

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Monday, May 20, 2024 AM

JN—Jon Neal, BOCC, Chair, District 3
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, District 1
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, District 2
LJ—Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board
NB—Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning
Tim—Tim Meadows, Maintenance Supervisor
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
MW—Mike Worden, Okanogan County Dispatch Center
RHD—Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director, Economic Alliance

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Summary of significant discussions:

- Pete Palmer, Planning Director describes a thorny problem of a lot that was divided in half when the owner died, leaving one half to each of her two children, but the lot was never went through the county’s subdivision process. Now one of the children wants to sell her property but can’t. The commissioners are stumped by this problem and refer Palmer to the county attorney.
- Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director of the Economic Alliance, and the commissioners discuss various infrastructure projects for RHD’s upcoming meeting with a federal interagency funding group, wanting to know funding priorities for affordable housing in the county.
- Commissioners meet in executive session with Esther Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor and Shelley Keitzman, Human Resources and Risk Management, for 15 minutes under RCW 42.30.110(1)(i)—on going litigation.
- Meeting adjourns for the day at 12:05.

-2:30:15—Pledge of Allegiance.

AH and CB discuss a map they’re looking at. At one point, they mention using MapSifter. LJ tells the commissioners that the projector used for zoom meetings was turned off, and they’re having trouble getting it turned back on. Because the projector is not on, the commissioners are unable to see who is attending the meeting via zoom.

-2:16:00—Public comment—Ms. Jackson thanks CB for participating in Saturday’s Mental Health Awareness Month Color Walk in Omak.

-2:01:10—NB—I’m Nick Barnes, Fairgrounds Manager.

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NB—It was an exciting weekend at the Fairgrounds. I went on Saturday. I think we need to adjust our contract some—what we provide and what they provide.

NB explains how they dumpsters were inadequate for the amount of stuff being thrown away. The High School Rodeo had rented the arena. The horse trailers were parked all over and no one organized the parking. The dumpster was piled way up high with trash. They should get a 30 yard dumpster next time. Discussion of soil amendments needed for the arena. It's too sandy and dusty.

NB—Norm and Dustin were there for two days doing things for the rodeo instead of their regular fairgrounds work.

AH—You should get in contact with Moses Lake or wherever and find out what they provided for the High School Rodeo. We gave them a 50% discount.

NB—But they paid for garbage and camping, but I'll call Moses Lake.

AH—I want to make sure we're not missing something they're charging for.

NB—They did a real good job cleaning up.

NB—The groomer is damaged—tweaked. It was done last fall sometime. It'll get fixed this fall.

Much discussion about how the damage might have happened and how to fix it.

NB—There's a guy coming today at 4:15 to look at the horse barn. He was on the small works roster. There may be another person coming to look later on, too.

NB—That's all I've got!

AH—Appreciate what you're doing over there.

-1:46:20—JN—Pete?

PP—I'm Pete Palmer, Director of Planning.

PP—We've got the Planning Commission meeting tonight at 7:00. Hoping they'll get through the red-line version of the rezone they've been working on.

PP—I emailed LJ a letter of support asking for JN's signature, asking for a bike lane grant that WDOT is submitting. I'll be a path from Walmart to the Casino along Hwy. 97.

AH—Sweet.

PP—I finally received a response from Chris Johnson (Planner for the city of Okanogan) regarding the Burton Ave. property. If you remember: Cheryl Curtis's mother's property was divided. Now we've learned it was done through probate. But that doesn't relax the law and local regulations about dividing property. So it looks like the property was divided without going through the county's subdivision process. Two parcels were created. The division was done and accepted by the Assessor's Office. There's no record in our office or anywhere there was an actual subdivision done. Cheryl's been in here a few times. She inherited one property and her brother inherited the other.

CB—She's trying to sell the property but can't.

Discussion about what to do with this property. Both lots are built on. There are two separate parcel numbers.

AH—That's not the county's fault, but it's not fair.

PP—Chris Johnson was my last hope of being able to find out how this happened.

Discussion about how the subdivision may have occurred and how to fix the situation now. Esther Milner (Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor) and PP will consult MSRC (Municipal Services and Research Center).

-1:25:45—PP—Update on permit statistics. Right now, we've had 30 permits less than last year, but we're about even with 2022. Last year there was a big fluctuation with permits.

JN—I'm not surprised because of interest rates.

PP—Finally, we met Friday with the Western Washington University people. We'll have interns from WWU to help with the subunit update in Mazama. It's a tight schedule. They'll do public outreach, and

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10 students will update statistics and maps. Sophia will be living there until the end of August, tying the map, the community and the county all together. I'll meet with her every other week. She's a grad student. The only cost for the county is for the copying I said I'd help with.

