

Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting

Monday, December 16, 2024 AM session

CB – Chris Branch, BOCC Vice-chair District 1
AH – Andy Hover, BOCC member, District 2
JN – Jon Neal, BOCC Chair, District 3
NB – Nick Bates, Fairground Manager
MW – Mike Wordan, OCSO
PP- Pete Palmer, Planning Director
CH – Cari Hall, Auditor
PJ – Pam Johnson, Treasurer
LS – Lisa Schreckengost, Financial Manager
AL – Albert Lin, Prosecutor
NNM – Nancy Nash Mendez, Housing Authority
RS – Rena Shawver, OCCAC
UM – Unknown man representing homeless shelter
MS – Michelle Sandoval, FYRE

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.countywatch.org/bocc-boh-notes> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, click [here](#).

Summary of Significant Discussion:

- *Updates on Fairgrounds, Sheriff/Morgue building.*
- *Short discussion about new compliance coordinator and collaboration with non-profit for updating maps of channel migration zones.*
- *Approval of final budget for 2025.*
- *Discussion with Prosecutor about funding opioid treatment.*
- *Discussion with Housing Coalition about funding for homeless housing*

The time notations refer to the time stamp on video that is published on the county's AV Capture site. To watch the video for this meeting, click [here](#).

01:00 – Pledge of Allegiance

JN and CB have conversation about history of development in the county, specifically the Methow Valley, and the changes that have occurred over the years.

AH arrives late. (Slow traffic due to snow).

15:30– JN asks if there are any public comments. There are none.

JN informs the BOCC that he has heard that there will be a public comment at the Oroville City Council meeting tomorrow (Dec 17th) regarding public safety, and that the commenter has told people that she will be joined by a county commissioner. None of the BOCC members are aware of such an arrangement.

30:00 – Nick Bates gives update. Forwarded email from Dept of Ag. Not going to extend something (suspect he is referring to a grant).

JN – says Lanie has followed up.

Discussion about options.

AH – mentions that they should send out an email to all county departments that in 2025 they must stay within the budget as there is not any money for supplementals. They have already dipped into the interest-bearing accounts to fund supplementals for this year.

NB – says he plans on staying in his budget. Elaborates on his plans. He can do a lot of the work in house.

NB – says he has a question about the bathrooms.

CB – says he would like to eliminate them.

AH – says the bathroom building structure is worth saving. We might be able to use it for something else.

NB – it has not been used since 2011. Not sure if it is connected to a septic system.

Discussion about possible uses for it. Showers, janitorial storage, etc.

NB – he has a crew out back cleaning out garbage. Looks like in the past a bunch of stuff was just dumped across the railroad tracks. Will look into selling the metal for scrap.

41:00 – Mike Wordan – update on new sheriffs building. Should have new agreement for hooking up to sewer. Looking at another change order regarding getting some Conex trailers to use for storage. They would fit on a space at the site if a modification is made to the curb. That would be a change order. BOCC agrees that is a good idea.

AH – reminds MW about tight budget and not to go over.

CB- asks if MW has received an answer to a question he had about a report. The term “ED” stands for Emergency Department.

AH – Jan 27th will be negotiations for dispatcher contract.

Discussion about schedule for upcoming meetings in January.

46:00– PP updates BOCC. Has good news – the MVN had a good article about the compliance coordinator that educates public. Down 59 permits since 2023. Wednesday the notice will come out about public hearing regarding Nightly Rentals. The hearing will be Jan 6th. Remove the requirement

Chris Johnson has asked if Lichen Land and Water working with Methow Salmon Recovery to study channel migration zones. They would be doing some re-mapping. That would be relevant to our work on critical area mapping. They are asking for the county to be the recipient of a grant to fund the work, with an agreement that the Salmon Recovery organization would do the work. She elaborates on a few details that would be included. It would be a win-win if we do this.

AH – wants to talk to them first before we agree to do anything. Channel migration zones do not allow building so it could impact our ability to develop.

CB – asks when is the last time they were mapped.

PP – not sure. They are supposed to be updated every 5 years, but I have not seen that that has happened.

CB – are you finding that it's been inaccurate?

PP – yes.

53:00 – PP leaves.

JN – asks if they have looked at what Chris Johnson sent about property evaluation for some land they are swapping? Our property is worth a lot more than theirs.

Short discussion about the values.

AH – wants to see what the FAA air space zone looks like. (property is near an airport).

1:23:00 - Auditor (CH), Treasurer (PJ) and Finance Manager (LS) arrive to begin budget discussion.

