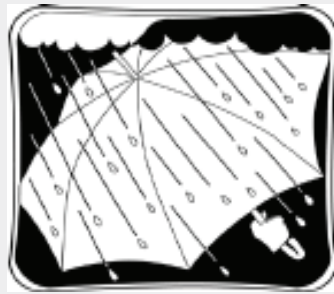


## Weather Corner



**Tonight...**Mostly clear. Lows around 20. Southwest winds around 10 mph.

**Tuesday...**Mostly sunny. Not as cool. Highs in the mid 50s. Southwest winds 10 to 20 mph. Tuesday night...Mostly cloudy. A chance of light rain showers and snow showers in the evening...Then a chance of light snow after midnight. Lows in the mid 20s. North winds 10 to 15 mph. Chance of precipitation 30 percent.

**Wednesday...**Mostly cloudy in the morning then becoming partly sunny. Colder...Breezy. Scattered flurries through the day. Highs in the upper 30s. North winds 15 to 25 mph. Wednesday night...Mostly cloudy. Lows around 17.

Sunday's low, high: 19, 42, 1.5 inches of snow.

Saturday's low, high: 36, 80.

Friday's low, high: 29, 62.

## Police investigate assault

Jan Katz Ackerman

Free Press Reporter  
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Colby police are asking for information about the beating of a Colby man Sunday.

Brandon J. Helus, 20, of Colby was in bed at his home in the 1200 block of West Fifth Street when he was awakened by someone beating him with a metal chain, said Detective Sergeant Gary Shull today.

"We got the call at 10:25 a.m. about the incident which allegedly took place at 10:20 a.m.," Shull said. "Mr. Helus' roommate, Tyson A. Plumisto, 21, heard the incident and went into Mr. Helus' bedroom."

Shull said by the time Plumisto entered Helus' bedroom, Helus and the unidentified male suspect were fighting when Plumisto broke it up.

"The suspect fled and got away," Shull said.

As of this morning, the identity of the suspect had not been verified, but had been narrowed down to three people.

Shull said the beating may be related to a previous incident involving Helus, but officers were working on connecting the two cases. He said although Helus received facial wounds from the beating, he declined medical treatment.

"A red late 1990s model of a Dodge Durango was seen leaving the scene of the incident," Shull said. If anyone has information, they are asked to call the Colby police at (785) 460-4460.

Emergency crews responded to a two-car accident at about 7:30 a.m. today in Colby. Detective Sergeant Gary Shull said Michelle S. Becker, 16, of Colby, was driving a 1994 Pontiac south from Lake Street to Fourth Street when she was struck by a westbound 2007 Ford pickup driven by William K. Latimer, 67, of Colby. Becker was transported to Citizens Medical Center with possible head injuries. No other details were available.



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

# Sherman County, town officials create group to work on rural fire departments; Brewster in need of truck

By Tom Betz  
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City and county officials formed a 10-member fire team Monday night during a joint meeting of the city and county commissions and the county rural fire board held to talk about possible ways to work more closely together.

At the end of a 90-minute meeting, the three groups agreed on a list of people who will meet and brainstorm about areas of common ground and ways the city and rural fire departments could work together.

Members include Tom Rohr, chairman of rural fire board; County Commissioner Mitch Tiede; Alan David, Goodland rural fire chief; Chris Bauman, assistant Goodland rural fire chief; Brian James, city fire chief; James Miller, assistant city fire chief; Mayor Rick Billinger; City Attorney Jeff Mason; Brewster fire chief or his assistant; and the Kanorado chief or his assistant.

County Commissioners Tiede, Chuck Thomas and Kevin Rasure came to the meeting, along with city commissioners Dave Daniels, Josh Dechant, Annette Fairbanks, John Garcia and Billinger, and rural fire board members Rohr, Ken Palmgren and Darrel Cloyd.

