CONSOLIDATION PLAN
PARK CITY RURAL FIRE DISTRICT AND
COLUMBUS RURAL FIRE DISTRICT #3

I. AUTHORITY

This Consolidation Plan ("Plan") is adopted pursuant to § 7-33-2120, Montana Code Annotated ("MCA"). Under that statute, two or more rural fire districts may consolidate to form a single rural fire district upon an affirmative vote of each consolidating district's governing board. This Plan is adopted contemporaneously with the respective resolutions of the governing boards of the Park City Rural Fire District ("Park City") and the Columbus Rural Fire District #3 ("Columbus") approving the proposed consolidation.

This Plan is intended to satisfy the statutory requirements for consolidation while also memorializing the background, practical considerations, and transition assumptions that informed the Boards' decision to proceed.

II. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Beginning in January 2022, representatives of Park City and Columbus began formal discussions regarding whether the two rural fire districts should explore consolidation into a single district. Those discussions followed prior informal conversations among Board members and fire service leadership regarding opportunities for operational coordination, service delivery, and long-term financial sustainability.

Over an extended period, the Districts utilized working groups and discussions involving Board members, department leadership, and members of the respective organizations to evaluate the practical advantages and disadvantages of consolidation. The Districts considered, among other things, the following potential advantages:

1. Increased operational efficiency in training, emergency response, apparatus maintenance, and administrative functions;
2. Reduction of unnecessary duplication and more efficient use of public funds;
3. Potential improvement in purchasing leverage and grant competitiveness due to increased call volume, service population, and unified operations;
4. Improved consistency in policies, procedures, and dispatch-level response practices;
5. Better utilization of personnel resources across multiple stations;
6. Opportunities to strengthen volunteer recruitment, retention, and support programs; and
7. A more unified service delivery model for the protection of life and property within the combined territory.

The Districts also considered potential disadvantages and concerns, including:

1. Concerns regarding local identity and governance;
2. Costs associated with rebranding and transition;
3. Potential increased travel burdens for certain meetings or training events;
4. Possible volunteer attrition during or after transition; and
5. The potential for differing tax impacts on taxpayers in the existing districts.

After considering these matters over time, the governing boards determined that consolidation should move forward, provided that it is accomplished through a legally compliant structure and an orderly transition process.

III. NAME OF CONSOLIDATED DISTRICT

The name of the consolidated entity shall be **Stillwater County Fire & Rescue District #1.**

The consolidated district ("Stillwater County Fire & Rescue District #1") shall constitute a new rural fire district governed in accordance with §§ 7-33-2104 through 7-33-2106, MCA, and other applicable law.

IV. BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the Consolidated District shall consist of the combined geographic territory presently included within Park City and Columbus as of the effective date of consolidation.

A boundary map of the Consolidated District is attached as Exhibit A. If available and desired for administrative clarity, a legal description of the combined territory may be attached as Exhibit B.

V. TIMETABLE FOR CONSOLIDATION

The consolidation shall proceed in accordance with the following timetable:

1. **Board Approval Date.** The governing boards of Park City and Columbus shall vote on consolidation and adopt this Plan on **September 7th, 2026**.
2. **Notice of Consolidation.** Within 14 days after the date of the votes approving consolidation, notice of the consolidation shall be:
    - published as provided in § 7-1-2121, MCA, or § 7-1-4127, MCA, if applicable; and
    - mailed as provided in § 7-1-2122, MCA, or § 7-1-4129, MCA, if applicable, to each registered voter and real property owner residing in the proposed new district.
3. **Public Hearing.** A public hearing on the proposed consolidation shall be held before the joint governing boards within 14 days of the first publication and mailing of notice, at the time and place stated in the notice.
4. **Protest Period.** The protest period shall begin on the date of first publication and continue for 30 days thereafter, in accordance with § 7-33-2120(4), MCA.
5. **Effective Date of Consolidation.** The effective date of consolidation shall be **July 1, 2027**, which shall be after the expiration of the protest period and only if the protest threshold established by § 7-33-2120(4), MCA, has not been met.

