

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, December 10th, 2024, 3:10 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2

Jon Neil (JN), BOCC District 3

Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board

OCTN (*Okanogan County Transportation and Nutrition*,

Dave McClay (DM), CEO, Okanogan Behavioral Health Council (OBHC)

Roy Johnson, OBHC Board Chair, Detention School teacher

Rena Shawver, Executive Director, OCCAC (*Okanogan County Community Action Council*)

Stasia Hazelwood, Food and Nutrition Manager, OCCAC

Brent Timm, General Manager, Okanogan County Transit (Trango)

Jen Fitzthum, Executive Director, OCTN (*Okanogan County Transportation and Nutrition, a non-profit organization*)

Ken Sterner, Deputy Executive Director, Aging and Adult Care

Erin Nelson, Director of Contracts, Aging and Adult Care

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:

- Behavioral Health Director gives optimistic report: two new board members, therapist position candidatures, strategic plan drawn up, positive public image; more crisis responders and board members needed, budget shortfall will postpone childcare projects, drug prevention program for youth needed; Commissioner Branch says local council discussing evaluation and treatment center
- Agencies summoned to brainstorm strategies for collaboration on food distribution, need growing while funds wane; Okanogan County Transportation and Nutrition delivers 4,000 meals a month, half within county, via car and Trango; Community Action lacking funds for operational costs; Commissioner Hover suggests reaching out to donors
- County to opt out of Homeless grant, Community Action will apply directly; Lake Management District budget approved; 4H coordinator contract signed
- Meeting adjourned at 4:19 until Wednesday

1:30 - Behavioral Health Update - DM: This is OBHC's quarterly report to our commissioners. I'm happy to report we have two new board members, Waylon

Michel, and Leisha Tonasket who is going to be joining us in January. Michel is our representative from the Tribes; he's the superintendent of Paschal Sherman School. Tonasket is a social worker. ...We're going to have a bit more diversity, different perspectives, different geographical areas. ...We have a few open positions. A psychiatric prescriber (candidate) is coming out for a site visit. We didn't want her to come sight unseen. It's a beautiful county, but it's not for everyone.

AH: Where's she coming from?

DM: Atlanta, Georgia.

AH: Good thing she didn't come (*during the snowstorm*) today!

DM: And we have two Masters (*inaudible*) therapists openings, one on the adult side, one on the child side. But there's a rumor circulating around the office that we may get someone for the adult therapist. If we get the other, that pretty much eliminates some of our service bottlenecks... We have five designated crisis responders (DCRs). We are in conversations with (*opioid fund administrator*) Carelon about expanding our contract. We need more money to hire more mobile crisis responders, to offer services out in the community during off hours, in teams of two. Our goal in that is to respond later in the evenings, maybe early mornings, depending on what staffing we have... We'll continue working with Carelon. We want to get 24/7 response in our community. We're pushing the state to create a separate mobile crisis (*unit*) for just children... I don't think (*24/7 response*) is going to be successful, but we're working that way. Some numbers: Last July 2023 to July 2024 we served over 2,100 different individuals in the county, provided them over 32,000 services... We have come up with an "executive summary of our strategic plan". We met last April to create that. We hired a facilitator to reach out to the community and state employees and past clients to get their input in these different focus groups, use that information to create a strategic plan. I did bring that to that County Collaborative meeting that you were at, Commissioner Branch, with other stakeholders. ...If you ask people's input, they want to see what came of it. We'll get that circulated, on social media, it will be in our annual report. We're going to make that an annual endeavor, and I think the board would like to see that as well... We have hosted now two of those County (*Crisis System of Care?*) Collaborative meetings. We need to decide where those meetings go...

1:38 - CB: I've spoken to it a bit quite recently. The fact that (*Chelan*) Commissioner Overbay did come, and facilitated work that we did, the bottom line I got out of it, a lot of people ask what's being done about behavioral health, mental health, and when you get in that room with that group of people you realize that there's a lot of different people in touch with this. There was some agreement that there should be a group like the collaborative that was there, ... to continue sharing what they're doing and what their challenges are.