PP—And that's it.

-1:23:15—MG—I'm Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management. The Performance Grant on Tuesday's consent agenda is the only thing I've got. It needs to get signed tomorrow.

MG—Questions? Have a good day.

-1:22:30—Tim Meadows, Maintenance Supervisor, distributes a document to the commissioners.

Tim—I got quotes for the new AC units for the Virginia Granger Building. There are 13 units on the roof all the same age. Some work OK. We could replace the eight that need to be replaced, or replace all of them. I think replacing all of them is the better option. There's going to be a 10-15% price increase coming in the next few months.

Tim—I didn't go with the lowest bid, because the bid from another company was way more thorough. They discovered that the back-up heat strip was oversized and that can be a fire-hazard. I wasn't confident with the low bid.

AH—Why have 13? Why not try to combine some?

Tim—I think because there are so many zones.

Tim—Changing the ducting would be a bigger undertaking. There are so many zones.

After discussion of the differences between the bids (from Cascade Mechanical, Spokane Comfort Systems and Divco), the commissioners decide they would like the lower bidder to come back and make a thorough inspect of the work needed to be done. That will make for a more accurate comparison of the bids. Tim will also check with the PUD to see if there are any rebates available for upgrading the efficiency of the AC.

-59:15—Tim—I've got the coroner's new storage facility all done. He's going to move in this week. There was a lot of wiring to do. We insulated the walls and ceiling and it's a lot cooler than it was. There's a fan, too. He's got a roll-in cooler with three tiers.

AH—How's the Auditor's Office coming.

Tim—I have one cabinet all done. The project is coming along pretty well.

Tim—That's all. I'll make sure the Cascade bid have everything. Maybe they forgot something. It's a big difference between the bids. They've got to use a big crane because one of the units is heavy.

-53:45—LJ—I've got a few quick items. I met with Judges Grim and Short, Clerk Speiker and Court Administrator Schreckengast about the new grant application with DAHP (Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation) for 2025-2027 biennium, and what the grant application should contain. ADA accessibility was at the top of the list. Also making all the courtrooms have the older characteristics found in older courtrooms like courtroom #1. We need photographs to submit with the application. I'll also go to the Historical Society to see what they've got.

LJ—Also, I have the state Auditor auditing the Tonasket EMS District from 2020 to 2023.

LJ—The Housing Coalition will be scheduled every other month to provide housing updates to the BOCC. Their next meeting is June 17.

-52:10—AH—Fieldtrip time!

Commissioners and LJ go out to the parking lot with Mike Worden, Okanogan County Dispatch Center, to inspect the new Mobil Command Unit for approximately 15 minutes.

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-46:35—RHD—I’m here to pick your brains today. There’s a federal interagency funding group that will be here at the end of June. They’ve asked to hear about four different projects in the county that we went to focus on. The group was started by John, the state director for HUD (Housing and Urban Development). He brought together Ecology, HUD DOT the EDA and Jenny Glass from the Federal Reserve, Department of Commerce—a whole group meeting with me, Nancy Nash-Mendez, Executive Director of the Okanogan Housing Authority and Rena Shawver, Executive Director of the Community Action Council. We’ve had tribal representatives, too. The purpose is to bring people together to talk about housing federal dollars, because Okanogan County gets funding for that. They want to come out here and do an overview of their services and sit down and do a tech team on four projects in the county. The tribe will have a project. Rena, Nancy and I will talk about one project we will bring. So I’m asking you guys do you have one project you’d like done.

AH—Infrastructure?

RHD—Any project. Last week, I met with Helen Price Johnson, the state director of USDA Rural Development. They will bring the funders that she thinks can best solve the problems of the projects we bring up.

AH—I think our biggest problem is the housing shortage. Prices are beyond belief for ordinary people. The Sheriff’s Department and the Prosecutor’s Office can’t hire people because the potential employees can’t find affordable housing here.

AH—Our main thing should be infrastructure. That place the School District bought near Walmart ought to be turned into high density housing. It’s not within the city limits maybe. Infrastructure within the city expansion areas to offset the cost of housing in those areas.

CB—Community Action is looking for property for transitional housing. Next to the mobile home park.

AH—Is that a good place for homeless housing?

AH—You’ll be in an area that’s residential and a school. I guess it depends on the type of housing. Section 8 housing has a stigma.

CB—Section 8 is rental assistance. Neighbors wouldn’t necessarily know it’s Section 8.

RHD—They were looking to put in a double-wide trailer park.

