

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, August 9th, 2022, 1:00 p.m. and 3 :30 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1
Jim Detro (JD), BOCC District 3
Lanie Johns (LJ), County Clerk
Rena Shawver (RS), Executive Director, Community Action Council (OCCAC)
Jennifer Short, (JS), OCCAC Programs Director
Nancy Nash-Mendez (NN), Director, Okanogan Housing Authority
Kat Goering, Executive Director, Room One (Twisp)
Michelle Sandoval, Co-Executive Director, FYRE (Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement)
Carol Belle Branch, Director of Communications, Behavioral Health (OCBH)
Kelly Edwards, Co-Founder, Room One
Jon Hayse (JH), President, Okanogan County Homeless Shelter
Par Zoom :
Mike Arrington (MA), Boardmember, Okanogan County Homeless Shelter
Miranda Maple, Community and Outreach Coordinator, OCCAC
Margo Amelong, Executive Director, The Support Center
Lael Duncan, Former Executive Director, OCCAC

Time stamps refer to the time on the wall clock. An AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date is available at:

https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php

Summary of Important Discussions: Barnholdt Loup, with its neighborhood organization, could be considered as a sub-area; Housing Coalition discussion led by new Community Action chief covers: - need for assessment and plan by next summer, mandated by state - need for new homeless shelter and affordable units- a minority of disturbed homeless people giving all homeless a bad name, causing complaints to officials - community involvement the key to solutions - possibly re-purposing a building - better data collection needed for good overall plan (182 homeless counted in 18 months) - integrating city, sheriff's office into discussion - the hidden homeless - hiring a coordinator for assessment.

! :08 - CB has received an email from Myra Barker qt the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), about signing, as co-sponsor, the grant agreement for (already completed) trail improvements on a piece of land at a trail head which was transfered from the County to the city of Oroville.

1 :08 - (Discussing zoning districts that can be considered as sub-areas) - AH : Why with such a

small —**CB** : There's a neighborhood, Barnholdt Loup, that had at the time a nuisance property. They wanted zoning that would deal with the nuisance property and also to make sure they had control over how it developed over there... Not that different from Methow Planning units... I would think (the Planning Dept. ?) would want to recognize those guys as an entity that provides input to the planning commission like those other groups would... Almost like a neighborhood organization, or HOA (Home Owners Association). **AH** : You want to be careful how small they are. **CB** : I agree, but they were established a long time. I'd like to give deference to that.

1 : 15 - Swearing in of new Board of Health member Lionel Orr as well as existing Board members Patricia Stanton, Jim Wright and Mariann Williams.

3 :30 - Discussion on RFP (Request for Proposals) for Homeless Housing Coalition - Eight members, the majority, are present, including new OCCAC Director Rena Shawver, as well as five attending via Zoom. The BOCC invited the coalition to discuss its programs in light of an assessment and plan due in June 2023. AH wants to be sure they're on the same page as to amounts given to the BOCC to budget.

3 :36 - **RS** : The Affordable Housing Fund, originally developed by the State, *(concerns)* emergency grants. The BOCC decided to set a fund aside for « brick and mortar »... **AH** : Homelessness has gotten a lot more visible. Something has changed... How is the coalition looking at using the homeless money for those people ? **NN** : ...I would like to convey that fund has been used for « brick and « mortar ». *(Inaudible)* **AH** : ...Trying to come up with creative ways to use those funds. Helping (people) feel better about things going on in the community. **RS** : What I understand, as a newbie, is the coalition members themselves have put in applications and that the funds have been divided mostly among coalition members. ...About \$200,000 was distributed last year. There's an ending balance of \$200,00 in the Affordable Housing fund and \$650,000 in the county Homeless Housing fund. We can't use these funds for home building projects but we all agree that more are probably needed for the county.

3:42 - **AH** : I have an issue with lack of housing for working folks. We've done some projects that added to affordable housing which is at a level so low it's ridiculous. At what level of poverty do you have to be to get into some of this homeless housing ? What can we use these funds on that help in a dire situation, get these people where they need to go ?

