

# PHILIPSBURG, DRUMMOND, GRANITE COUNTY JOINT SESSION

OCTOBER 2023

Meeting Location: Drummond Community Library

10/05/2023

**CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor Gail Leeper called the October Joint Session Meeting to order at 6:02pm. Present from Town of Drummond were Mayor Leeper & Council President Cary McLure, Council Members Earl Clute, Ray Powell and Carla Stuart; Town Attorney Jana McGill; Town Clerk-Treasurer Robin Wight. Present from Town of Philipsburg were Mayor Dan Reddish & Council President Scott Lyons, Council Members John Laigaie and K.L. Dell-Bishop. Present from Granite County was Commissioner Blanche McLure.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Mayor Leeper led the Pledge of Allegiance at the Public Meeting.

**PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:** Chris Laslovich and JB Ray, representing Blackfoot Communications

**GUEST COMMENT:** None

**INTRODUCTION OF SITTING MEMBERS.**

**MINUTES:** Minutes from the previous meeting were not discussed.

**GENERAL UPDATE TOWN OF PHILIPSBURG:** Mayor Dan Reddish provided update for the Town of Philipsburg, stating it has been a busy summer. Mayor Reddish spoke of normal maintenance and infrastructure needs; the planning of updated maintenance and infrastructure needs; the addition of public works members; and the start of winter preparation.

- **Infrastructure**

Mayor Reddish continued, speaking of the water main that broke in front of the school last week. Mayor Reddish complimented the Philipsburg crew in their system and ability to locate, unearth and have part of it replaced, between 8:00am to 2:00pm. This particular huge main runs North and South; this main has been problematic for a few years. Philipsburg is going to look at trying to finish this main out, which will come down to finances. Mayor reddish expanded, this is a wake-up call to the fragility of Philipsburg's infrastructure. Normal amount of water movement through this main is couple 100 gallons per minute; when the water main was broke it was pushing water through at a rate of over 1,600 gallon per minute. This type of incident there is no time to delay, it has to be acted on quickly.

- **School Parking Lot**

October 6<sup>th</sup> Philipsburg Public Works crew will be working on the school parking lot; consisting of blading, bringing in gravel and preparing this location for winter. Mayor Reddish reached out to Granite County, speaking with Commissioner Blanche McLure, asking if the County might be willing to contribute several of loads of gravel. Mayor Reddish and Commissioner McLure conversed; resulting with Mayor Reddish will have Philipsburg's Foreman contact Paul Alt, Granite County Roads Department, regarding the gravel contribution arrangement.

- **Proposed Resort Tax**

Mayor Reddish asked Commissioner McLure, if she has heard from the state in regards to the proposed resort tax, which she had not. Mayor Reddish provided an update, that Philipsburg is expecting preliminary paperwork before the end of the month, the State is currently looking at it and working on it. Mayor reddish suspects they will receive the packet by the end of October, which he will then forward to the County. Once those documents are received and reviewed, they will have a discussion on how to

proceed.

- **Regional Recognition of Veteran's Day**

Mayor Reddish stated, Philipsburg is very honored and fortunate; Philipsburg received notification from Washington, D.C. Defense Department that the Town of Philipsburg has been selected for regional recognition of Veteran's Day; which will be Saturday November the 11<sup>th</sup>. Mayor Reddish turned the time over to Councilman John Laigaie to expand; as he was the impetus behind this recognition.

Councilman Laigaie expanded; the Defense Department normally selects large towns for this recognition, Councilman Laigaie submitted Philipsburg documentation last May. This is a regional recognition consisting of the Northern Rockies; Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and possibly Idaho. They have been in contact with Montana Governor and will be highlighting Town of Philipsburg for this year's regional recognition.

There will be a statewide press release to draw people to Philipsburg; additionally support items will be contributed.

The theme of this recognition nationwide is *Service to Country*. This is an honor to commemorate our veterans.

This event will be beyond a parade; consisting of a parade and cook out. Placing our veterans on display to provide them the honor they deserve.

Letters of invitations will be sent to Congressional Members; direct letter of invitation will be sent to the Governor; and a statewide press release will be placed.

Mayor Leeper interjected, to verify veterans' posts in Maxville and Drummond will be notified has well. Council Person Dell-Bishop notified Barney in Maxwell; Mayor Leeper will contact Rick in Drummond.

Council President Lyons added, Veteran's Day was originally known as Armistice Day; the 11<sup>th</sup> Minute, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Day, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Month; that is when World War I ended, 11:11 AM on 11/11; this is when the cease fire with Germany occurred.

**BLACKFOOT COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE:** Mayor Leeper asked Blackfoot Representatives to attend the Joint Session; as the fiber optic project will be beginning in Drummond next year and citizens have seen them working throughout the County. Mayor Leeper felt this would be a good platform for Blackfoot Communication to address citizens' concerns and answer questions.

