

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, March 21th, 2023, 1:30 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1 (*via Zoom*)
Jon Neil (JN), BOCC District 3
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board
Roni Holder-Diefenbach (RH), Director, Economic Alliance
Wayne Turner (WT), Economic Alliance, Okanogan Mayor
Todd McDaniels (TM), Economic Alliance, Omak Mayor
Misty Ruiz (MR), Economic Alliance, City of Brewster
Jeff Sarvis (JS), Economic Alliance, Town of Winthrop
George Brady (GB), Economic Alliance, City of Pateros
Dennis Rabidou (DR), Chairman, Behavioral Health Board
Dave McClay (DM), Director, Okanogan Behavioral Health
Maurice Goodhall (MG), Emergency Management

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:

- *Economic Alliance board discusses possible projects for newly available “.09” dollars: Roadwork and sewers on Rodeo Trail in Okanogan, a grant writer for the Alliance, planning and feasibility studies, road security in Mazama, Okanogan landfill; prefers projects with additional funding sources*
- *Short discussion with cities on jail fees, need to raise them, deplorable health conditions, lack of safety*
- *Behavioral Health reps discuss MCOs (managed care organizations), long waiting lists for both children and adults, positive results with internship program*
- *On-call designee MJ Neil chosen with DOG as architects for “Law and Justice Center” at former Forest Service building*
- *Commissioner Branch has reservations about shoreline site east of Okanogan for new Coroner’s/Sheriff’s building; proposes assessment by insurance company*
- *USDA Wildfire Defense grant refused; county to re-apply; Branch regrets those closest to forest boundaries opposing forest treatment*
- *Commissioner Hover expresses desire to join Grizzly Bear Task Force*
- *Fair Queen’s fundraising activities discussed*
- *Methow Valley News/Oroville Gazette Tribune chosen as newspapers of reference for legal advertisements*
- *Meeting adjourned at 4:18*

Economic Alliance Board Meeting - RD: ...Last meeting we talked about having all the county and city projects funded together... The Economic Alliance (EA) Board and Infrastructure Committee updated our application, our process and the way our timeline was, to make it easier for communities to apply. ... Normally our year starts in August, letting people know prioritization is going to begin, then we do a workshop because there has been so much turnover in staff and elected leaders—some may not understand. We explain .09 dollars (derived from a .09% tax credited against sales tax to finance public facilities serving economic development in rural counties and finance personnel in economic development offices). ...An infrastructure committee receives applications, reviews them and hears the presentation directly. We rank them, an executive committee sees them then they are approved by the county.

Since 2010 we have not awarded any (.09) funding because of the moratorium due to funding being used for the (“Geo” bond payment contracted 20 years ago.) ...Now the bond will be paid off. ...Not all has gone to the trust fund so there’s actually a significant amount in the account. ...We do annually receive money out of this account because The EA is the designated economic development organization for this county. The city of Omak also receives \$40,000 (for economic development), half from the city and half from the county. That will “sunset” in 2024, same as the bond...

CB: A lot of people don’t apply because there’s no money there, and a lot of people do apply because it’s the easiest money they can get their hands on. When you have to go through federal funds and get matching funds—people try to avoid those. But there’s only so much of this money to go around. We’ve tried to emphasize asking for funds to match ours, and going to infrastructure conferences,,,

1:39 - RD: Our ability to create a process to attract leveraged money for projects moving forward— it’s been missing through our process. We keep track of when someone submits an application, what funding they’ve applied for and what they’ve secured, but we do not keep track of other money they’ve later received... A lot of Counties have used .09 dollars, not to fully fund projects, but to leverage state, local and federal dollars.

...Our criteria tool incorporated the components that are key to economic development... All the applicants get copies of the criteria so they know what to focus on. It’s not a complicated tool. (*A board member*): Less cumbersome than most.

MR: If you want to spread things out, if you’ve been awarded money in the last five years you get less points in that one section...

AH: ...Now there’s \$1.7M that’s going to roll over next year... Do you try to do large projects or keep (a lot) in reserve? (*MR suggests prioritizing projects that can’t get funding elsewhere. Like the homeless fund, says AH.*) **AH**: The real thing is how much you want to keep in the account...

RD: In ranking in the past we said... we can fund the top four projects based on the need they have. ...We want to leverage as many dollars as we can. Often a community only needs 25% or less to get a project done... *AH suggests keeping more than \$20,000 in emerging opportunities. (In the past these have received 20% of county funding, with the rest split between county and city projects.)* **RD**: Last meeting we talked about money set aside for strategic planning and feasibility studies. And we can recommend other funding sources.

1:54 - **GB**: The .09 money is there to spend. The only reason to keep some is for emerging projects, so we should keep that fund going, and put a maximal amount on how much to give to one project... and some funding should be contingent on other funding (*not to be given until other funding comes through*).

RD: In the past there was a two year time limit—a contract to spend within that limit. ...**CB:** The current process—is it not working? *It is, say two board members.* **TM:** The rating Board—when we have planning projects vs. a construction project they don't stack up real well... But *(as for)* criteria, we've got that resolved. There could be a money constraint—put up to 10-20%. But paying it last *(in the case of matching funds)* doesn't work.

