

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Month, Day, 2024 AM

JN—Jon Neal, BOCC, Chair, District 3—absent on vacation
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, District 1
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, District 2
LJ—Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
NB—Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager
EM—Esther Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor

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/> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see https://okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners_proceedings.php

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Summary of significant discussions:

- Commissioners and Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager, the situation with the High School Rodeo. They reserved a number of spaces in the RV park, and the spaces were used. However, the Rodeo's representative said they weren't reimbursed for many of the spaces, and so can't pay the Fairgrounds. The Commissioners will insist the bill is paid, and in the future, groups who ask the Fairgrounds to reserve spaces in the RV will know they're expected to pay for all the spaces.
- Commissioners and members of the Housing Coalition hold a long discussion about affordable housing and homelessness in the County
- Commissioners adjourn for lunch at 12:40.
- Commissioners hear an update on the work of Westeast Design Group concerning their work on housing in the county.
- Commissioners adjourn for the day at 2:55.

-5:10:10—Pledge of allegiance.

Commissioners correct minutes and discuss rules for getting reimbursed for travel to meetings they're not required to attend.

-4:55:36—Public comments—Ms. Jackson says that because LJ is training a new person, it's hard to hear the discussion between AH and CB. Commissioners say they will speak up.

CB—The Forest Health Collaborative is writing a grant application that would enable them to hire a professional facilitator.

AH notes the connection between forest health and salmon recovery.

-4:47:25—NB—Good morning. I'm Nick Bates from the Fairgrounds.

NB and commissioners discuss the situation with the High School Rodeo. The Rodeo reserved a number of spaces in the RV park, and the spaces were occupied. But the Rodeo spokesperson says many of the RVers didn't pay for them and so they're unable to reimburse the Fairgrounds for the occupied spaces. After some conversation, AH says he's convinced that they need to pay.

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NB—I'll let her know, but I bet she'll be here to talk to you later on.

-4:25:40—NB and commissioners discuss the bids received for weed control near the racetrack. NB was able to get more complete information about some of the bids. The commissioners decide to wait until they find out if another company wants to bid on the job. They hope to hear back by the end of the day, and will make their decision then.

NB—I'll get ahold of the High School Rodeo person and explain the situation. I'll also tell Larissa (in the Fairgrounds Office) that a group that asks us to block off spaces in the RV park for an event needs to know that they'll be responsible for paying for the spaces whether they are used or not.

-4:09:20—MG—I'm Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management.

AH—There was a lot of smoke when I called you yesterday. But about 20 minutes after I called, the wind changed direction.

MG—The Forest Service was manning that fire. Their air quality person called me.

CB—You do the best you can with the weather prediction you've got, but if the weather changes...

AH & MG talk about public health emergencies vs. natural disasters and how they determine who responds to what.

MG—Not much going on. We helped the Sheriff's Department with an injured person. Search and rescue.

AH—Do you have SNOTEL data?

MG—I haven't looked it up yet.

AH—Can you look it up for next week, please? Water levels.

MG—OK. See you next week.

-3:38:10—LJ—I have a few things to talk about.

LJ—Lifeline will be here next week to talk about how the Tonasket EMS District needs a backflow preventer, and a collapsed pipe needs to be repaired, too.

AH—Do they have reserve funds? Can you check?

LJ—Also Lifeline wants to talk about the levy that's ending in December 2024. It looks like both Oroville and Tonasket will be ending at the same time.

CB—That's a pretty tight timeframe.

AH—Can you call Jamie (Grooms, Election Office) and ask her the schedule for getting it on the ballot?

AH—Does the EMS district pay revenue to the county for your administration?

LJ—Yes.

AH—So do you build the language for the levy?

LJ—Yes.

AH—I think they both need to get drafted right away but without an amount put in.

LJ—Tonasket is at \$0.40, and Oroville is at \$0.50.

AH—And we can go up to \$0.60.

LJ—For ten years, too.

LJ—Did you talk to HR about the background checks for the Fairgrounds?

LJ—Three items for the board to consider—the Memorandum of Understanding, the contract with Ticket Tomato and agreement with the Sheriff's Association for the non-commissioned. That should be done today.

LJ—There are also several titles for the Chair to sign for equipment that was surplus.

CB, as vice-chair, signs the documents that need to be signed.

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-3:36:45—AH—We're going to put her (Esther Milner?) on the agenda for 2:30 today. There's the Ticket Tomato thing at least.

CB—We need to talk about DSHS. Twenty-two counties have filed against DSHS for not providing evaluations for mental health patients in the courts. We need to talk about that. I need more clarification. I want to talk about it in the context of how it plays into OBHC (Okanogan Behavioral Healthcare) and our contracts with them.

