Board Members and that Board is responsible to make these decisions. Preston explained the work of creating a fire district. He feels higher rates should be paid by larger homes.

Lyle Brist read a letter he composed to the Commissioners for the group explaining modifications to his opposition.

LaBudde asked how many people have shown up to meetings with questions concerning finances. Meetings have been advertised and books are open at the meetings.

Pierson Dean said he has a problem with George Neils, a fireman, being on the Board, and Marlene Herried's son on the Board, and commented that Irene Loveless lives next to a fireman. Loveless replied she takes offense to that comment of living next to a fireman. Len Howell commented there is a nomination process to be on the FSA Board, and there is public notice of accepting nominations to be on the Board.

The fire service area is urban interface. Most fires are on wild land and the fire company needs to be trained to respond. Firemen are not paid in the fire service area.

It was brought to the group's attention that \$13,000 was received from assessment and the budget is \$74,000. There is no comparison in equipment and training since the fire company started. To get the service, these volunteers do not have time for fundraisers. Sandridge said she does not feel welcome. Neils said he wants Pierson Dean to know he will abstain from voting due to conflict of interest. Preston said he had served on a District Board for years and he knows the Board respects its voting privileges. Munro said in the past, the fire company could provide service from taxes and fundraisers. The money generated from fires is more than what can be raised. The age group has changed to 50 years old and up. These people do not want to fight fires. Prices have increased, and the fire company has to make changes. It costs more to keep up with the needs of the community. Munro talked about some incidents of fires just in the past month. The fire company does not have many structural fires, but it does have wild land fires. The fire company could go to a district and pay more and wish later it had stayed a FSA.

Brist read a letter stating the ambulance service from Libby is to be discontinued. Brist asked how the fire area could make this decision, and how can residents no longer have this service. Kraft said ambulance service is questioned due to the long distance from Libby. The long distance evolved into a service that was paid for. The State of Montana suggested every entity get its own license. Kraft said the LVA service will continue, and it will be responsible for fuel, maintenance, and supplies. Kraft said the LVA does bill for its services. Commissioner Konzen felt a lack of communication between residents and LVA. LaBudde said he would like to break down this communication wall, and would like to provide answers.

Bertelsens submitted a letter asking the Board of Commissioners if the building belongs to the community or to others as is claimed. Bertelsen feels older residents should be involved. The Bertelsens have contributed for many years. Bertelsen read a letter composed by Neil Peterson expressing the fee increase being excessive, but would support a moderate increase. LaBudde had composed handouts expressing numerous aspects and opinions with this issue including a historical overview of volunteer fire departments and his personal experience with the fire department.

Pete Hoeltzel explained after the Houghton Creek Fire, people donated generously and later donations slowed down. Hoeltzel confirmed how the FSA separated. Commissioner Konzen commented that people should realize the work done by Pete Hoeltzel. All of us here need to make this work. If the fee increase is too high, then it needs to be looked at thoroughly. I do this type of work, and I know the volunteers. Commissioner Konzen challenged everyone to swallow the past and move forward with a solution that will work for everyone. Marlene Herried said the fire company and its Board members have always tried to be there for the community. The doors are open and the people of this area are welcome. Barb Benson commented to the homeowners that if they want to know what is going on, it would be to their interest to attend the meetings. Volunteers are trained EMT's and have been for a long time. Commissioner Konzen said the fee increase decision has to be made, but hates to see the community split. Art Purdy said he does not think this meeting should have become personal and its purpose is to review the budget and hear the community and fire company's needs.

Commissioner Konzen closed the meeting. No decision was made at this time. The Board of Commissioners will further review this issue.

**LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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**the Board**

**ATTEST:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Coral M. Cummings, Clerk & Recorder**

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**Marianne B. Roose, Chairman of**