

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, Dec 11, 2023 AM & PM

JN—Jon Neal, BOCC, District 3  
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, Vice-Chair, District 1  
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, Chair, District 2  
LJ—Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board  
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning  
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management  
LR—Luis Rodriguez, Architect, MJ Neal Associates  
JW—Justin Wood, Asbestos Central  
JB—Justin Borst, Architect, MJ Neal Associates  
LG—Larry Gilman, County Assessor  
PJ—Pam Johnson, County Treasurer  
JT—Josh Thomson, Director, Public Works  
JS—JoAnn Stansbury, Public Works  
RS—Ron Suter, Lost River property owner  
RHD—Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director, Economic Alliance  
TM—Todd McDaniel—City of Omak  
KD—Kurt Danison, Board of Directors, Economic Alliance  
LD—Lael Duncan, Board of Directors, Economic Alliance  
MR—Mindy Ruiz, City of Brewster

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Summary of significant discussions:

- Commissioners discuss taking 5% of the Weed and Pest Boards assessments for administrative expenses in the Assessor's Office and the Treasurer's Office. Several other districts pay that fee.
- Commissioners hear a discussion of asbestos abatement in the Court House presented by MJ Neal Associates and Asbestos Central.
- Commissioners hold a public hearing about a road vacation near the Lost River Airstrip.
- Commissioners allocate .09 money from a list prioritized by the Infrastructure Committee of the Economic Alliance.
- The 2024 budget has its final adjustments and is posted on the Commissioners' website. The public hearing was continued to Tuesday, Dec. 19 at 9:30.
- Meeting adjourns at 3:29.

**00:35**—Pledge of Allegiance.

AH—I have to deal with a labor issue, so I'll be back in a few minutes. (He leaves.)

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CB & JN chat about the weather and CB's attendance at a funeral.

CB asks JN if he'd accept his nomination as chair. JN says it wouldn't decline it.

CB and JN discuss a meeting JN had attended. This seems to be a continuation of a discussion at the Washington State Association of Counties meeting about more proportional representation. Small counties would have a much smaller voice than larger ones. They fear that if a small county didn't raise a tax rate and asked the state for financial help, it would be denied because they hadn't tried to help themselves first.

**15:00**—No public comments.

CB—Discusses the Forest Health Collaborative (FHC) meeting and its facilitation. It was “kind of a touchy-feely thing” but never got down to the nitty-gritty of the issues.

**20:05**—AH returns.

CB—We went over the agenda and we were also talking about the FHC meeting I was at for a couple of days. It was OK.

AH—Question: The Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board (UCSRB) facilitates the facilitator.

CB—Yes.

AH—The one you were having quit. My question is: does the FHC want the UCSRB to keep facilitating those meetings, or is it something you guys want to do internally?

CB—We may still need the UCSRB for fiscal (*inaudible*) because we're not a non-profit.

AH—So the thing we need to do—the staff is 100% grant paid. If they're doing something, they have to be paid for it.

CB—We're getting some funding from the DNR. Haven't got down to the details.

Discussion of facilitators/coordinators and fiscal agents.

**28:20**—AH—Did you see the email from Dennis (Rabidou? of Juvenile and Family Services)? About Okanogan Behavioral Healthcare (OBHC) funded one FTE position to work in the jail. The person has been hired.

AH—Also, I was talking to Commissioners Straub (of Douglas County) at the UCSRB meeting. He told me they'd brought their Public Defender Office in-house. Do you two think we should explore that option? He said they get a better product and they pay a lot less than what we pay for contract services. Plus we might be able to provide the attorneys with more money and health care.

CB—I'd like to see the differences in volume. For Douglas County, a lot of their activity is in the city, right? That would be part of looking at it.

CB—You could get a lot of information from our District Court Judge because he was a judge in East Wenatchee.

AH—Marc said they just started recently. One or two years ago. I'd like to talk to (*inaudible*) about that. She said they don't provide insurance. We'd have to look at the liability issue.

CB—Those are all the details you're going to want. We're providing Public Defense services for cities and towns. So I'd like to see how Douglas County does that.

AH—Would we bill for defending people? AH leaves.

LJ—Where would their offices be?

CB—Well, in the Planning Department. (He is joking. PP has just arrived for her weekly staff update.)

**33:30**—CB to PP—do you want to have a staff meeting?

PP—I don't really have anything. I just want you to know we've been waiting for Craig (Nelson, Executive Director of the Okanogan County Conservation District) to get us an amendment to the VSP (Voluntary

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Stewardship Program) budget. They've gone over budget in the invoices. We put the last two on hold until it's figured out. At the beginning of the year there will be those vouchers.

AH returns—Yes. I think that the cities would be very inclined to have us try to save money on Public Defense.