JD : A lot of people are very very upset, saying building more... for homeless people is not going to solve anything... We have homeless housing going out to people who really want to help themselves. What's left on the street is people that are mental. Had someone run up to me at the corner stone church taking his shirt off, throwing stuff at cars. The Farmers Market moved from the Civic League Park to East Side Park because they were constantly harassed by people who are the dregs of the homeless society. The problem now is not just building houses. Those people are going to tear them up... Got to have a different approach. On Main Street someone started running after my wife and yelling at her. She got to her car and locked the doors. I said, « You should have run up on the sidewalk and run over that guy, pinned him up against a building until the cops showed up... You're addressing the homeless aspect but no one's addressing the mental aspect... People call me to report someone coming after their kid, their wife.

NN : I applaud you for stating the situation. We receive the same calls at the agency. As a society we need to address the mental health issue. It's not either/or, it's this and that. There is affordable housing out there. We do not have enough. We have mandates for people

working with people working with the homeless that we need to explore more. The Housing Authority's mission is rebuild, acquire and reserve affordable housing... (Not) to build worker housing. (CB arrives.)

CB : I appreciate, Rena, the plan you sent me, prepared by Olympia, that attempted to describe the homeless situation... It's one of the most important things we do because we all have our impression of what homelessness is... Friends took in a homeless guy who had been fired from a Housing Authority project he was working on. He'd come from Montana. They got him during the coldest days of winter. Now he's working at Home Depot. Just an example... We need to do something here because of the impression that the crime going on is just the homeless people. Some of them are but not all. We need to build a shelter. We need an emergency shelter in the interim.

3 :54 - **JH** : I showed Lanie around the (*homeless*) facility. People are talking about « low bar facilities » that don't require being sober. At our facility you have to be clean and sober but you can come back the next day if you were rejected... We've called on churches to get a new facility in Omak. The problem is having the most visble people creating most of the interaction problems. We sat in on a meeting with John Culp, the Sheriff, and safety officers who recognized that every situation needs to be located somewhere amenable to support services, sheriff, mental health, to kind of shepherd these people. Projects that have had success have had community involvement, like volunteers to help with child care. In meetings over five/six years we've talked about how to navigate on your own. Some people are incapable.

4 :12 - **AH** : The crisis portion of mental health is (what) we lack. **CB** : Mike (*Arrington, Homeless Shelter*) had some good contributions to that meeting. I was there. The fact of people coming together having good conversations is very important. Some were fed up, some engaged and wanting to know. I'll add to that mental health issue— there are great efforts being made. **JD** : I've been inundated with calls. **CB** : The problems we have are complicated... Sometimes when the State tells us what to do and makes rules, it doesn't always work for us where we live. These efforts by all of you are important but you're right on in that engagement is important. If the community doesn't understand, is blaming officials, telling us to do our job—I do my job by engaging with you, who know the people on the street better than anybody else. Jennifer (*Short, OCCAC*) does because she's there... I would stress (*with these proposals*)... you get vouchers to help people in the interim. In the long run you need to know what the homeless situation is.

NN : You have to see where the successes are. I have also seen the Olympia plan. In the Methow Valley, after the Carlton Complex fire we hired a specialist in housing assessments and did common engagement. Out of that came the very successful Methow Housing (*inaudible*).

4 :06 - **AH** : We need to know where we are on that (*homelessness spectrum*) to figure out what we need. If we're on this end with the mental health issue, are we looking at buildings that we need to re-purpose ? People talk about needing a new hospital, a new crisis center, a new jail. Coud a new jail have a crisis center ? I see not having to take someone to Eastern to help their mental health issues that they don't want you to help them with, maybe transition them in a short-term homeless shelter once they're on medication. We might not have the money. You can't buy a facility for \$800,000, but you could re-purpose one.

4 :07 - **RS** talks about funding sources. We get the sales tax portion that the state gives back

to the county. We've budgeted and got \$21,000 for affordable housing. The rest are from recording fees based on house building. **MA** : House bill 216 0 is restrictive, the other is very broad. How do you know which fund is being used **LJ** : Just \$75,000 was used for affordable Housing. Haven't received much of the sales tax portion. (*Unidentifiable*) : Do we know how much new money is coming in ? **CB** : In 2020 Affordable Housing received just under \$60,000. **AH** : That's why we said we'd led (the building fund) build up and keep the homeless fund for just short tem stuff, then realized we could use some for building. **NN** : We'd love to discuss what we need as a county to collect data. What is the end product we're looking for, qualitative and quantitative ? **CB** : The cost of living has sky-rocketed. The attempt to provide Affordable Housing is good but not going to get any better. The way we deal with land use itself is part of the problem. **AH** : We don't have a lot of affordable housing that meets the need. **NN** : That's the reason we signed the MOU (motion of understanding) with our housing trust. (Inaudible.)