Mayor Leeper turned the time over to Chris Laslovich and JB Ray, Representing Blackfoot Communications.

Chris Laslovich addressed the elected officials and those in attendance, he expressed his gratitude in attending events throughout Granite County over the past nine months getting to know the community and elected officials. Expanding on his attendance in the Drummond Rodeo, sponsoring the Skate Park in Philipsburg, and speaking with Town Councils and Commissioners.

- **Chris Laslovich Philipsburg Update**

They got off to a late start in Philipsburg; which consists of two projects: The Valley and Rock Creek portion. They were, however, able to lay about eighty miles of fiber lines in the ground, but were unable to connect customers to the fiber locations yet. They will continue to work throughout the remainder of this year, as weather allows; then pick back up in the Spring.

The goal is to connect locations to fiber the first part of next year.

- **Chris Laslovich Drummond Update**

Chris continued, Drummond will be the third and final stage of the Granite County Project. The total project investment of the three phases in Granite County is over 36 million dollars; which is a historic



infrastructure investment from Blackfoot Communications.

Chris wanted to make sure the citizens of Drummond will understand what to expect, and get any permissions needed, with the Drummond phase of this project; they will start early next year by sending information in the mail, placing notices in the newspaper and utilizing social media as a way to get the information out.

Chris Laslovich and JB Ray will both be available should there be any questions or concerns from the projects in Philipsburg and Drummond.

- **JB Ray Philipsburg Update**

Chris Laslovich turned the time over to JB Ray to expand on the project. JB expressed he will not be delving into much detail regarding the Philipsburg aspect of the project, as they just presented in Philipsburg; but will say it was slow process in Town, they are almost complete with the North side from Main Street North towards Whiskey Flats and will be wrapping that area up this week. They will begin moving to the South side, all the boring is done on the South side to Skalkaho. Once they begin the South side, they should move through the South side fairly quickly before the weather gets bad.

On the Phase II Rock Creek portion, they have most of the main lines placed from Marshall Creek, all the way around almost back to Skalkaho. They do still have a lot of taps to do, which are the lines off the main routes into subdivisions and to several individual homes.

They are currently working in East Fork; they are hoping to get this area completed.

All the drops are completed in Marshall Creek, Willow Creek, they started the majority of drops in the Rock Creek area and into Moose Lake; also, getting drops done in East Fork and some drops in Town.

Their main goal is the get the main line placed in the ground; which is key to them.

Once the snow starts to fly, they will be pushed out until Spring when thawed.

Mayor Reddish commended Blackfoot for their ease of communication throughout the project; being very open and straight forward while working in Philipsburg, due to the nature of the Town and the undertaking is very complicated.

- **JB Ray Drummond Update**

JB Ray turned his attention to presenting information for the Town of Drummond; JB previously met with Mayor Leeper to inform her of the project.

Blackfoot Communication is planning to bring in fiber to all areas they currently provide existing service, just like in Philipsburg.

They have already done fiber work toward the Gold Creek area and out towards Dunkelberg some lines were plowed in out there this summer. They were anticipating the Granite County project and started preparation in lining things up.

Everything from Bear Gulch, Mulky Gulch along I-90 into Drummond, then from Drummond on HWY 1, all the way through Hall, West Hall, New Chicago; all areas that currently have service today, they will be plowing fiber through those same lines that have copper.

Mayor Leeper asked regarding an area South of Drummond on Mullan Road; asking how far out on Mullan Trail fiber will be extended, they responded where they currently provide service and copper is in place. Blackfoot did recommend looking into their line extension policy. Blackfoot puts in the first 1,000 feet, then the customer helps finance the balance of the extension.

In Town, they will be plowing fiber all through town that currently has copper. JB referred to the map provided to indicate areas where fiber is set to be laid in Town.

Once the Engineers have the map finalized, that map will be provided along with the contract.

Blackfoot will be meeting with the contractor next week; which has already given the green light they will be ready for this project next year; this will be one of the contractors that did the work in Philipsburg.

They will then extend out towards the Jens exit and tie into the existing fiber, this summer. They will then move out towards Helmville and Murray Ranch. They will continue to plow fiber to this point where they currently service about eleven customers.

This will in turn prepare Blackfoot, for the Orvando and Seeley Lake area for when they begin that project.

Blackfoot goal is growing and trying to bring all service back to Missoula. They will then have a massive fiber network that will enable them to send services to any of their exchanges. They are about finished with projects in Thomas Falls and Saint Ignatius.

They have many anticipated upcoming projects such as Bitter Root, Darby, and several others.

Fiber will all be placed in the ground, with the exception of bridge attachments, Blackfoot is trying to move away from all arial cable.