1:30:00 – public hearing on budget continues.

CH – we just got the new L & I rates on Friday. They have doubled and in some cases almost tripled. I changed the current expense info based on this so that you would have an accurate budget to look at today.

Brief discussion, followed by vote on approving the 2025 budget. BOCC approves unanimously.

1:43:00 – CH describes how she will disseminate the new budget to all departments and get it on the website. She will also update the EDEN system.

Finance committee leaves.

Casual conversation about an article regarding an infestation of praying mantis that came in on a Christmas tree.

1:48:00 – BOCC looks at agenda and decides to move the 3:30 pm agenda item to now. Discussion about an agreement with other counties regarding a regional treatment and evaluation center that is being built.

CB – says he thinks it could be a good use for opioid money.

2:00:04 – Prosecutor Albert Lin arrives to say goodbye to CB and thank him for his work.

CB – mentions that the new commissioner (Nick Timm) will be sworn in on Dec. 30th.

Conversation turns to questions to AL about the details of handling people who come through the system due to opioid use. Criminal prosecution vs treatment.

2:23:00 – Representatives from the housing coalition arrive to discuss homeless and affordable housing.

2:31:00 – NNM begins discussion. Wants to bring awareness of all the potential funding sources that are available. The coalition has been talking for the past year about the housing crisis. We have been working on a homeless housing plan. We have talked about [HB 1590](#), but with everything we are wondering if there are options for funding in addition to the \$350K that we have.

JN – the county's budget is not able to cover any excess. We are squeezed pretty tight.

AH – regarding sales tax, there has been a discussion to have a voter approved increase of .3% to fund public safety. We think about half of our budget that is related to that. Plus we just had a big increase in L & I for corrections officers. I think that the state should look at what they are funding, and curtail the programs that are not performing. They could use that money for housing. And this is a statewide issue.

RS – Unsure what the state has planned. There is talk of creating a dept of housing.

NNM – In winter we always have people calling about what to do about homeless housing. We know that there are lots of little amounts for specific projects but there is no big picture discussion. If we are not getting funding from the dept of commerce or other state sources, what will we do?

AH – the legislators who are making poor decisions should not be re-elected. We should elect people who are going to make better decisions. Why are they spending so much money and still not addressing the problems?

RS – I was told that a lot of the financial issues are due to collective bargaining.

AH – we just got hit with a huge increase in L & I payments. I don't have a problem with increasing the minimum wage to say \$16/hr, but you have to understand that will increase costs everywhere.

RS – asks question about the .3% increase for law enforcement, and how it affects housing.

AH – It is very specific that it can only be used for law enforcement.

RS – Has heard Omak Police Chief say he is overwhelmed with homeless issues. I'm asking if it would be worth considering putting money into housing the homeless rather than pouring it into more law enforcement.

CB – says it is hard to make that connection. It's hard to prove the data that housing people will be more cost effective than paying for dealing with the effects (crime, mental health, etc.).

AH – what is the expectation of people who are questioning how we address homelessness? Do they want us to provide permanent housing, transitional housing?

RS – some examples are – why don't you buy an old hotel and turn it into housing? People are angry about homeless and want them to just go away, and then those who are more compassionate and want them to be helped.

One of the issues is that a lot of the state funding requires matches, which we can't do. A lot of our local homeless are ill and need treatment. We need a mix of transitional and permanent housing. About 90% are local from our community. The stories about homeless people being bussed in are not true. The funds have been reduced over time, due to Federal funding being directed elsewhere.

Man – we are working on helping people with wrap-around services (counseling, etc.) The people who are questioning us want to see a solution.

AH – then you need to ask them if they are OK with a sales tax increase.

UM – we need to see how we can fit it? I'm all about compromise.

Discussion about how to divide up money and the complications of getting it approved.

AH – for me, I'm not smart enough to know what you guys do. We have not done an impact statement. I don't know what the needs are of the Sheriff over and above paying for his staff. All I know is that the labor and L & I costs have gone up dramatically. I know it was required because we couldn't get anyone to live and work here due to low wages. If you think that by increasing funding to housing will reduce the burden on LE, and you can show me, I'm all for it. I can't be the one to decide that – it would need to be a coalition of LE, Behavioral health, and county.

UM – asked what would the timeline be to do something like that?

AH – It would have to be pretty quick.

UM – homelessness is not just a housing issue. The LE in every jurisdiction can tell you that a large number of their calls come from a small number of people, many of whom have housing insecurity.