CB : With the coalition here, you're oing to do an RFP. Not sure it's the total approach, because you have to take care of people in the interim. **RS** : We have a job description for a coordinator or a need for homeless assessment, have a housing assessment but haven't done county-wide homeless housing assessment. Everyone is going to say you need sheltering, low income housing. All have our data, thanks to Community Action. 182 individuals have experienced homelessness in the last 18 months and we can give you data on how many we've placed and where, in hotels, which don't have a lot of. We all have this data but havn't put the data together in a coordinated fashion, all have full time jobs. The coordinator position could do an assessment and help us with a plan. **LD** put me on to what officials are doing in Kitsap Co. It's a community-wide problem. Bring law enforcement and elected officials into the conversation... Take a different approach to an increasing problem that's not going to go away... 60% of their homeless are community members forced out of their homes by real estate decisions, ordinances. We can do an RFP and divide the money or we can take another step and hire a coordinator. We need both.

AH : Looking at the amount of money that comes into the homeless fund, can you hire someone full time ? You can give \$100,000 pretty easily. Are they going to find some place to live ? ...Trying to be to be forward-thinking. If my \$10,000 adds to Nancy's \$40,000, does it translate down the road to something better ? **CB** : It's not either/or. Jennifer, you're responding to someone now. Community Action can't take those funds for long term because you still need to deal with the situation now... Don't think anyone here has too much money. **AH** : But if you see the needs you can ask for an appropriation to do something that's very forward-thinking.

JS : I appreciate the focus on gathering data. Homeless are the most difficult to get data from. The numbers are always sorely under-represented... Looking for ways to improve data collection. This is a very small percentage that's interacting with law enforcement. I understand we have a lot of very loud constituents who are pushing, but also a lot of really active and supportive community members who value the work that everyone in this room is doing, and they're quieter. The loudest constituents often take our attention away from the work we're doing every day. (*JD suggests working with dispatch to get data, someone mentions sharing stories.*) **CB** : Taking it to the street is really important. People are nervous about approaching homeless people. We don't know as much as we think we know (from) what we see. Downtown there are people with mental problems who are harmless (and not even necessarily homeless.)

RS : According to the County Action Plan, Bill 1277 (*just passed*), counties are supposed to com up with wo actions out of six that they name, to take effect in 2023... **JS** : I'm glad that

we have funding, plus additional funding, for this visible issue. But it's okay we don't have a full count and there are clients we can't help. We can make a major dent because we have almost all the right people in this room. (MM?) : It's also important to know the homeless population are not just the people you're seeing... We have kids living on couches, kids living in places they should not be for reasons they should not be there. This room could educate anybody as to what homelessness really looks like. The loudest are the least informed. JS : There could be the star of the basketball team that's homeless, or someone living in a car who won't admit they're homeless. Education is a big piece, not just educating our community but our agencies, getting to be more visible. (MM ?) : For any community that counts, the actual number is 20% higher. (Other participant) : Full-on addiction has everything to do with these issues.

...JH : It seems a mistake if you don't bring in those cities who actually have the problem. You can't just buy a piece of land. Have to locate people where you think you're going to locate them. I'm not assured that police and cities are going to (go along with it).

CB : Coordination (for me) has been talking to the mayor, going to meetings, OBHC. Trying to understand what cities want to do... RS : You had a task force. You brought in all the agencies. CB : The major players. The Sheriff's department has been under-staffed and that's a major part of the task force. The Economic Alliance had that meeting. Businesses felt threatened, were thinking « I want to move out of here. » Some may have felt we didn't accomplish anything. For me, we had a conversation. Shared challenges. The Sheriff prosecutor, chief of police was there and a bunch of business people. A couple people walked away mad, expected something to get done right away. ... AH : The take-away is, when you do the RFP, make sure everyone is talking together. CB : and is interested in hiring a task force, including law enforcement.

They discuss the position of coordinator. CB prefers it not be a contract paid for by the county but by one of the organizations present, to « keep politicians out of it. » RS concludes : We'll meet and figure something out. You know what we're thinking in the longer term, and also that we have needs that are current.

4:51 - The meeting breaks up.