DM: I think the big thing out of those meetings is action. We all get stuck in meetings where we just talk and talk. A lot of us already know what the problems are, but some action coming out of it- there has been some action items. For us, we're looking at the funding of Shove House. (*It came from*) a

housing trust fund loan, a little over \$2M, but there are some restrictions around how that can be used. We don't have any intention of changing that. I don't want to stereotype but a lot of people we serve is at 30% of the adjusted median income of the county, which I think is \$72,600 now. Most of those units have to be set aside for that population. I think only one unit can be up to 80% of the adjusted median income. ...We're currently opening up some of those beds if we have them... *(to people)*. I call them "step-down" beds, they're people 24/7 facilities that just get discharged in the community and nobody knows they're coming back. It's strange that there's no communication of a discharge from, let's say, a state hospital, to the community they're coming back to... it happens more than you think... they arrive on a Friday night, people have nowhere to go. It's voluntary... but we want to have a couple beds available, there's food there. We're trying that to see if we can help create some successes... We are doing that right now. A large part of our funding for that is county sales tax dollars. Thank you for funding those beds. It's useful. That building is a vital part of the community, but I think that finding out other ways it can be valuable like this, we just need to continue looking at those things. Nine of the units are permanent housing. They can live there forever if they want. ...That does come out of these meetings on what's needed in the community. Sometimes you have to get creative. "It can be done". (1:41) We're working on getting things out into the community, sharing things we can share... We don't want to be a black box, even if we do have to protect people's information.

RJ: One of the things the board's working on is getting more representation. We have two new board members, want to get another two in. With a bigger board more members can concentrate on areas and make that information available to the full board, make better decision, better see what the community wants and needs.

CB: How many on the board now?

RJ: Seven, and hopeful another two in May... Things are changing. We're getting almost full capacity for our mental health specialists. We're really excited about the woman coming to see us Thursday. There's a lot of optimism, not just in OBHC but in the community. Some of what people think about OBHC is changing. We want to be involved, we want people to contact us. With more board members we'll get the kind of representation that might not have been heard before.

DM: *(Also)* the policy analyst was talking about the budget, with the state. We had a \$10,000 budget shortfall but that includes things that didn't actually happen yet, ...some type of childcare things that they could push back to a later date, so while it's a shortfall, it's a government thing, it's a government budget *(AH stifles a laugh)* so it's not as dire as it sounds but there's not a big appetite to reduce funding for mental health and substance use. So we'll be advocating to keep us funded.

1:48 - CB: We talked at the Collaborative meeting about sharing what each entity, professional representation *(inaudible)* legislature, insure that information, make sure there's some consistency and not opposition amongst various entities, like if the Washington Council went in, and then the association

of counties (WSAC) went in with a completely different opposite view of what's needed. At least share what those legislative priorities are, so when you get there you're not surprised by it, and maybe there's room for compromise before you do. I saw that happen before...

DM: ...I wouldn't have to go create the work. WSAC does that. The work's already being done, we just need to share that work, see where the policy analysts are in alignment. It's not as complicated as I thought it would be.

CB: The next phase of the Connections (*emergency behavioral health care center in Kirkland, working with the opioid council on proposals for settlement funds*) work will be helpful, because I think, getting things done. In pursuit of an evaluation and treatment center, or alternatives.

JN: We have opioid settlement money. In the not-too-distant future we'll be going out for RFPs (*requests for proposal*) to spend that. So you might be watching out for that.