AH—We'll do it at 2:30.

-3:11:10—AH—It's 11:00 AM. Homeless and Affordable Housing Update by the Housing Coalition.

--Michelle Sandoval (MS), Executive Director of the Foundation for Youth Resilience and Engagement (FYRE).

--Dr. Brendan Smith, Chief Compliance Officer, and on the Board of Directors of the Housing Authority of Okanogan County.

--Kat Goering, (KG), Executive Director of Room One in Twisp. Serves the Methow Valley. Eviction prevention support and letting people know what help is available.

--Margot Amalong (MA) via zoom—Executive Director of the Support Center in Omak. Emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence. We were one of the original members of the Housing Coalition.

--Nancy Nash-Mendez, (NNM), Executive Director of the Housing Authority of Okanogan County and a board member of the Methow Housing Trust.

--Rena Shawver (RS), Executive Director of Community Action in the county and a member of the Housing Coalition.

--Eric Hind (EH), Treasurer of the Okanogan Community Homeless Shelters.

--Scott Ackerson (SA), WestEast Design Group, Social Impact Studio, partnering with the Okanogan County on the Five-Year Homeless Plan.

They present a PowerPoint slide show with data about homelessness in Okanogan County. A long, detailed discussion follows. Lack of housing is a root cause of many other social problems, but it will take a lot of money to fill housing needs in the county.

Adjourn for lunch at 12:40.

-1:17:00—AH—We're ready when you are.

SA—We talked about both contracts—the RFP and the Clip Grant to do regular check-ins. I was heartened by the conversation today. You've got to get all the people going in the same direction. You can't just have the service providers doing it because it touches so many other pieces of the system.

AH—It shows that the people who have the money that you're trying to do something bigger than plop an apartment building down.

SA—The approach we take is a comprehensive system. The only way to see an impact.

AH—Our jail is at a critical mass right now, so anything we can do to keep people out of it is a plus.

SA—In San Antonio, the jail was beyond capacity. We got state money through mental health funding, and we used it to create a jail-release program to release people in jail for loitering, etc. Prior to our having a place to put them, the judge wouldn't sign off of the release. So with this, the jail didn't have to build an annex, but had 500 beds open.

AH—The types of criminals we get into jail, the level of severity is way more. It'd be interesting to see if anyone could be released.

SA—We want to talk to the Sheriff to see if there is any solution.

AH—Tell him you've talked to us.

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CB—These days, we're seeing less people involved with vagrancy, etc.

AH—And the prosecutor doesn't want to prosecute them, too.

SA—Martin vs. Boise is a federal case that ruled being jailed for homelessness is a violation of their rights. Grant's Pass, OR, was sued for the same thing, and it's before the Supreme Court right now. Martin vs. Boise said you can't enforce laws against camping on the street unless there's some place for the people to go. One town was citing people for public urination, but it turned out it was tourists, not the homeless, being cited, so they stopped.

SA—We have a report due to you on Friday, so you can submit it to the state by the end of the month. We've got the draft. I'll let Katherine tell you about it.

KG—I'm Katherin Gonzales. We did a trip on March in this is our second time out here. Met with Omak, Winthrop, Twisp, Brewster and Okanogan City Planning Staffs. This trip we're meeting with Tonasket, Oroville, meeting with the Reservation Housing Authority in Nespelem, and Pateros. We'll get to meet with everyone at least once and see what types of information we'll be looking for in the studies. The Clip Grant that looks at housing under 50% AMI and the Five-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. Things that have come up is variations in housing, regional variations around the county so everything we'll do is for a specific part of the county. Look at costs to extend water, sewer, etc. to see how infrastructure costs affect housing. Look at project financing and scale—trying to find the middle place where it's large enough to be financed but not so large it throws off the rural aspect. Looking at FEMA flood maps to see where we can build.

KG—That's our scope. My background is in housing and community development and public policy.

SA—We were blown away by the diversity of the towns.

AH—The amount of philanthropy that goes on in the Methow, compared to the rest of the county is a big difference.

SA—And they're taking a large part of the housing stock and using it only seasonally.

AH—I used to manage a lumber yard, and the way to decrease the cost of building is to do all the houses the same. Tract homes isn't a bad word.

KG—Looking at how to reverse inclusionary zoning that preserves housing for the work force.

SA—We're doing a project with IKEA doing small homes. They're bigger than tiny homes. It's kind of like Legos. We're going to build some and see if people want them. There seems to be a lot of interest in them. They'll be affordable.

AH—The state laws about rentals make it harder to be a landlord. You can't evict for not paying.

CB—I've only had one bad renter, but I know people who've had terrible trouble. For 30 years, I've seen the same problems with landlords and renters.