CB—That's another discussion for sure. (To PP--) That's it?

PP—That's is. See you next week.

CB—Any questions for Maurice Goodall (Emergency Management)?

AH—No. There were no emergencies I don't think.

JN—Chuck Ford (Fairgrounds Manager) emailed me and said he's not feeling well, so he won't be in today. He doesn't want to share it.

**36:30**—AH--From the 7<sup>th</sup> District, we got a request for funding for capital projects.

CB—A request for projects?

CB—Back to Behavioral Health. They have a mental health block grant to pay for the position.

AH—One of the capital projects I'd like to explore is re-doing the Twisp Pool. Not in the format they proposed, but getting the actual pool fixed. It's the only pool in the community.

JN—Have they looked into costs?

AH—I think so. I'll talk to them to see.

CB—Does the town have an interest in a project?

AH—Don't know. I'll talk to them. I got an email from someone who was opposed to the Rec. District, saying why don't the towns of Winthrop and Twisp have a Pool District?

CB—I'd like to see what the mayors' take is.

AH—It'd probably be better to have a different pool in a different spot, but the costs...

CB—Some cities are in the pool business with schools. Many years ago, Marysville did that.

**43:30**—AH to LJ—Have you got that law enforcement agreement between us and Twisp back from Esther (Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor)?

LJ—Yes.

AH—Can we sign that now so it can get back to Twisp for them to sign?

AH—We're charging them \$75 more per call. They're good with that.

**46:35**—MG returns to update the ending balance for the Emergency Services budget. It'll be \$205,000 instead of \$150,000.

Commissioners discuss Winthrop's Police Force.

AH—There was some discussion about a Sheriff's Department detachment for the Methow Valley. There's one person over there usually.

CB and AH discuss policing in rural counties, including the USFS and DNR policing.

**59:10**—Courthouse Hazardous Materials Report from MJ Neal Associates.

LR—I'm waiting for Justin Wood from Asbestos Central. He'll be in the meeting shortly.

LR—If we're limited to 30 minutes, we can limit the discussion to the flooring, windows and the tower. I want to make sure we're within the scope of the project.

CB—Can you just go through your report?

LR shares his screen. We see the floor plan of the three floors of the Courthouse. JW explains where materials containing more than 1% asbestos were found.

Discussion of different strategies to accomplish the abatement—

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- how to seal off different sections but still allow workers access to their work spaces, etc.
- whether it would be less costly to do the abatement throughout the whole floor space instead of selected spaces.
- how long the work would take
- the possibility of applying a sealant to floor areas instead of removing the problematic areas.  
This would raise the floor level and doors would have to be adjusted.

They will continue the discussion during the week of Jan. 22.

**1:33:45**—CB—It's 10:30 and we have a discussion of noxious weed and pest control assessments. LG and PJ introduce themselves.

LG—We don't have our resolutions yet for Pests and Weeds, and I wanted to talk about it a little. This year, we have an administrative fee for the irrigation districts, EMS districts, the Conservation District now but not the Weed and Pest. I want to discuss if we should be consistent with the other districts in the future.

AH—The Pest...

LG—That one's complicated because it's a tri-city board.

AH—We just get a bill to send. But there's not a lot of public hearing we have to do, secretarial work to do. LJ has to take minutes for EMS districts.

LG—I'm not talking about the commissioners. Reads from a document—"the Okanogan Conservation District shall pay 5% yearly revenue to the Assessor's Office and the Treasurer's Office for administration." The last two years, I've had to hire TerraScan to do mass adjustments. Miscellaneous adjustments on the Assessor's site take hours and hours every year. The Treasure does the billing side of it. All these districts are assessing an administrative fee except for two.

LJ—Pest gets \$3000 in current expense.

AH—In our budget it can say we put in money for administration.

LG—We just wanted to talk about charging the Boards to be consistent.

AH—We could change it, I guess, but we should have the conversation. And it may be too late for this year.

LG—I understand. I just found this a few weeks ago. All three of these miscellaneous assessment have this same language that the Assessor and Treasurer have to do the adjustments. It takes numerous hours.

PJ—I take into account what LG's assessment is, plus I take PILT (Payment in Lieu of Tax) into account, and then add it all up and submit an invoice to Conservation for them to pay.

CB—And that's working?

LG—Yes.

PJ—So that got LG and me talking. I also do noxious weed PILT billing, too. But we thought that Weed and Pest doesn't pay us anything for administration. The County gets 50¢ per parcel for administration from DNR. That system works, too.

AH—So we collect a \$3000 fee from Weed, which is probably less than 5%. Does that amount fluctuate?

LG—Yes. Parcels change.