The city commission room was packed with members of both city and rural fire departments, members of the Shine On, Sherman County Government Alliance committee, Sheriff Kevin Butts and Undersheriff Roger Studer, County Clerk Janet Rumpel and City Clerk Mary Volk.

Tiede opened the meeting by explaining that the county had a dilemma.

"We have thought about a full-time fire chief, but do not have it in

the budget," Tiede said. "We want to talk things over. I have talked to John Garcia a little about the two departments joining sometime in the future."

"We want to get some ideas. We have kicked a lot of things around. We have sort of fallen behind on the equipment and have outgrown our building."

"Our building is too small and there is no room for training. We have to expand the building or build a new one."

"I think that is it in a nut shell," Rasure agreed. "We have to watch out for the taxpayers and do the best for the firemen. We have to keep the cost down."

"We need good ideas for the short term, long term and find some solutions."

Thomas said part of the problem facing the rural departments is that the district has a maximum 5 mill property tax, and the levy is at 4.7 mills now. To go over that level, the county would have to have a vote of the people in the district.

Garcia said he understood the levy would have to go to about 7 mills to generate enough money to pay for a full-time chief.

"We just got done with our commission meeting and addressed the cost factors involved in our communities," Garcia said. "We have to find ways to relieve the tax burdens on our people and not increase that tax burden."

"We are seeing people moving away. Look at Main Street. It

should not alarm us, but we need to be proactive. The city is now down to 4,361 people. We need to find ways to unify services."

Cloyd, a Kanorado area farmer, said the rural fire board has been looking at their equipment goals, which include a couple of trucks and a building in Goodland.

"I think we have an awesome infrastructure as far as stations and people," he said. "I would like to see a combined city-county fire board to bring people together to see about combined services."

"I think you have an awesome resource in your fire chief. I feel we could make the system work with the chief you have and the equipment we have. He has done quite a bit to get the department up to regulation."

"Brewster is in need of a truck and we need a rescue truck here in Goodland."

Billinger asked why the district covers Brewster, which is in Thomas County.

Palmgren, an Edson farmer, said Thomas County pays \$5,000 a year in taxes. Sherman County provides the equipment and the City of Brewster provides the building.

"Brewster helps cost share and they have expanded their fire house," Palmgren said. "We need one more truck over there to satisfy their situation."

He said the fire trucks may not have many miles on them, but the older steel tanks that are rusting

out. "We want to improve the equipment," he said. "We were to this point and hoped to establish a new fire house, then wanted to lower the tax levy. Ours is one of the highest in the area, and lowering it is one of our goals."

Cloyd said other counties have combined departments and it has worked. He said the city and county need to look at this very carefully and not just jump in.

"Communication is the main thing we have to do," he said. "We have to keep the people up to date on what is going on. We have to have attorneys involved to see what we can and cannot do under state laws."

Chief James said he would like to stay with two departments.

"We are all here to serve and protect the people," he said. "We should not have any animosity between either department. We need to train together so we can become more of a team and can do a better job of serving the people."

Fairbanks said she thought getting the two departments training together would be a great first step. She said she went to Tribune with the government alliance last week to talk to officials about how they

were combining city and county governments in Greeley County.

"It really brought the community together," she said. "They said the most important thing was to keep the people informed. We have a long road, but we need to get started."

Trevor Linton, a financial advisor at First National Bank and a member of the alliance committee, said the people in Greeley County looked at the population and saw it was going down, that there were not as many people to pay the costs.

He said they did not see savings as a big point, but wanted the government to be more efficient.

"I think in our case, it could be very beneficial and cut costs," Daniels said. "If it is going to increase our costs, it is not going to be a good idea. I think the money is a bigger piece of the puzzle here. We need to look at the numbers and not jump into it."

"It would be nice if there was a savings," Billinger said, "but we are going to have to find ways to provide the services with less people. Ultimately, in consolidation, we will see some savings. We have to look at ways to do more with less people."

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