DM: Just speaking from a humanitarian spot, I really have a spot for getting (*substance use disorder treatment*) services with kids, at a younger age. We haven't really been able to crack that yet at OBHC. That's something- I really want to get there. *He thanks CB for all he's done, since he won't see him again as commisioner, thanks the other commissioners. The two leave.*

1:55 - Senior Food Distribution Discussion with Six Local Stakeholders - AH:

When we were working on our budget that just passed, we actually had to move about a million dollars out of our reserves to balance this year's budget. OCTN asked for an increase in the amount of money we provide for food services (\$75,000). When you asked for \$15,000... I (*was wondering if*) there was any overlap with any of our other programs- Public Health should have probably been here too.

JF: I asked for an increase because the home delivery program was way under-funded for 2024. I expect the same thing in 2025. You're not the only ones we asked for increased funding from. What we get from Aging and Adult Care and with donations is not enough for the increase in wages this upcoming year, and the cost of food.

AH: So Trango's contract-

BT: The contract we have with OCTN is to provide the para-transit services or the door-to-door for ADA (*Americans with Disabilities Act*) eligible riders, and also we contract out with them the two fixed routes, between Tonasket and Oroville and between Okanogan and Pateros. We don't do any of the food delivery, just those routes.

AH: Is the food delivery a regular car, a bus?

JF: In the outer areas it's the bus. In Okanogan-Omak we have cars.

AH: With all the food pantries, why are we doubling up? Do you get food from

the grocery stores?

JF: (Yes), a lot of it's coming in on food service trucks. The meals we're packaging for home delivery are made in the senior centers.

RS: Our services are different in that we don't do delivery. We're supplying food to the pantries where people box and bag, and people come to the pantries. We do a seniors food commodities program, we have about 300 (*inaudible*) seniors on the program. Commissioner Neal asked us to look into the two services. We did do an MOU (*motion of understanding*) with Jennifer... and we found very little overlap. She's providing to a different group of seniors than we're providing to with our boxes of food. ...The food pantries (*themselves*) have to deliver them. We don't do any residential delivery. AH asks where their food comes from. RS says the USDA delivers food, not money, through a grant. This is for Okanogan County, with a little going to Douglas which doesn't have a program. AH asks if OCTN could use that food instead of going to grocery stores; it's regulated down to each can of corn, says RS, and can't be shared with other programs.

SH: I was wondering, but they don't have the budget, if some of our people could be put on their meals-on-wheels program, to where we could get the overlap, but if they don't have the budget to cover the additional people-

BT: What funds are given to actually deliver the food, because you get food from the grant?

RS: We've cut back on deliveries because funding for staffing has decreased...

AH: Leaving the pots of money out of it, is there a way to coordinate these services?

JF: We are, in a limited capacity, picking up some senior boxes and delivering them to some folks who can't get out, picking up their food.

EN: For the OCTN program, if somebody has the capacity to get food another way, or has somebody to cook or prepare meals for them, then they wouldn't get the home-delivered meals from OCTN. There shouldn't be a lot of overlap between the two.

AC: But there is, a little bit, in the delivery portion.

JF: We just have some folks in common. ...five (*out of 300 served by OCCAC*). RS asks how many meals are served by OCTN: about 4,000 a month spread across Chelan-Douglas, Okanogan, Grant and Lincoln counties.

EN: Aging and Adult Care contracts with OCTN. We also contract with Moses Lake Senior Center and the Othello Community Hospital. But OCTN is our biggest. It covers areas where there is no other contractor...

AH: Are the other counties providing funding?

JF: They usually do, to a lesser amount. About half of those 4,000-5,000 meals are in Okanogan county.

JN: At the end of September there were 214 here who were receiving meals. *OCCAC has 290 on its list with 30-40 on a waiting list because of not enough (inaudible) to do the boxes.*

RS: The program doesn't give us any money for staffing or lease space for the food product. We're telling USDA we need operating funds. Everybody's complaining about it...

2:ll - AH (to JF): So an extra \$7,500- that would help but you would need the others to increase funds as well. And if they don't?

JF: I cut my budgets. ...Reducing days at congregate nutrition sites. That decreases the food. They'd still be cooking home-delivered at the senior centers. AH asks if USDA food can't go to the senior centers for home delivery, RS says not with state grants.