AH—So Weed should pay what we charge everybody. Maybe we should talk about 5% with them.

AH looks at the Weed budget. 5% seems to be in the ballpark.

LJ—There's no revenue from PILT in Pest control.

CB—So you're not getting paid for work you do?

LG—Yes. We're looking for consistency.

LG—Do we have resolutions yet this year for Pest and Noxious Weed?

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LJ—Yes. Pest is the same as last year and the Noxious Weed came from Larry (Hudson, Noxious Weed Board).

LG—I need numbers.

CB—We’re working on them today.

LG—This is a full audit year for me. Partial audits every year and a full audit every third year, so I want to make sure I’ve got all the documentation.

LG—OK. Thank you very much. LG and PJ leave.

**1:47:50**—CB—We’ve got six minutes until the hearing. Do we want to be the Methow Valley EMS District real quick?

AH—I move to adjourn as the BOCC and reconvene as the MVEMS District. Motion passes.

AH—I move to pay the invoice for December for \$63,499.66. Motion passes.

AH—I move to adjourn as the MVEMS District and reconvene as the BOCC. Motion passes.

CB—We’re back!

JN—I move to enter into the agreement for law enforcement with Twisp for 2024. Motion passes.

**1:52:20**—CB—We have an advertised Public Hearing for 11:00 AM for the vacation of an unnamed connector between Meek Rd. and Susan Rd. Can you have the report?

JS—I’m JoAnn Stansbury of Public Works. This is the vacation of the road. The applicant is the Lost River Airport Tracts Association (LRATA), the adjacent land owner and the Kuehler Law Firm. LRATA petitioned to vacate the road in 2014 before the Hearing Examiner, but no formal petition was presented so the vacation wasn’t completed. Rusty Stamps of FD6 has approved an emergency turn-around. The petition fee was paid on October 25 and the public hearing was set on Oct. 28. We advertised in the legal papers and posted both ends of the road. We’ve received no comments. The County Engineer completed his report on Dec. 7. I’ve received no additional comments, although this morning I received a letter from Ron Suter. If the vacation is approved, the petitioner has to pay \$32,401.60 per the Okanogan County Code (OCC). If it’s exchanged for a platted road, the petitioner will pay \$21,124.60 instead, per a different OCC.

JT—I’m Josh Thomas, County Engineer. This road were never built and only appears on paper. Vacation would create a dead-end road in a development, which isn’t allowed. But if we could get the fire department to approve it, it’d be OK. FD6 approved it this summer after building a turn-around. Ron has something to say about the payment for the vacated land.

JT explains why the fee is what it is and says the OCC says the fee cannot be waived.

CB—I haven’t looked at the letter yet.

JS—It’s Ron’s talking points and he’s waiting to discuss the issue.

CB—The action that’s proposed went to the Hearing Examiner at one point?

JS—Yes. June of 2016.

JT—It was done as a plat alteration, but not as a road vacation.

LG explains why the road was assessed as it was.

CB—Also, there was a letter sent as a comment?

JS—Ron sent the letter to me and I forwarded it to LJ. It’s his talking points.

CB—I’ll open the public testimony portion. Ron can comment.

RS—I’m Ron Suter. I have a cabin in Lost River and a home in Seattle. I apologize for my voice. I’ve got Covid so I didn’t go to Okanogan for the hearing.

RS—This has been going on for about 10 years now. I’ve been at it for 8 years. We thought it’d be simple but it’s not.

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RS explains the process he's been through. There are two other petitioners and one is not willing to pay the price of the vacation. He asks to reschedule the hearing until June 18, 2024 or withdraw the petition. JT—If the BOCC grants the vacation and no one pays, we'll put a lien on the property.

AH—Maybe we can just continue the hearing until June.

The commissioners eventually decide to grant the vacation contingent on receiving the payment by Tuesday, July 30, 2024. If the payment is not received by that date, the petition is denied. AH moves to make the resolution and it passes 3-0.

**2:25:30**—Discussion of Infrastructure Funding in 2024 with Roni Holder-Diefenbach.

TM—I'm Todd McDaniel, City of Omak and Infrastructure Committee Member.

RHD—I'm Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director of the Economic Alliance

KD—I'm Kurt Danison, Chair of the Board of the Economic Alliance.

RHD—We also have Lael Duncan who's on the Infrastructure Committee and Executive Committee.

RHD—We're here to tell you the recommendations of the Infrastructure Committee and the Executive Committee. When we met and made the allocations for funds—We had planned to break it down into planning projects, construction projects and community and economic development projects. One list has all the projects on it. The other list has them broken out. We've got the allocations on the list.

RHD—Omak would be able in 2024 for .09 funding money.