NNM – It is important to have a conversation. Unless we do something, our work is going to be stagnant for the next several years. If that is the case, I don't know what we will do. I'm seeing that the HB 1590 will cost every household about \$22 per year. That will bring close to \$1M per year to us to put toward housing. That is not all that much cost for a big benefit.

JN – I have a lot of issues with these sorts of taxing because it does not go through the people.

CB – brings up getting an advisory vote, even if it's not required. Mentions that it's important to have accurate information presented about each side.

Michelle Sandoval – talks about what people are expecting. The more we see examples of homeless people, what the public wants vs what the homeless need are very different. The same people who can't afford the \$22 a year in taxes are the same people who are struggling to pay rent. There is an increase in people being vocal about finding a simplified solution that just doesn't exist. The simplified solution actually costs the most. We have seen a vocal minority start demanding that homelessness be criminalized. I'm asking you to pay attention to the vocal minority and their increasing demands.

RS – providing help to people has far better results than an encounter with LE.

NNM – com. Hover asked what we are hearing from community about housing crisis. I would like to know what you (BOCC) are hearing?

CB – people are suggesting things that are unreasonable (take them to jail, etc.). That would be way outside of our budget.

JN – we just don't have the capacity.

CB – where are the solutions? How do we respond to people who are angry about seeing homelessness? Or are experiencing crime? There is a connection between treatment, housing and crime. Everyone knows that wrap around services would help, but how do we fund that? Expounds on what happens to people who are release from jail with no place to go. If we don't solve this, we will continue to find ourselves in conflict. Nobody wants to deal with it because it's complicated. Gives example of zoning. Everyone hates limitations, so they just want a total hands off decision which leads to way more problems in the long run.

NNM – I think it would be worth talking to the Sheriff to see if we can come up with a compromise. When are they going to put their thing on the ballot?

JN – not sure. They have several options. There is a cost involved (outreach, etc.)

CB – the BOCC would have to put something in the budget. People need to have an open mind and be able to see a correlation. But we need to make sure that information is accurate. Right now we don't have any way to counter the misinformation that is out there.

JN – we are just collecting information. Looking for public input.

RS – could we find funding through housing fund (for outreach)?

CB – not sure. If I am asking an entity to spend money I want them to have factual information.

UM – We are weighing people's desires vs the facts.

CB – asks why would the county declare a housing crisis, and then restrict ability to build (by regulating zoning)? People believe what they read whether it's true or not. How do we manage the wide range of information, both true and false?

RS – I see misinformation all the time, but I don't always call it out.

RS – even when people see data, they don't believe it. We don't have the ability to do our own study. The national data shows that providing housing is more cost effective than funding LE but nobody believes it.

CB – gives example of how important it is for elected leaders to state the facts.

NNM – we need to be doing more outreach and getting the story out there.

CB – you have been working with us for a while (mostly because of funding). If I were you, I would be more comfortable going to a city council meeting with a BOCC member to support request.

JN – if you can get LE on your side and present a united front it would make a difference. Discussion about which towns have a local police dept.

CB – Pateros did a community survey, and one issue was do you want local police, or county police? Strongly in favor of local, until they discovered that it would cost more in taxes. Public opinion is fickle.

JN – asks if housing group is communicating with school districts.

RS – yes, we are. People who work in this arena understand how to help people. It's the general public who don't understand. One issue is that we have very limited local media. Much of people's opinion is based on what they hear from community leaders.

JN – that's why I brought up schools.

RS – our consultant suggested increasing our coalition to include a broader group of organizations.

CB – yes, there are many points of view and experiences that inform how we think about this.

RS – there are discussions about looking at the entire family, not just the kids.

CB – that's where I think housing come into it. Helping families manage their circumstances. LE is a big part of it. LE runs into a wide range of people.

RS – the housing first philosophy acknowledges that you can't help people with their other issues until they have secure housing.

CB – I've read that that approach is not working in CA.

RS – says she has heard the opposite. Also mentions that the strict regulations are an impediment sometimes (example – can't use certain funds for housing because it isn't "low barrier"). If you have rules excluding certain things then you miss a portion of the population. We have 50 families on our housing waiting list. And that's constant.

NNM – it will take 5 -7 years to build 50 units for those families.

RS – this is an example of how we can move forward. If we had \$7M we could build 22 more units in a year or two.

Conversation ends with agreement that it is a complex issue.

3:37:00 – BOCC breaks for lunch. (12:37 pm)