SA—There are mitigation funds to pay for damage to the house, but with some of them only about 20% of the money is used.

KG—Some housing is owned by low-income people. Some programs help to do repairs on the house, but the city needs some way to recoup the money if/when the house is sold.

CB—Now we're having trouble getting contractors to do the rehab.

CB—For Section 8 Housing, it's a fairly good program, but we have such a long waiting list.

SA—Some Housing Authorities are really bad, but you seem to have a good one.

AH—The Housing Coalition is good at doing a plan we can take to the legislature.

CB—Small towns have a hard time getting plans, but there are planning grants.

-45:40—KG—I'm interested in hearing your thoughts about our work in the next few months. What are you interested in seeing?

AH—We talked a lot about planning. Where does it make sense to have low-income housing. Growth has sometimes just been a product of needing stuff. If we want to keep urban sprawl from happening,

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what are the best plans for the areas? It can be a bear for us to try to figure out if a place is too dense or not dense enough.

AH—We talked with the Washington State Dept. of Agriculture about low interest loans for infrastructure. They can't do loans to developers, but how about counties? They never really answered the question. We did it once—the sewer main in Oroville.

CB—They tend to be project oriented—in Oroville it was 4-mile extension to a resort area. System Development Fees were the pay back. But in 2009, the resort area fell on its face. The infrastructure all came about incrementally.

CB—That project established what the Growth Management Act required, and we're not a GMA county.

AH—I know transition housing is important, but if we don't have housing for service workers, we'll fall apart. Corrections' Officers make pretty good money for this county, but they can't move here because they can't find a place to live.

SA—It's easier to get the projects that are 80% to 120% AMI because they pencil out. It's hard to pencil 150% AMI without deep subsidies.

AH—But 100% AMI here is about \$54,000 for a household, I think.

SA—We talk about housing affordability instead of affordable housing because of NIMBYs.

Discussion of Habitat for Humanity housing.

CB—There used to be. They shifted over to rebuilding houses after the fires.

SA—Did a lot get rebuilt?

AH—About 130.

KG—But they lost 300+.

AH—If you see the diversity of what we have.

SA—Winthrop blew me away. There's a little German town in Texas, Fredericksburg, and it reminded me of that.

AH—But there's poverty over in Winthrop, too, it's just not as apparent.

CB—The poverty is in the people who have to work there.

SA—Any last questions for us?

AH—No. It sounds real comprehensive.

KG—We plan to have periodic check-ins along the way. We don't want to end up with a final product but it's way off the mark. We plan to have most of the trips done by November, before the snow starts. We'll do all the data collection between now and then. Use November through March to get the drafts done.

Talk to you about the drafts in March and get the final reports submitted by June. Then you'll have from June through December to hear public comments and your revisions before you submit it to the state.

CB—The timeline works for me because I'll be done in December.

SA—We appreciate your time.

SA and KG leave.

-22:10—AH—We've got two documents to talk about.

EM—Once I looked at the contract, there's a few things you need to be aware of. Tomato wants to be included on their insurance, but we can't, so they'll have to provide the insurance.

EM—There are a lot of standard provisions provided through a hyperlink, but you need to read them all before you sign.

AH—I propose EM works with Pam (Johnson, County Treasurer), and gets back to Ticket Tomato that we can't do that.

EM—There are some other things you might not like. Indemnification doesn't exclude negligence unless it's gross.

AH—I think we made changes to an internet contract, and it was all right with them. Can you just propose some changes to them?

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CB—I think the answer is “handle it, Esther”.

EM—That’s what I get for nitpicking a contract.

AH—OK with the contract. What about the DSHS?

EM—Your question was what are some of the obligations of the Prosecutor’s Office?

AH—CB was reading the MOU to me this morning.

CB—My question is—since we settled this suit, how does this play in to involuntary treatment?

EM—We’re somewhat used to working with Eastern State Hospital. You’re talking about the 3.4 requirements? We’re already directed to do some of that. It doesn't look onerous to me, and I ran it past Albert (Lin, County Prosecutor), and it’s OK with him.

CB—I move to assign EM the authority to sign the MOU with the State of Washington regarding DSHS’s handling mental health evaluations.

-7:45—LJ—I’ve got a few follow-up things.

LJ—First: For the election. Jamie needs our resolution by August 6 for the General Election.

AH—We’ll talk to Lifeline next week, and then we’ll formulate a plan. If it doesn’t pass in the General Election, we can try again in February.

CB—We better do some information out so people won’t think it’s a added levy.

Discussion of other issues with the EMS levy elections.

LJ—That’s it.

Adjourn at 2:55 until Tuesday at 9:00