CB: When there's a disaster, then you'll - this is just run-of the mill.

JF: During Covid there was ARPA (*American Rescue Plan*) funding but that ran out.

EN: I'm passing out hand-outs that list funding for the different programs and the sites that OCTN is providing to. About 14 senior centers that get congregate meals, and that's where meals are prepared for home delivery.

AH: How much does Chelan-Douglas provide for this?

JF: Chelan has also been providing \$7,500. Douglas is less, it's smaller and doesn't have a congregate site.

AH: Odessa and Davenport and Wilbur?

JF: They're in Lincoln Co. They get what's left over in the budget. AH asks if they've talked to non-profits in the Methow.

AH: There's a lot of philanthropists over there... I think more advertising needs to go on so people will donate to that because that is an important cause. Food stability... *RS says she could use their Facebook page to get information out to people.*

AH: Brett, can you look into some of the stuff that Trango could do?

BT: Since Covid we're really tied down with what we can do, because of (*regulations*). Now we're going out of the realm of what we're funded for. I wouldn't want to push the funding source because that's really not what we're funded for.

AH: The funding source is the taxpayers.

BT: But it's transportation. It's very specific.

JF: They do support the door-to-door transportation which is very important for the transport of meals.

RS: Even though I offered our Facebook page, we don't have a lot of local donors who are giving to our agency for food. We just don't have a "non-profitly"-minded community that way.

JF: We do not. I can't even find a volunteer. *AH knows more people with money than time to donate.*

AH: It's good to all get in the same room to talk about the issues. We should talk to the other commissioners so they will bump up their funding.

CB: On the transportation and nutrition services, they're not as tightly scheduled as (*Trango*). *BT talks about OCTN having more leeway as to the use of their funds.*

AH: When you're taking meals out, what's the operating costs for the vehicles?

JF: We have four vehicles for Okanogan. We had been delivering by car but we can't afford to pay people to do that. It's cheaper to do it with the bus, and we just got a DOT grant to be able to provide meals by bus. The cars, we're spending \$300 a month in gas and paying a drive four days a week. In Chelan they're delivered by volunteers so it costs us a lot less. Staff in Lincoln County are doing the deliveries.

BT: The software schedules these deliveries, as if we were scheduling another rider.

JF: The problem was that we had so many people on the delivery list and not enough drivers so we had to curtail the list of people getting meals.

AH: If we were to provide a certain amount of money, ...are they going to go to Okanogan County residents? *Yes. We should talk to the other counties. Those programs are totally different. CB says Aging and Adult Care is a good place to address these other commissioners. JN asks JF to break down the different places served and number of beneficiaries.*

JN: Every community might be willing to contribute something.

JF: They all got requests. *No money has come from cities thus far. A waste of postage, it seems. Some were looking into it. JN promises to harass people, bring up the subject at the Okanogan Council of Governments (OCOG). AH says in February or March they should fulfill OCTN's request, and see if they can get more. JN says they'll be more careful about who will qualify and if necessary do a waiting list. They could have served a lot more than they did (with more funding). OCCAC has seen a 25% rise in demand this year. EN says the population is aging so the problem will only intensify.*

BT: We subsidize OCTN, and not just with money. Because we house them, the nutrition gets absorbed into transportation.

AH: To understand where the \$7,500 goes, (*whereas*) ARPA was funding \$200,000 for food subsidies... Is there an overlap we aren't thinking of?

BT: This goes back to ... getting everybody in the community to come together. There are some high needs in the county and everybody has a piece of the pie so if we never get together it's easy to put the blinders on...

AH: Just because it's always been done that way doesn't mean that's the way to do it.

CB: And because resources are scarce sometimes the organizations that are providing those resources are actually talking to each other a lot. I'm not surprised when I hear about coordination between any of the county's social programs... Sometimes you might hit on an idea... But I do see a lot of crossover in cooperation. I see that a lot.