AH—Builders hate the term “tract home” but that’s what you need. You need a bunch of houses all built identical to each other. It’s cheaper that way.

AH—I’m not talking about low income. I’m talking about if you make \$60,000 to \$150,000/year, you can’t buy a house. Houses are at least \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 now in the Methow, and partly over here, too.

CB—With what they’re building, anyway. There are a lot of moving parts to this. Take Section 8. It could be in a mobile home park right now and you wouldn’t know it.

RHD—The landlord just has to accept it.

AH—I’m just saying it’s a stigma.

CB—I rented to people who were Section 8 people, and they were family people, working...

AH— I’m not saying there aren’t people who will be helped by it. I’m just saying when we’re looking at things, let’s look at it globally. We just put in some low income housing by Safeway. Is that a better place to put it? Thinking globally about what is the plan for housing around Omak, Okanogan, Twisp, etc. Not just that there’s a piece of property for sale. Maybe we could do a land swap or something.

CB—If there are federal funders coming in and we decide that affordable housing for people at a particular income level, what do you see that project looking like?

AH—If we’re just talking infrastructure?

CB—So you’re talking about putting in infrastructure and saying “build it and they will come”?

AH—If we were going to put in infrastructure, it would have to meet certain qualifications. Then the developer wouldn’t be on the hook for that money. You could say a certain percentage of houses can’t

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be sold for more than X dollars. Because now the developer wouldn't have to pay to put in the infrastructure.

CB—This is like a federal tech team coming to see what they should do? See if they would fund our project.

RHD—If the county owns the land, you could dedicate the land to affordable housing and put restrictions on it.

AH—In Winthrop, the Housing Trust has projects without the county or town owning it.

CB—Who's getting the infrastructure dollars?

AH—The Housing Trust.

CB—They've got a project and they're putting in infrastructure. As far as I know, they're not just putting infrastructure in without a project.

AH—That's right. To do that, you're going to build a little piece of a city over there. I've been in contact with the School District in Omak about the county helping get their stuff done. The planning and engineering has to be done. Maybe we could say we need design and engineering on a large sale community project—includes the school, residential, light commercial, whatever. Get it all done and plan it out.

CB—The city of Omak I think has its water and sewer plans.

RHD—This is something we've had conversations about.

AH—I apologize. Curt, the Omak Planner was in the meetings with us and the School District. His big deal was—we don't have any engineering over there and that engineering will cost a lot.

RHD—The school would be the end user, and getting the infrastructure from the last location through a couple of different properties to the school is the issue.

CB—If I'm a developer, and I have a project, and it's farther out than the infrastructure, I'd be my responsibility to build it out. But the project will have a hard time getting that expensive infrastructure that's up to city standards out there to the project.

CB—So we've got a project to associate with building the infrastructure to.

AH—Yes. The roads, sewer and water are a large obstacle for them. They have to pull it to the end.

CB—That's a benefit. Jon, you've been involved with exactly that—the airport and Veranda Beach. There's a project you can identify to these people. The housing part of it would be a benefit. It'd be a lot easier to build houses if the infrastructure is already there.

CB—The problems with Water Associations don't happen because the city is already there. Some of the legislation we considered at the (*inaudible*) was similar to that—extension of infrastructure. There was a proposal to force the PUD to take over Class A systems. (The PUDs opposed this at the legislature.) But cities are in better positions to do that if it's close to them.

AH—Twisp needs the infrastructure extended too. They want development in the old mill site, and the stuff up above on top, and all of that industrial area. I can think of two places that would be served well by the expansion of infrastructure. This one (*the School District project?*) has property that's untouched, owned by a few owners and it's ready to be developed. In Twisp you've got a patchwork of property with many owners. If we want to keep this place rural, more intense development has to happen in the cities and expansion areas. We have to assist in that to further our goals of the Comp Plan.

CB—Maybe the agencies will extend the infrastructure without a project, but maybe not.

AH—With this one here, we've got a project, so it's easier. The School District has already bought the property.

RHD—They have to pass a bond. One failed maybe two years ago.

AH—Bonds are like the chicken and the egg. The infrastructure is such a large chunk of the cost. How do you justify that huge cost of the people that'll be paying for the bond?

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RHD—I talked to the city. They said one of the things that made the developer to back out was the upfront cost for infrastructure. That piece is in the city. A place in the county is doing it in smaller chunks and don't need sidewalks like they do in the city. It was too much for the developer to do.

AH—I think if a developer looked at our housing study and saw how many people could pay in the \$220,000 to \$400,000 range—people who have working jobs.