VI. ESTIMATED FINANCIAL IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS

Pursuant to § 7-33-2120(2)(a)(iv), MCA, the estimated financial impact of consolidation on taxpayers within the proposed Consolidated District is as follows for fiscal year 2026-2027, based on the information presently available to the Districts:

A. Park City Rural Fire District Taxpayers
Estimated annual tax under consolidated structure:

- $100,000 taxable value: $19.51
- $300,000 taxable value: $58.52
- $600,000 taxable value: $124.73

Estimated change: Increase of approximately $5.62 (per $100,000 taxable value equivalent)

B. Columbus Rural Fire District Taxpayers
Estimated annual tax under consolidated structure:

- $100,000 taxable value: $19.51
- $300,000 taxable value: $58.52
- $600,000 taxable value: $124.73

Estimated change: Decrease of approximately $3.48 (per $100,000 taxable value equivalent)

C. Explanation

The foregoing estimates reflect the anticipated effect of creating a new rural fire district for mill levy purposes and aggregating the mill levy authority of the former districts as provided in § 7-33-2120(6), MCA. The Districts presently estimate that the combined total taxable revenue associated with the consolidated structure will be approximately $522,940.000.

The figures above are intended as planning estimates based on currently available information and may be affected by final taxable values, budget adoption, and county calculations.

VII. INDEBTEDNESS

The Districts agree that the consolidation shall occur with the mutual assumption of the warrant and bonded indebtedness of each District, as required by § 7-33-2120(2)(b), MCA.

Known existing or anticipated obligations include the following:

1. **Columbus.** Columbus presently has debt service associated with a Type 3 engine, in an approximate principal amount of $145,000.00, and debt associated with property and building obligations, in an approximate amount of $350,000.00.
2. **Park City.** Park City presently has no existing debt service identified in this plan, but anticipates a possible INTERCAP loan of up to an approximate amount of $100,000.00 for a tender, with payments expected to be accommodated within existing budget assumptions.
3. **Capital Accounts.** The Districts report combined capital account balances of approximately $347,000.00, consisting of approximately $176,000.00 attributed to Columbus and $171,000.00 attributed to Park City.

Upon the effective date of consolidation, the Consolidated District shall succeed to and assume the obligations described above, together with any other lawful indebtedness of the former districts existing as of the effective date.

VIII. GOVERNANCE AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Upon consolidation, the former districts shall constitute a single rural fire district governed under §§ 7-33-2104 through 7-33-2106, MCA.

Because the Consolidated District is treated as a new rural fire district under § 7-33-2120(6), MCA, the governance of the Consolidated District must conform to the statutes governing rural fire districts. Accordingly:

1. The Consolidated District shall be governed by a five-member Board of Trustees;
2. The trustees shall be appointed by the board of county commissioners as provided by § 7-33-2104(2), MCA;
3. Park City and Columbus may recommend and provide the names of the initial trustees; and
4. The initial trustees' terms shall be staggered by lot in the manner required by § 7-33-2106(1), MCA.

IX. ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL TRANSITION

The Districts anticipate that the administrative headquarters of the Consolidated District will be located in Columbus, subject to final Board action after consolidation.

For planning purposes, the Districts presently anticipate an administrative structure that may include a Fire Chief reporting to the Board, command or supervisory staff, volunteer coordination functions, emergency medical service leadership functions, maintenance responsibilities, and administrative support.

The Districts further anticipate that existing stations, apparatus, personnel, and volunteers will be integrated into the Consolidated District in a manner intended to preserve service continuity and make reasonable operational use of available resources.

The Districts have also discussed the potential benefits of unified training development, consistent policy implementation, more efficient maintenance coordination, and cross-station support.

The operational matters described in this section are included to reflect the practical assumptions underlying consolidation. They are not intended to create contractual rights to any specific position, rank, title, meeting location, duty assignment, compensation arrangement, or organizational chart, all of which remain subject to lawful action by the governing body of the Consolidated District.