RHD—The Executive Committee made its recommendations knowing that there'd be this discussion with the BOCC.

RHD—I attached the lists that were approved by the Infrastructure and Executive Committees. I've attached several options that I put together for you guys. We got the total amount as close to \$1,200,000 as we could.

Long discussion of the process they followed.

**2:37:30**—Discussion of the Omak east of US 97 infrastructure project vs. airport hangars project.

The options were:

1. The actual committee recommendations.
2. Only funding Pateros small improvements, airport hangers, and the east of US 97 infrastructure project.
3. Funds Omak airport hangers, only \$56,610 of the Brewster RV Park, the Winthrop River Walk, the Chief Tonasket South access, Oroville north water transmission line for \$100,000 which gives us \$534,610.
4. Fund Pateros small improvements, fund the US 97 project but not the airport or the Brewster RV Park, fund the River Walk and have only \$44,610 left for the Chief Tonasket Park which leaves them with a shortfall. But keeps us at the \$534,610 level so we don't move money from construction to planning only.

RHD—Those are options I wanted to put out. The ranking is easier than the funding recommendations. Which option would you guys like?

JN—I like #3. It spreads the money around the county the most.

AH—(*inaudible* He's asking about a project.)

RHD—And the money needs to be spent in three years.

AH—Looks like everybody's recommendation is #3.

TM—There's the issue of Jerry and Julie Palm's housing project in Twisp. The fire code requires two points of access because it's over 30 units. The city said they only had to have access to the local road. That's an important project.

AH—I get a lot of people call me about that project because they say it's too dense.

TM—They had a chance to appeal and they didn't.

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AH—And also, I'm also looking at sprawl issues. That's the natural place to create dense housing. We'll never stop growing as a country because we don't limit how many children people can have, etc. Even trying to find places for people with more than the median income is really hard. It's hard to hire management positions, too. We need the infrastructure to build housing.

RHD—In March there's going to be a summit about affordable housing.

AH—I think it needs to be a mixture. Affordable housing up to \$380,000 or \$400,000.

TM—I think in three years when we do this again, we'll have more places for housing.

AH—The county can partner with the cities to find solutions for housing, but the city can do the water and sewer a lot better than the county can.

AH—I move to approve the 2024 prioritization list as presented. Motion passes 3-0.

AH—Also, I move to approve the .09 fund allocation as outlined under option 3:

For Planning:

- \$100,000 for the Pateros Mall,
- \$140,000 for Omak airport hangar area expansion,
- \$56,610 for the Brewster RV Park phase 1,
- \$100,000 for the Winthrop River Walk,
- \$138,000 for Chief Tonasket Park south access phase 1,
- \$100,000 for the Oroville north end transmission main replacement line.

For construction:

- \$115,000 for the Tonasket Perfect Passage phase 1.
- \$250,000 for the Twisp emergency egress project,
- \$100,000 for the Winthrop sewer lift station,
- \$100,000 for the Okanogan Sheriff's Office radio improvements.

The total is \$1,199,610.

Motion passes 3-0.

**3:09:55**—AH—OK. The \$1,200,000 is in the budget already. Also \$300,000 for emerging projects.

RHD—I'll contact all of the communities to let them know. They can contact LJ to discuss contracting with the county.

AH—Who will manage the contracts? There's no money for administration of the contracts. There will have to be some money taken out of emerging projects for administration.

RHD—That's fair. We can talk about it.

Thank yous all around. They leave.

Adjourn for lunch at 12:21.

**3:34:10**—Commissioners, Cari Hall (County Auditor) and Pam Johnson (County Treasurer) continue the Budget Hearing. After much discussion, almost all of the county's budgets are marked green.

**4:23:10**—AH—We'll recess our hearing for 15 minutes. I move to go to executive session for union negotiating reasonings (sic) for 10 minutes, until 2:45.

**4:34:00**—Budget hearing resumes.

**5:09:30**—AH—I move we to have the clerk post this final draft budget. Motion passes 3-0.

AH—I move to continue the public hearing until Tuesday, Dec. 19 at 9:30. Motion passes 3-0.

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AH—Who should sent the notice to whomever about the change of payroll for the probation officer?

CH—I can do it.

AH—Tell them it's just for this year.

CH—Will do. CH and PJ leave.

**5:14:10**—CB—Want to do a couple of Resolutions?

AH—I move we approve Resolution 195-2023 maintaining the noxious weed control assessment levy for collecting in fiscal year 2024. Motion passes.

AH—I move we approve Resolution 194-2023, stating 2024 levels of assessment for horticultural pests and disease control in the county being the same as what it was at \$1.60/parcel for qualified lands and \$2.25/acre for orchards. Motion passes 3-0.

Adjourn at 3:29.