

CAFD ...

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Ashmore had worked as a battalion chief and emergency medical services director before he moved here from Hibbing.

CAFD board chair Bob DeCaigny said Ashmore has more than three weeks to sign the separation agreement with the district, which would become public 15 days after he signs it. DeCaigny said the board will consider its next steps at the next board meeting Wednesday, Dec. 15.

"Up to this point we've already had two searches," DeCaigny said, adding that it was unknown if they would embark on another national search for someone to lead the fire district.

In the meantime, CAFD battalion chief Jesse Buhs is working the daytime office shift at the fire district. "Our level of service will continue," Buhs said. "All of our dedicated staff remain and our service will be unchanged."

What came before

Ashmore defended himself in a Loudermill hearing — which provides public sector employees the right to contest reasons for possible firing — in both open and closed meetings Nov. 22 regarding the allegations and his performance as fire chief.

A notice of the hearing sent to Ashmore stated that the board considered allegations against Ashmore in closed session on Nov. 11 and made a preliminary determination that discipline or termination may be merited. He was placed on paid administrative leave after that meeting.

Ashmore and his attorney, Jason Raether, addressed complaints Nov. 21 that he had not abided by Covid-19 protocols previously adopted by CAFD for all employees, including wearing a mask and observing social distancing in public or with the public, specifically when teaching at Virginia Community College on Oct. 27, at two meetings on Oct. 28, and with a Lake Superior College student Nov. 1. Additionally, he is accused of not maintaining social distancing requirements from co-workers at the fire district on Nov.



The Cloquet Area Fire District board has recently been dealing with issues surrounding fire chief Matt Ashmore. He resigned this week after an investigation closed. *Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

1. Several sections of the allegations against Ashmore were redacted in the Loudermill notice so there were additional details that weren't public.

The now former chief told the board during the Nov. 22 meeting that he had followed Covid protocols for CAFD members who are fully vaccinated because he had gotten a negative result with an at-home test.

He also noted that he was given inadequate time to respond to the hearing notice, and had only two days to find an attorney and one workday to prepare for the Loudermill hearing.

Ashmore gave a prepared statement during the Nov. 22 hearing.

"Overall I would like to make it clear that member safety has always been a priority of my career," he said. "This is not an exception when it comes to Covid. This is evidenced by changes that have been made to the district's Covid manuals, procedures and getting fully vaccinated myself. Recommendations for Covid have been in constant change since the pandemic started, sometimes making it difficult to know what is current and what is not."

Ashmore said he had "given a good faith effort to follow the district rules" and that any deviation from these rules does not rise to the level of behavior alleged by the board.

While the board did not dispute Ashmore publicly

during that meeting, the Nov. 22 hearing notice stated the evidence suggested that by not following the CAFD Covid-19 plan, Ashmore's "actions and inactions significantly damage the respect for you of those you are required to lead. It is further alleged that your actions and inaction was of such a substantial nature directly affecting the rights and interests of the public and touching on your qualifications to perform your office or performance of your duties, that it shows you are not a fit or proper person to hold the office."

Ashmore was not physically present at Monday's meeting, and his name was not among those attending the meeting online. Five board members were present at the Scanlon Community Center — Marshall Johnson, DeCaigny, Sheila Lamb, Linda Wey and Gary Harms — and two attended online, Bun Carlson and Bruce Blacketter. The votes were unanimous. A handful of CAFD staff were also present in the audience, along with several more who attended online.

CAFD provides fire protection to 170 square miles and ambulance service to a state-mandated area of more than 250 square miles in Carlton County and southern St. Louis County.

Kingdom Builders Ministries present

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at **Common Ground Coffee Bar & Deli**  
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Donate what you can afford. All donations will go to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.  
Cut your own tree or pick up a fresh cut tree at Harold's Service in Carlton.

Make checks payable to **St. Jude Children's Hospital** and drop off or mail to:  
**Harold's Service**  
PO Box 21, Carlton MN 55718  
**Rod & Sue Holmes**  
3030 State Hwy 23, Wrenshall MN 55797

Directions to the trees:

- 7 miles SE of Wrenshall on the West side of Hwy 23, across from Fire No. 3030
- From Co. Rd 4 (Military Rd) go 3.3 miles South
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