MR: We'll see a lot more applications in the future. **TM:** I'm not against giving all to one city or, well, now I'm funded. *He talks about a Tonasket project.* The craziest dumbest project, but they keep pecking away and it's getting to be pretty cool."

CB: Refining criteria could be helpful. If someone is targeting the fund because it's easy, that's a problem. At one point we talked about requiring people to attend the infrastructure/finance conference. ...Economic impact should be the goal. *AH asks him if he has any project ideas.* **CB:** Rodeo trail. A partnership the city would be interested in. **WT:** Yes! **CB:** We've talked about it for 30 years. There was a study done to provide sewer to the tribe for the casino. Now we have businesses there, the athletic park, the fairgrounds and also businesses along the railroad. A road project popped up this spring when Nutrium couldn't get their products in and out. *(We need) an all-weather road and sewer.*

RD: The Mazama intersection needs road widening for pedestrian safety. *MR mentions Dispatch.* **RD:** I'm not sure how much is for equipment. There are specific restrictions for judiciary facilities. They can still get ranked.

The Loomis Fire District Station is mentioned. **TM:** ...I worked with Laney (*Johns*) to facilitate the grant... The county has limited grant writing capacity. One idea—use these funds to hire a grant writer.

CB: I don't support the county funding a grant writer, but contracts for specific projects. The person would be overwhelmed. There would be the opportunity for the county to use that themselves.

AH: You could put in *(the stipulation)* that we name the projects. **RD:** For example, the top five projects be the main focus for that person's time. *Someone asks if it can be an EA employee.* *RH says they could be paid through this funding.* Now we have a gap—they can get prioritized but only volunteers come to the table. **AH:** They don't have time to *manage* the grant, receipts, etc. We end up *(refusing)* projects because they have no time.

CB: Some grants are easy, others are very complicated. **RD:** I wrote a grant for the Loomis Fire Hall feasibility study. They had no experience. **AH:** Management lasts as long as the grant lasts... If someone said they wanted a grant it would be up to the BOCC to allow it to go into the hopper. There's a little bit of checks and balances with this process.

RD: Any entity that's a special purpose district, like a fire district in an unincorporated area that needs support would have to get approval from the BOCC to be ranked, attaching a letter proving to the committee that it's vetted—you'd approve for grants to be written in the county's behalf. Communities that might have grant writers say "We just need money." Others would need that assistance. **MR:** Ones without a writer would rank lower. **RD:** Back at the Infrastructure Committee *(we would say)* "Here are shovel-ready, here are planning only." *AH doesn't agree that only those with a grant writer would get a high rank.*

2:25 - **JN:** When there's a turnover with a grant sponsor, what happens? And, writing is easier than administering. *MR supports having different lists for "shovel ready" projects and project planning.* *GB mentions the "clogging" of requests for ARPA (American Rescue Plan funding.* *RH*

says they receive many incomplete applications. GB: There has to be a sorting process. RD: Some are eligible, some not—special districts that need funding, non-profits, that we can give funding to. AH: An alternative to this is that the County just uses its 40%. However, we need to do something so that the county projects can actually get in there. JN: Road work in Okanogan and Omak; the land fill, with all these changes in the law.

MR suggests, to remedy the problem of incomplete applications, a 2-step process: after meeting criteria for the first step, criteria would be added to meet the second.

RD: We need to schedule another meeting... Our goal is to be done by November, which lines up with your budget. So (*money will be available*) by 2024 or 2025. **AH:** This might be the last year for all the grants. **RD:** I'll get that clarified, get feedback from the Infrastructure Committee, look at the 2-step process.

2:30 - **AH:** People here from cities, where are we on the jail fees discussion? They're covered under a court decision. All cities, with the county, must come up with a way to bill differently than the way we bill now, but that everybody accepts. *Omak typically pays 1%, the others less. An arbitrator, no longer with them, determined the percentages.*

JN: I've approached our legislator about our stupid medical system. **MR:** There are a lot of parts to that contract. It's good to have an in-depth conversation. **JN:** The lack of assistance is asinine. Someone is covered, and then they get to jail— **AH:** We need all the cities on board. **MR:** We talked about it with OCOG (*Okanogan Council of Governments*). I thought you (*CB*) had copies of the proposed contract. All the cities agreed.

2:37 - **CB:** We have a hell of a problem keeping jail safe, and with maintenance, and upgrading the facility. *Cities have been taking out their run-down jails...* We've been taken to court more than once. It's costing our insurance pool a lot of money. That facility is dictating the cost.

AH: If I say we up the jail rates, all the cities will come to a meeting. (*Laughter*) *He asks what the operational costs are, what replacements needed, like the kitchen.* **MR:** It would be better if we had a jail board.

