**Seeley Lake Rural Fire District**
**200 Firehouse Dr.**
**Seeley Lake, MT 59868**
**Special Board Meeting Agenda**

**July 29th, 2026 5:30pm**

**I. Call to order/Roll call**

Present: Mike Weigel, Vickie Smith, Alyssa McLean, iShirley Goudzwaard, Kevin Clader, Renee Cotton, Clara Kyrouac, Chief Blaine Cowan, Susan Page, Brian Page, Steve Laramour

Pledge of Allegiance led by Blaine Cowan

**II. Public Comment/Correspondence**

1. Chief Blaine Cowan announces: There is a Public Safety Fair this Saturday August 1st at 2pm which SLRFD will be at with some equipment
2. Chief Blaine Cowan announces: For meeting security measures we have locked/privated the zoom meeting and office administrator Renee will be allowing people in one by one

**III. Bylaws**

A. The board has been researching and considering bylaws from similar rural fire districts and Montana statutes. Vickie Smith compiled a draft version of bylaws, and Chairman Mike Weigel submitted some commentary on the draft.
B. Regarding Article 1 - Governing Authority
    a. Discussion centered on 501(c)(3) status and whether fundraising proceeds could be routed through the Fire Foundation, as the district lost its status years ago. Chief Cowan is actively working on reinstating our 501(c)(3) status.
    b. This article includes agreement to abide by Roberts Rules of Order
C. Regarding Article 2 - Board Composition, Terms, and Vacancies
    a. No significant changes
D. Regarding Article 3 - Officers, Organization, Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary
    a. No significant changes
E. Regarding Article 4 - Meetings and Public Participation
    a. Chairman Weigel recommends that any trustee (not just the chair) may request special meetings, subject to quorum approval.

    b. Language requiring compliance with Montana Open Meeting Law (MCA) was included
F. Regarding Article 5 - Minutes and Board Records
    a. Discussion on the important of detailed minutes to support future success
    b. The intent to leave documentation and guidance for future secretaries and trustees was discussed
G. Regarding Article 6 - Committees and Advisors
    a. Confirmation that committees can and should include community members as well as board members, and committee meetings will be open public meetings
H. Regarding Article 7 - Fire Chief Appointment, Personnel, Emergency Authority
    a. Discussion ensued regarding the Chief's authorized spending limit set at $2,000 without board approval
        i. Expenditures above $2,000 require board notification and email/quorum approval
        ii. During emergencies the Chief may take necessary action without prior approval and report it at the next meting
    b. The chief will negotiate and maintain mutual aid agreements with final approval by board quorum
I. Regarding Article 8 - Financial Administration
    a. All funds must be deposited with the Missoula County Treasurer, no unauthorized accounts are permitted
        i. A local Citizen's Alliance account was established in coordination with Missoula County to avoid excessive trips to Missoula
    b. Discussion ensued regarding getting the county attorney's advice and opinion on cash handling for donations and fundraising
    c. A Formal Audit was discussed, which would be an expensive venture and is currently unaffordable to us. Many accountants were contacted, few were interested due to the large undertaking and potential liability.
    d. Disposal of district property must follow a formal auction/sealed bid procedures per state law
        i. Debt, bonds, and levies must be authorized and go through the county's processes
J. Regarding Article 9 - Ethics and Conflicts of Interest
    a. Added language prohibiting board members from serving as volunteers in an operational capacity to avoid conflicts of interest
        i. Board members may still participate in auxiliary/community events in a non-operational capacity
        ii. Board members may be members of the Fire Foundation
K. Regarding Article 10 - Fire Protection, EMS, Cooperative Services
    a. More discussion regarding the maintenance of our Mutual Aid Agreements
    b. No significant changes
L. Regarding Article 11 - Policies and Administrative Rules
    a. No significant changes, board in agreement that this section looks appropriate
M. Regarding Article 12 - Amendment, Severability and Effective Date
    a. A majority vote is required for amendments

N. Conclusion: Vickie Smith will incorporate all agreed edits and produce a clean version of the Bylaws for us to present to the county attorney for his opinion before final acceptance.