X. PERSONNEL AND VOLUNTEER TRANSITION

The Districts anticipate that existing paid and volunteer members of the two organizations will be considered for integration into the Consolidated District in accordance with lawful policies and operational needs.

Nothing in this Plan guarantees any specific rank conversion, title retention, employment status, volunteer assignment, or supervisory position. All personnel and volunteer matters following

consolidation shall remain subject to the lawful authority of the governing body of the Consolidated District and its administration.

XI. ASSOCIATED NONPROFIT OR MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

The Districts acknowledge that each organization has historically had associated nonprofit or member-support entities, including the Columbus Firefighters Association and the Park City Fire Department or related entity. Those organizations are separate from the rural fire districts themselves and are not consolidated by this Plan.

Nothing in this Plan determines the governance, continuation, renaming, dissolution, or merger of any separate nonprofit or member organization.

XII. PROPERTY, EQUIPMENT, TITLING, AND INSURANCE

Upon the effective date of consolidation, the Consolidated District shall succeed to the real and personal property, equipment, apparatus, accounts, and other assets of the former districts, except to the extent a separate ownership arrangement requires additional documentation or agreement.

The Districts anticipate that vehicles and other titled assets will be transferred into the name of the Consolidated District and that insurance coverage and tax identification arrangements will be updated accordingly.

The Districts further acknowledge that the main Columbus fire station is presently subject to a joint ownership arrangement involving the City of Columbus and Columbus Rural Fire District. That property interest shall require separate documentation, agreement, or transfer action as appropriate and is not resolved solely by this Plan.

XIII. SHARED TRANSITION EXPENSES

The Districts anticipate that reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the consolidation process will be borne proportionately by the Districts, unless otherwise agreed in writing.

XIV. NOTICE, HEARING, AND PROTEST PROCEDURE

The Districts shall strictly comply with the notice, mailing, hearing, and protest procedures required by § 7-33-2120(3) and (4), MCA.

Written protests opposing consolidation may be submitted as provided by statute. If, within 30 days of the first publication of notice, the owners of 40% or more of the real property in an existing district and the owners of property representing 40% or more of the taxable value of property in that existing district protest the consolidation, the consolidation is void as to that district under § 7-33-2120(4), MCA.

Protests shall be submitted to **Columbus Rural Fire District, PO Box 285 Columbus Mt, 59019,**

(for CRFD taxpayers) or Park City Rural Fire District, P.O. Box 476, Park City Montana, 59063 (for Park City RFD taxpayers).

XV. SUCCESSOR STATUS AND CONTINUITY OF SERVICE

Upon the effective date of consolidation, the Consolidated District shall be the successor entity for purposes of continuing rural fire protection and emergency response services within the combined territory, subject to applicable law.

The Districts intend that fire protection and emergency response services continue without interruption during the transition to the Consolidated District.

XVI. MISCELLANEOUS

1. **Severability.** If any provision of this Plan is determined to be invalid, the remaining provisions shall remain in effect to the extent permitted by law.
2. **Interpretation.** This Plan shall be interpreted consistently with § 7-33-2120, MCA, and the statutes governing rural fire districts.
3. **Conflict with Law.** If any provision of this Plan conflicts with governing law, the law shall control.
4. **Amendment.** Prior to the effective date of consolidation, this Plan may be amended only by formal action of both governing boards.

XVII. ADOPTION

This Consolidation Plan is adopted by the governing boards of Park City Rural Fire District and Columbus Rural Fire District #3 contemporaneously with their respective resolutions approving consolidation.

DATED this 7th day of September 2026.

PARK CITY RURAL FIRE DISTRICT

Chris Southworth Chris Southworth

Ty Heppner _____

William Rash _____

Tom Rakes _____

CJ Baker _____

COLUMBUS RURAL FIRE DISTRICT #3

Curt Robbins _____

John Patterson _____

Debbie Parod _____

Chuck Kronze Jr. _____

Brent Parkin _____

EXHIBITS

- **Exhibit A** – Boundary Map
- **Exhibit B** – Legal Description of Boundaries (if used)