RHD—Teachers, deputies, etc. the bill is an asset for them. You can barely find anything for \$220,000 anymore.

AH—That's four Ford trucks.

JN—Four cheap Ford trucks.

RHD—We have housing statistics on our website—see how many houses have sold, etc.

CB—So is it agreeable for that project to be one of ours?

CB—When we prioritized WSAC (Washington State Association of Counties) legislative priorities, we have three different areas. Affordable housing cropped up all across the state. The ways to achieve it differ—affordable housing, transitional, etc. Also we looked at transportation—the gas tax with the state being able to fund its projects which will cut us out. Josh (Thomson, Public Works) can talk about that. We had three places—urban, rural and all counties. Two projects for each. If we looked, we could identify two projects for us.

AH—I think it's self-serving for us to do housing. Why have county government if the attrition rate is higher than your incoming rate. You have to have people who will work here. If you had affordable housing, you could attract people because Okanogan County is a nice place to live, and you wouldn't have to raise the wages up to astronomical levels to get people to move here. And we'd get better teachers (but I'm not saying they're bad now), mechanics, medical, etc.

RHD—Will we have houses for our kids to move back to?

CB—If we keep it a nice place, they'll want to move back.

CB—So what are the projects we want to identify. That's what we need to know.

AH—Ask them how many housing units they plan.

CB—If the goal is to provide a variety of housing types, densities can achieve huge numbers.

AH—Apartments are easier to build. Normal, nice apartments—like town houses.

RHD—Now there is senior housing right next to the strip mall. There's a trailer park there. There's industrial, too. Across the street are duplexes and trailers.

AH—There's also high end houses.

RHD—The quality of the intersection is part of our prioritization process every year. (Discusses who owns which property around this intersection.)

AH—If Community Action did in Winthrop what Nancy and the Housing Coalition did with medium income housing, low income apartments but it's all together, that's fine. But getting the infrastructure of the 150-180% AMI...

RHD—One of the challenges for Community Action is that you have to have the ability to connect to water and sewer. This project would be good, but you'd need to have all the players come to the table.

CB—So their planner needs to be a part of that group. They have a Comp Plan. What are the projects that would be served by extending the water and sewer? Do they have the water?

JN—Do they have the sewer capacity to accept everything?

RHD—They're biggest concern is eastside Omak and all of the development getting done over there, and the sewer capacity.

RHD—The old mill site. They're building stuff, a wellness center, etc. It's awesome, but the water and sewer capacity is something to keep looking at. But up north, I think it's fine. They need a lift station.

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AH—It'd be hard to engineer a project like that—I bet \$1,500,000. If you can get it paid for, then they'll have it. Also, latecomers' fees. You can pay for the infrastructure to go way out there, but people who build in the bypassed area will have to reimburse them for having a pipe that big.

CB—I think you'll do that anyway. Connection fees and system's development.

CB—The specifics come later.

RHD—I'll go back and get a meeting with Curt and Todd. Then I'll let you know where we are. And I'll ask Michael with the School District, so at least we have a time line.

CB—The transportation side is another part of the process.

RHD—OK. I'll work on that. I meet with Rena a Nancy tomorrow and they'll have a project. Also, talk to the tribe to see what their project is.

CB—Rodeo trail.

RHD—They're probably going to talk about the east Omak development and the need for sewer and water.

CB—Our Rodeo Trail project probably isn't popular with the City of Omak. Because he doesn't think there's the business to support it.

RHD—There are several businesses.

AH—Trango is looking for property to buy to put in a new deal. It's not too far away...

RHD—I talked to Brent and I'm supposed to look at properties with their board members, but he wants to be right next to all the services. They don't want to be off the beaten path.

AH—What's the idea for Rodeo Trails? Commercial development? If a concern isn't enough businesses there, what can we do to help? What sort of tax breaks can we do? Conversion from ag land to other, can you waive the seven year back taxes.

CB—Something to explore, but if somebody is going to do the conversion, they're counting on making a lot of money. One thing I'd look for in a business is an all-weather road, so I could ship my product in any weather.

AH—Also, our electricity isn't as cheap as some places. How do you offset that cost some way?

CB—For the city, they could waive their utility tax—10% maybe. But cities need money like everybody else.

RHD—Some cities can only waive their business license fee, but it's about \$10.

RHD—I'm done. I'll let you know what I find out.

-2:30—AH—I move to go to executive session for 15 minutes under RCW 42.30.110(1)(i)—ongoing legislation, inviting EM and Shelley Keitzman (Human Resources and Risk Management). Off they to.

Upon their return, the meeting is adjourned for the day at 12:05.