**IV. Committees**

A. The board proposes we formalize committees that include the community.
    a. Shirley Goudzwaard will serve as the head of the Fundraising and Events committee, having been informally serving in that role already, as shown by the Chief's swearing-in ceremony
        i. This is to be a standing committee
    b. Vickie Smith volunteers to lead the Board Policy Committee, and she has already researched and compiled our draft bylaws
        i. Committee to develop board policies and supplementing bylaws, including job descriptions for all positions
    c. Hiring Committee member Kevin Clader recommended that we convert the Hiring Committee into a Chief Support Advisory Committee
        i. *Chairman Mike Weigel makes a motion to change the hiring committee to the chief advisory committee. Shirley Goudzwaard Seconded. Discussion ensued about being wary of making more meetings for the Chief to attend. All were in favor, motion passed.*
    d. Chief Cowan noted the need for a Apparatus Replacement/Facility Needs committee
        i. This is to be a standing committee
        ii. Head of this Committee to be assigned at next meeting

**V. September Chili Cook-off**

A. Shirley Goudzwaard proposed October 10th, 2026 as the event date, confirming there is no Grizzly football home game that day.
    a. This event coincides with Fire Prevention Month, will include fire prevention education, and potentially a visit from Smokey the Bear
    b. Admission will be $10 per person, includes chili dinner and cornbread donated by Connie Clark from Pop's Restaurant, brownies donated by Highway 83 cafe, and we will include water and iced tea to drink
    c. Discussion ensued regarding a Chili Cookoff Competition which could include a $25 entry fee for contestants, who could then win a cash prize
    d. Chief Cowan offered to personally contribute $200 to the winner of the "Chief's Choice" chili
    e. Sampling will happen via small cups, voting by ticket
    f. Fundraising goal of $2000
    g. Potentially can stream the away Griz Game during the event

**VI. Discuss Legal Meeting with County**

A. Vice Chairman Vickie Smith presented a financial chart showing the district went from approximately $281,000–$372,000 in surplus (as recently as March 2022) to a current deficit of approximately $107,000–$140,000 or more.
B. Chairman Mike Weigel: Reviewed years of past minutes and identified approximately $150,000 in excessive spending in a single year, including

unauthorized purchases (e.g., a $10,000 enclosed trailer not approved by the board), credit card charges with vague or missing receipts, and a $22,000 credit card service fee paid over 11 years for a card that was no longer in use.

A. Chief Cowan confirmed that Missoula County Finance notified him of chronic overspending; the district was approximately $30,000 in the red at the start of the current fiscal year. Noted that wildland fire deployments historically generated significant revenue (~$25,000+ per two-week assignment), which may explain some prior surpluses.
B. Office Administrator Renee Cotton Described current financial controls — all expenditures documented with itemized receipts, co-signed by the Chief and a board member, submitted to the county.
C. Chief Blaine Cowan noted a $120,000 surplus carryover shown in a prior budget that cannot be accounted for; no explanation was provided by previous board members when asked.
D. Discussion on a CARES Act grant of $72,000 received in 2021 — purpose of expenditure not documented in past minutes.
E. A safe deposit box key is missing; contents unknown; estimated $250–$400 to drill open/replace lock for access
F. A mold remediation at Station 2 had cost approximately $28,000 and was not budgeted.
G. The board acknowledged the district will likely remain in deficit for more than two years without new revenue sources (e.g., mill levy, grants, increased medical billing).
H. *Shirley Goudzwaard motioned that due to new leadership, a significant decline in district finances and our current substantial deficit, that we present our financial findings to the Missoula County Attorney's office requesting advice regarding our responsibilities, whether further review or reporting is needed, and what safeguards should be put in place to protect the district's finances in the future. Vickie Smith seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed*

### VII. Adjournment

Alyssa McLean motions to adjourn, Vickie Smith seconded. All were in favor, the meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting Monday, August 17th, 2026 at 6pm