

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, July 18th, 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
Dan Higbee (DH), Building Department
Larry Hudson (LH), Noxious Weeds
Esther Milner (EM), Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor
Kurt Danison (KD), Contract Planner, City of Omak
Maurice Goodhall (MG), Emergency Manager

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:

- *Building director announces decrease in permit applications; CB's quip about yurts sparks discussion of temporary occupancy permit, lengthened under former Environmental Health director from 30 to 60 days to increase permit revenue, allowing septic but no well-drilling*
- *Denise Varner approved as Board of Health council-member representative*
- *Weed treatment needed on state lands, BOCC will sign a letter urging participation; milfoil treatment going forward on Osoyoos, Spectacle, state funds requested to do Conconully; department still short-staffed*
- *Housing discussed at length with Omak planner Kurt Danison and Economic Alliance director; EA projects to include feasibility studies, selection process ends August 26th; cleaning-up of run-down homes a priority, County should buy some to provide affordable housing; policy needed*
- *Public Defender requests another attorney, Blake cases cited*
- *Emergency Manager discusses overtime for "call-out" work, alternatives discussed*

1:30 - Executive session with Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor.

1:56 - Building Department Quarterly Report - DH: We're down a little in applications even when we take out the cannabis applications that sent our numbers sky high last year—through June, 68 as opposed to 92 last year. Still on track budget-wise. Hired a trainee, he's doing well, certified in six weeks for Building Inspector. This winter he'll be qualified as Plans Examiner. (*Retiring inspector*) Larry will be here 'til spring.

CB: Any yurts built?

DH: We do have Smiling Wood yurts, framed, code homes, that fit the energy code.

AH: Actually they're pre-fab...

CB: I'm curious because of housing costs.

DH: It's probably the cheapest way. The issue is (*canvas ones*) can't be permitted as permanent.

AH: Is there a 60-day occupancy permit?

DH: There was a 30-day, now it's 60-day.

AH: You can have a septic system?

DH: Originally (*no*) but (*former Environmental Health Director*) Hilton want to get additional money out of permits, so he said they wouldn't give a 60-day application if there was a well on the property.

AH: So I could build a cabin of any size without a water supply but still have plumbing.

DH: Not that way before.

AH: What's to keep me from staying more than 60 days if I have a bit cistern?

DH: Nothing. Before plumbing was allowed we had full-blown houses that had bathroom but no plumbing, or just little shack cabins.

AH: What's the difference in cost, in the permitting we have to do? Let's say a 500 square-foot with water and everything as opposed to 60-day occupancy with no water?

DH: Same price. Because they're the same inspections...

AH: So someone could build a house without water supply.

DH: It's recorded against the title that it's just 60 days.

JN: Can you start with one of those or do you have to start from scratch if you're building a permanent house?

DH: Depends on how you originally permitted it. *One would need to file paperwork with the Health Department to get rid of the 60-day mention on the title. DH talks about training for a computer program, wonders if they will be carrying tablets in the field. Says they will allow them to check progress on permitting. DH leaves.*

Board approves:

- \$2,245 ARPA (American Rescue Plan) food crisis reimbursement

- a CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) for public service

- a CDBE for June Food Bank expenses

- letter appointing Denise Varner to Board of Health position #7 representing elected mayors and council members of Okanogan County.

2:33 - Noxious Weeds Director LH has come with attorney EM to draw attention to RCW 1710 which allows his department to "purchase, rent or lease equipment, facilities or products and may hire additional persons as it deems necessary." Since they are a small department their hiring and contracting will continue to pass through the County's HR department.

*LH: July 26th (*milfoil*) will be treated on both sides of the buffer zone of Lake Osoyoos. There is a newly infested zone on the west side. August 2st they will treat the river section of the lake. LH tells AH that this treatment is costing \$49,000 this year. They will do one more treatment on Spectacle Lake. LH as asked for \$50,000 from the Bureau of Recreation to treat Conconully Lake but not contract yet. The Department of Ecology has funded milfoil treatment at Leader Lake. CB complains of water conditions at the DNR campgrounds. LH says despite getting free herbicide from the County "it's hard for them to get an applicant into the budget." AH suggests tallying up DNR and Fish and Wildlife property and sending them the cost for treatment. LH will draft the letter.*

2:56 - LH: Some invasive species found in Sinlaheken Valley lakes but access is difficult. AH notes that Canada has approved the use of Proselicor in Lake Osoyoos so they can go up to the border. LH says Canada still prefers harvesting the milfoil. LH will meet with HR soon to discuss strategies for addressing "severe staffing shortages."

3:00 - Economic Alliance (EA) director and Omak planner arrive to brainstorm on the best use of

their budget which includes \$2.2M in “.09 dollars” (percentage of sales tax devoted to infrastructure projects). In August they will announce the selected projects. CB suggests stretching payments over time for some, using CBDG to leverage other grants. KD acknowledges that writing multiple grant applications in the last five years for Brewster and Pateros got them on a priority list and allowed them to resolve their problems. They are now paying off bonds worth \$3:. But they either must “spread (their money) really thin or just do a couple of projects.”

AH sees infrastructure (water, sewer) projects such as the County’s proposed Rodeo Trails project as increasing viability. KD mentions a resort proposal on the west side of Lake Osoyoos that will use city money. He sees EA funds being used for establishing project plans.