Mayor Leeper notified Drummond Town Council, she provided JB Ray maps of Town of Drummond's sewer and gas lines to assist with the placement of the fiber lines. The main fire line mapping will be provided as well.

Mayor Leeper discussed with Blackfoot representatives bringing service to Drummond City Park/Campground and the Rodeo Grounds. It was mentioned this additional service was previously discussed with Mayor Leeper, Butch and JB. JB mentioned Blackfoot sponsors the Rodeo all the time and felt this is something they would be able to accommodate to help out. He will bring this up with Blackfoot's CEO's.

JB, Blackfoot representative expressed; they will tear things up, and will break things; but they will be responsible for repairing and fixing everything, making it right. He added, if there are problems or issues that need to be addressed that himself, Eric Schwenk, Construction Supervisor, and Chris Laslovich are good resources to reach out to. They want to provide good quality service to their customer/owners.

Mayor Leeper thanked JB and Chris for coming to the Joint Session providing information and providing update.

JB gave a final update as to the George Town Lake project, that it will be officially completed tomorrow; providing service to about 235-265 customers. The project time frame was Summer of 2022 and Summer of 2023; and there was a lot of rock.

George Town Lake project was to the lake, and all the way around to George Town Estates. This Spring they finished towards Boat Club, the Dam, Echo Lake, Seven Gables and Old George Town.

Philipsburg there was also a lot of rock, but not as much as George Town. The rock causes a lot of equipment breakdown.

**GRANITE COUNTY UPDATE:** County Commissioner Blanche McLure reported it has been business as usual. They are getting gravel down on the roads; which has been a dire need. There were many complaints in the Spring, but it was still too wet for gravel placement. They are preparing for Winter.

Granite County redid the road to Ghost Town this summer.

- **Granite County Tax Valuation**

Philipsburg Council Person posed question to Granite County Commissioner; Granite County Tax Valuation was the highest in the State over last year's rates being 67%. The County sets the rates, the



mill rate was lower; but asked what in a general sense, was the percent everyone's taxes will go up?

Commissioner McLure responded, to explain when the Department of Revenue says the County sets the rates, they certify what the value is going to be, they send back to the County on a Department of Revenue spreadsheet to fill out, and on that spreadsheet is an inflation factor. The cash value has to be the same as the prior years. If the value is higher, which it was last year. Example was given; *if*, last year the value of a mill was 15 and went up to 21, that will utilize less mills to equal the same cash value.

At this time, she does not know what the tax bills will be, they just got certified, then will go to the Department of Revenue and then to the Treasurer and she will send out tax bills.

Regarding the State Educational 95 mills; information which came from MACO that the 95 mills, they would only actually need 77 since the mill amount is so high. A decision for granite County has not been made yet, it will on the Commissioners' Agenda next week, and they will look to the County Attorney to give a recommendation.

Commissioner McLure's feelings are, this money goes to the General Fund at the State level, every bit of it; then the State decides what they will do with this money. So, there is eighty million dollars being collected, which is the extra money on that 95 mills that they are asking for. That means there is eighty million dollars sitting there in the General Fund that the State can do what it wants with.

Commissioner McLure personally feels; they should do the 77 mills, which would be more than what 95 mills was collected last year. She does not know what will be happening Tuesday; a lot of people feel the same way throughout the state. She continued this is not hurting the schools. Commissioner McLure's personal opinion is, they should certify 77.4 mills because the value is more, which means they would get the same amount of money. What they are saying is at the 95 mills they are pulling an extra eighty million dollars from the tax payors. They don't do what the Counties and the City/Towns do, they are giving the whole 95 mills. 77 mills are more than the 95 mills was last year.

Mayor Leeper expanded this is a very difficult concept to understand, if you don't work in it.

Department of Revenue came offering to look at property owner's assessment; if the property owner didn't feel the assessment was correct.

Department of Revenue had eleven people in our region to do 60,000 assessments. There are currently no boots on the ground.

Property assessments for tax purposes have no correlation to market value assessment for marketing property for sell. Houses assessed at \$50,000, are selling for \$400,000.

The assessment conducted for tax purposes, is the Governmental Body determining what the state needs to collect from the property owner; for things such as schools.

There is great concern for delinquent taxes; especially, since the Towns make every effort not to gouge citizens in the community.

Mayor Leeper expanded, it concerns her what the National level is doing to the States, and the States are doing to the Cities and Towns; hopefully we don't get taxed out of our own homes. Pretty much in small Towns across Montana, Elected Officials donate their time to perform their duties.

**GENERAL UPDATE TOWN OF DRUMMOND:** Mayor Gail Leeper provided a report for the Town of Drummond.

- **Completion of FY 2024 Budget**

Sewer investments were needed to bring the Sewer Fund into proper accounting. Further stating, at least Drummond had those investments to be able to accomplish this. She expanded, with concern to the issue of delinquent taxes and the issues that poses to the Town.