2:41 - Behavioral Health (OBHC) Update - **DM:** ...We're looking at some 300,000 to 500,000 people in WA who will fall off the list because of income requirements. The impact on Okanogan will not be that great. They're taking bids from insurance companies. It's House bill 15115, well supported by the WA council, WSAC (*WA State Association of Counties*), etc. They're going to allow local input. It's not going to be "one size fits all" This is a good thing. We have unique issues. What people are pushing for is managed care organizations (MCOs). It will decrease the administrative burden and allow more services. Locally we're down six therapists. *As they have been.* We've started an internship program. ...It increases the capacity to serve clients at the facility. Very positive. There are 100 kids and 100 adults on the waiting lists. We're triaging for acuity, trying to get some off the list who don't need to be there. We're represented at city meetings in downtown Omak.

DM: Do you need our help with the opioid abatement? *CB says OBHC and the Courts need to meet and determine the most urgent needs. AH says to come up with a plan since the county will be receiving the money directly. They discuss the two entities being considered to manage distribution, the one selected would be paid 10% (\$4,000) of the settlement. CB is "miffed" by Molina (MCO?) sponsoring food distribution with Harvest Food which recently stopped supplying the county with many items. DR invites CB to attend their retreat where they will discuss a 5-year plan.*

3:02 - Discussion to Select Architect for Superior Ct. Renovation - **JN**: Courtner had the best presentation but ...I like MJ Neil in Wenatchee the best, possibly a bit more thorough. **CB**: Neil had experience (*with the county*)... I was impressed by DOH too... If you ask me today, I'd flip a coin. **AH**: (*to CB*) We agree on the top two. Neil is our (*recently appointed*) on-call architect. DOH did an excellent job too. ...MJ Neil gets a nod because we'll be working with them. **JN**: They do 3-D rendering. ...How are we going to phase this the best? Courtney is doing, theoretically, the utilities. *AH still prefers the other two. A motion is passed naming MJ Neil and DOH architects for the Superior Ct. project at the Forest Service building "Law and Justice Center". AH urges using their on-call architect for rendering of a single point entry for the new Center which will "make it safer".*

3:14 - **CB**: For the facility on the East Side (of Okanogan), I want to see what comes of the permitting process. It will be a big deal for us because it will involve clean-up. **AH**: We can get help from Ecology with the old rail station. **CB**: In retrospect it's hugely inappropriate for a shoreline area. *He recommends that an insurance company look at that site. Based on assessments they've done—you see what they look at—a few things I saw that got my attention. There's a reason that shop is there. It's not because it's a great location but the county was drawing water for road watering. ...If we don't get through the permitting process we have to redesign. They talk about taking an inventory or sheriff's surplus, or waste, over there.*

3:22 - The building at the corner of the County parking lot—someone is interested in buying that property and maybe rasing it. **AH**: Dispatch center was slated up there. **CB**: Where they're at now it's a kind of dungeon. **AH**: A concrete trailer.

3:29 - **MG**: We put in for the USDA Wildfire Defense grant through DNR. I've been notified that we didn't get it. \$125,000 to do the plan. A lot of money went to the other side of the mountains. The Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan has parts of the Community Wildfire Defense section. ...We'll go for it aging next year. We thought it was guaranteed. Only four entities that got it. A lot who applied it was for fuel reduction. **JN**: Kittitas County tied theirs in Yakima.

CB: ...In the Methow Valley people are right against forest boundaries. Unfortunately there are those who are not in favor of us doing treatment of the forest. *AH asks about thinning project in Kittitas-Yakima counties. MG will check. He shows them pictures on his computer of the Fairgrounds.* **CB**: We talked about nuisance sites—We've got some of those. **AH**: We need to get them cleaned up as soon as possible. If we're going to tell others... **CB**: When you're making applications on the shoreline, there's an opportunity for treating. *He mentions Regal Fruit partnering with Bluebird to do a full clean-up on Bonaparte Creek.*

15:46 - Tunk Re-zone - *JN mentions reviewing the whole process, says it was worth the effort, getting all the information. (The public hearing process and zoning change had come under scrutiny.)*

AH moves to approve three cannabis licenses, with "some reservation": If we want to change it, we have to change the code. **CB**: We've been through the process. Chelan lost their case. **AH**: This letter means nothing. When we say we don't approve, they don't care. **CB**: I had a discussion with Cannabis Board members. I could share some of that with you at a later date.

AH: For homework, look at the stuff I sent you on grizzly bears. ...Whatcom County, Skagit, ...I want to basically say we want to come to the table. ...**CB**: It's against the national park. I'm okay with that. **AH**: I'll get a cover letter together asking if they're interested in a joint meeting. There's a Grizzly Bear Task Force on board. The county's supposed to be represented... I'd like to be on it.

13:59 -CB asks for the board's opinion on the Fair Queen doing fund-raising for her activities beyond what her duties demand; one event was at the Fairgrounds. He's been hearing remarks, and wonders if there's an accountability problem. AH opts for accountability and flexibility. He asks CB to put his thoughts into writing. CH says he will add two sentences, "to prevent a wasteful argument with the Fair Committee" .

4:01 - Despite Eagle publishing (Omak Chronicle) 's superior subscription numbers, the group

Methow Valley News-Oroville Gazette-Tribune, based on it's \$4.40 price per column inch rather than \$5.50, was chosen to be the newspaper of reference for legal notices.

4:18 - Adjourned until Monday morning.