SH: We're trying. Jennifer and I met about trying to deliver with the Meals-on-Wheels, then I found out this week that we can't send any buses without a body there to make sure that food box gets to that client. *RS remembers when Spokane was delivering "second harvest" food but had to stop and there was a four-month halt in deliveries.*

RS: Food scarcity is an issue. And they're going to cut staff, is what I'm hearing. And every time you cut the food stamp program you see more people at the pantries. ...And when the Farm Bill gets cut at the federal level, we see cuts to our program as well. Food is not a program that's rich in resources.

AH: Which is so weird because we produce so much of it.

RS: I was just on the phone with Marie Hines (*whose organization "Blue Sky Minds" focuses on food needs in the county*) and it kills us to have to be rich in agricultural produce, beef, all this around us, and the way food is brokered through these food assistance programs. ...A lot of our deliveries come from Michigan. We have cans of peaches from the East coast, while we have fresh peaches here in our community.

AH: It's the same with schools. It irritates the crap out of me that schools have to use food from certain places.

EN: We also have a program where folks get \$80 vouchers to go to farmers markets and farm stands. It's unfortunate in the sense that there aren't enough farmers markets and stands for the number of people that get these vouchers. There's none in Lincoln County. It's a fantastic program and a few thousand people benefit every year in our six counties but it's a frustration not having enough vendors out there...

AH: For home delivery it can be anywhere from Winthrop to Pateros? *Yes, though*

Mazama might be out of their reach. AH asks JF to get some information together for a brochure aimed at potential donors. We know we have an aging population... Any questions?

RS asks JF what their annual budget is for meals. JF: It started out as nine some dollars per meal which wasn't enough, but some things happened and it didn't take long to slip into a deep hole. The home delivery program costs more in the first place because there's extra packaging, extra handling. Those cost us two dollars more than what we're making in the senior centers so we're always encouraging people to come to the centers. The commissioners thank the participants for coming.

3:07 - Lake Management District 2025 budget approved. LJ relays an offer from the software company they already work with to expand services in the form of agenda management software. LJ: We have simplified our process, we don't really need software to do that. This software packet would do everything, we wouldn't need AV Capture, but it would be a lot more complicated for the public to get access to... AH says no way. LJ says this software creates a lot of pdf documents but the names wouldn't always be the same as on the agenda. She feels this wouldn't be helpful to them or to the public. AH wants to see if there are elements to their audio-visual recording system AV capture they're not using. She says they'd have to type in time stamps for every subject discussed. She shares her screen. AH asks if she can edit the time stamps. LJ: The document has to be saved, and you'd enter the time stamps afterward. She explains they system to AH. Tells the board Mike Worden has sent some emails, made some changes to ?

3:18 - LJ: I asked the commissioners about opting or opting out of the Consolidated Homeless Grant for next year. You asked me to reach out to Dept. of Commerce to see, if the county opted out, whether Community Action could apply directly. And so the response was yes, if OCCAC was the only agency that applied... Commerce will conduct a competitive procurement... and they will receive the funding.

AH: Does Rena have an opinion on this?

LJ: She would just as soon get the funding directly. AH moves to opt out of Commerce's CHG grant. Motion carried. The person from WSU extension has come with a request to sign the 4H coordinator's contract which is the same as last year's. The commissioners sign, she leaves.

4:13 - After much editing, the commissioners approve the minutes from November 26th and 27th, December 2nd, 3rd, 9th and 10th. CB says all he has to do is evaluations; he doesn't like this process. AH says there should be more room for suggesting improvement. JN talks about a big federal grant for the Conconully reservoir but can't be understood. CB is reminded of a Rural Development grant that Elmer City got but didn't use because the city wanted it's own wastewater system but it was already hooked into Grand Coulee's system. RD would only pay part so Elmer city sued.

4:19 - Meeting adjourned until 1:30 Wednesday.