AH: The first \$100,000 is important (e.g. in salmon recovery). Then you keep asking. CB and RJ point to the Early Winters Bridge project, initiated to promote tourism, “a driving industry in the county.”

RH: For projects in the last two years totaling \$52M, EA secured \$4.7M, with 10M coming in... Several (applicants) had not applied for any grants (from other entities). The average project was for \$2M; a lot were in the \$300,00-\$400,000 range.

AH: Is it better to bond for \$1.2M every 2-3 years or to apply for eight or nine “planning only” projects every year?

KD: There’s a lot of funding but you basically have to be ready to go. They discuss the fact that there are LTAC (Lodging Tax Advisory Committee) and .09 funds available for publically-run housing or private developments but, says KD, there are strings attached.

3:22 - RH: At our last meeting there was interest in setting aside some of the money for feasibility.

KD: Omak could have gotten \$30,000 or \$40,000 in federal funds for Stampede Grounds improvements but they only gave us three days to answer their questions. De did have, by Wildwood, builders from Moses Lake. They were going to do it in phases, 30 houses, but it came down to cost of construction and availability of labor.

RH: Water and sewer are prohibitive. You have to wait 30 ears for return on investment.

3:32 - CB asks about the Twisp housing project (11 homes proposed by Housing Trust and owner of Hank’s Foods). KD says it will end up in court, and go through sooner or later. AH is frustrated by anti-development people.

KD: You can’t eat at your favorite restaurant because there’s not housing for workers. They discuss the amount of preparation needed to start a development, the possibility of manufactured homes, and their rising cost—\$100,000 now for a double-wide. CB says there are a lot of low income projects coming up but KD refers to the “missing middle”—not many places have as many millionaires as the Methow, with its housing trust, or as many non-profits per capita. LJ says there are no listings for houses under \$280,000. KD: So what does it all mean for the (EA) infrastructure fund?

3:36 - AH: We have to have a policy.

RH: Identify by August 24th how much should stay in the fund.

AH: Keep \$600,000 in the fund. That leaves you with \$1.3M static, another \$375-\$400,000 to utilize on a yearly basis. ... In subsequent years we’re going to keep \$100,000 for planning projects?

CB: I don’t want to get rid of (the category of) emerging opportunities.

KD: 20% was set aside...

3:44 - RH: We need to look at the criteria we’re giving people and see if they line up with our priorities. Housing is a key piece of economic development but there’s nothing specific to housing in the criteria so we’d have to adjust.

CB: Are the applicants looking for additional funding?

KD talks about Okanogan’s former rest home “in shambles”, and a Community Action property near his home without proper access. AH: We can develop 15-20 houses.

CB: I don’t know if we can discount smaller projects. It’s a blight. We hold the junk here.

AH: All we have to do is say we’re going to sell to the highest bidder but it must go for multi-family housing. KD says an EA abandoned houses project didn’t provide enough incentive for cleaning up the houses; the government should buy them and have them cleaned up. CB agrees.

AH: Let's use (these funds) as front money for doing that... The money we get from selling is going to go back into infrastructure. (RH gets a call, leaves to be with her daughter who's about to give birth.)

AH: We just need a draft policy written.

CB: If you want to write, I'll tell you what to put in it... Local governments have been doing it (*cleaning up*) and I think you're on to something.

KD: There's a guy in Omak who's doing it. Most of the houses, you just bulldoze. There are a lot of commercial buildings that builders aren't interested in fixing up but that Okanogan may sell at a loss; infrastructure funds could be used. ...Some people are penalizing if you're not occupying a building. There's a "wall of shame". They're trying to encourage people. Here, the less you maintain, the lower your taxes are...

SH arrives to relay Public Defense office's request for additional funds to get another attorney; mentions a reimbursable grant for Blake cases (regarding the ruling that the state's felony drug possession statute was unconstitutional).

AH: ...We have a lot of money sitting in pots. We could use one of these static funds—ARFA, LTAC—to get through, then try to budget through a revenue stream... *He proposes allocating \$70,000 for the remainder of the year, to be re-negotiated next year.*

SK: How do we want to insure the Courthouse? To reproduce it as it is now, for \$40M, would cost \$68,096 a year; To replace it for \$13,000 would cost \$30,000. *BOCC opts for simple replacement; CB doubts that either of these figures is realistic.*

4:17 - *MG comes to discuss the problem of a worker who, because they have put in time on a Sunday or a holiday, ends up getting overtime for their normal working hours. MG would prefer "call out" time, a minimum of 15-20 minutes, paid at time and a half. This may be for coming in earlier than one's shift on a normal work day. They decide to keep holidays at double time and days off at time and a half. MG will "work something out and get it back to the commissioners." AH says on-call has to be revised, wonders if people from other departments could be used. MG says it would be difficult to get people released. AH: Are there people in the community who could do that?*

MG: You need someone with you on a constant bases.

AH: Someone semi-permanent, a retired police officer, or search and rescue worker? ...They can be paid to do the training.

MG: We have to figure out the budget.

AH: ...Maybe a one-day class every quarter.

MG leaves and LJ talks to them about the Methow EMS contract, the amount of reserves, an amendment to allow the commissioners not to have to act as the EMS district. There will be no Wednesday meeting.

4:49 - *Meeting adjourned.*