- **Waste Water Facility Upgrade**

The testing at the lagoon is completed; all test results coming out good. Project is anticipated to go out to bid in the Spring. Bi-Monthly Funding agency meetings are going along well and the project is moving forward grand.

- **Montana Limestone**

Mayor Leeper spoke with Kyle Carter, of Montana Limestone; regarding the mine. As she had heard rumors regarding the mine, that it wasn't going to go at all. Kyle responded, that is just not true; that they are going onward, they have completed core samples to know exactly where they could put the plant. Their previous location for the plant had a cavern underneath it. They are currently working on their air permit; and are starting to work on their water permit.

- **Valley Fire Department**

The Drummond building is just about complete; still lacking some wiring in the kitchen and bathroom. The toilet is installed and the water works, the floor is completed. They will start moving equipment in within the next week.

- **South Main Bridge**

The county has ownership of South Main, documentation of this ownership was discovered.

Drummond was awarded \$190,000 for South Main Bridge; Drummond is waiting to hear a direct answer from MCEP regarding these funds. Drummond has stated this is not Drummond's road, questioning if Drummond can filter these funds to Granite County for this bridge.

Mayor Leeper and Commissioner McLure discussed the issues present with South Main Bridge; and the structure of bridge being so narrow and the updating South Main road.

Mayor Leeper further expressed to Commissioner McLure the County can apply every year for bridge funding.

- **Solid Waste**

Town of Drummond did a quit claim deed to the County for the two plus acres at the solid waste site; to complete what was documented in historic minutes.

- **Flint Creek Child Care**

Flint Creek Child Care, in Philipsburg, has leased the old Physical Therapy building in Drummond, to place a satellite childcare facility.

When Flint Creek Child Care applied for original grant funding, they had listed Drummond has a future satellite location.

- **DNRC Flood Plain Mapping**

Tuesday night DNRC held a meeting regarding the new flood plain mapping throughout the County; which was a successful meeting. There will be some properties located in Drummond, being taken out of the flood plain.

The Ladar mapping does pose some difficulties; a resident outside of city limits who dug a fire trench around his property, when they conducted the elevation study that placed the elevation level lower. That property owner will have to go through the process with DNRC.

- **Trails**

Amanda Cooley provided the Granite County Commissioners' an update on the trails. The original proposed trail was to have a trail between Missoula to Butte along the Old Milwaukee Railroad; they received a grant for the original Trail study and are hoping to receive additional grant funding.

The trail is still in the study phase; they have changed the trail plans a little, discussing placement of sidewalks, in Philipsburg and Drummond, and walking paths, such as to the park; especially since that



road is actually a state highway. They are in hopes of connecting Drummond and Philipsburg with a trail either motorized or non-motorized.

This is being funded with Super Fund Monies. Hopefully with grant funding of this study, they will be able to put out a questionnaire. They are looking into the communities to see what the needs are within each community.

- **Montana league of Cities and Towns Conference**

Montana League of Cities and Towns Conference will be held in Helena, October 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

- **Headwaters**

There are Food and Egg Grants that open October 7<sup>th</sup>, ending October 21<sup>st</sup>; that money is capital for equipment. Refer to Sam Masko if would like further information. There are several individuals that will be meeting with her from this area for information.

- **Governor Gianforte to visit Drummond Fire Hall**

Mayor Leeper spoke with the Governor's office today; they called City Hall regarding the Governor coming over to the Fire Hall. That will be Wednesday, October 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm; at the Drummond Fire Hall.

Mayor Leeper spoke to the school superintendent regarding having the children come over, she will be reaching out to teachers as well. This invitation will be for anybody because it is Valley District Fire.

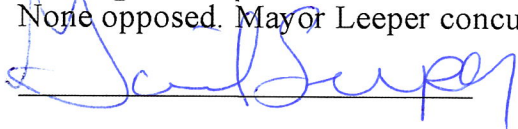
The Governor likes to visit one Town out of every County each year; this year they have chosen Drummond, because of the grant funding that has gone into the Fire Hall.

This grant funding is a relief on the tax payors.

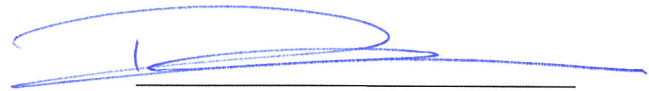
**General Public Comment on Matters within Local Governmental Jurisdiction:** None

**Next Joint Session scheduled for the Spring Thursday, April 4, 2024 6:00pm; Philipsburg Town Hall.**

**ADJOURNMENT:** Philipsburg Council Member Scott Lyons made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:03pm. Drummond Council Member Cary McLure seconded the motion. All yeas. None opposed. Mayor Leeper concurred.



Gail Leeper, Mayor



Robin Wight, Town Clerk-Treasurer

