

**Board of Okanogan County Commissioners**  
**Monday January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 9:00 a.m.**

*"These notes were taken by a County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized. Note taker comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://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 the Okanogan County Commissioners' website at <https://www.okanogancounty.org> ."*

**Present:**

John Neil (JN), BOCC District 3  
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1  
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board  
Andy Hover (AH), County Commissioner District 3  
Melvin Tibbets (MT), Aeneas Valley resident  
Emily Sisson (ES), Okanogan County Watch  
Isabelle Spohn (IS), Okanogan County Watch  
Maurice Goodhall (MG), Emergency Management  
Chuck Ford (CF), Fairgrounds Manager  
Raven Aea (RA), local resident

Time stamps refer to Tuesday's AV Capture video. *An AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date is available at:*

*[https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live\\_streaming\\_of\\_meetings.php](https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php)*

**Summary of Important Discussions:**

- In Public Comment Aeneas Valley resident gives litany of complaints including police roughing up his wife, neighbor stealing his back hoe and laxism toward drug dealing; County Watch note-taker asks to re-position clock since camera angle has changed; Mission timber cut in Methow criticized
- Emergency Manager says Wildfire Protection Plan to be discussed at six public meetings throughout county, has aided three houses with frozen pipe issues
- New Fairground Manager seeks mediation for tensions with Fair Advisory Committee; complains of regularly having to "kick people out" who signed contracts he wasn't notified of when he took the job, will try to satisfy commissioner's request to move scheduled Agriplex venue
- Brief discussion on need to visually document Housing Board's funding efforts for better understanding
- Long discussion with local resident/management specialist Raven Aea on benefits an appointed County Administrator could bring to county government where elected officials cannot complain about other elected officials
  
- Orchardists' had bad year and beef producers having trouble; help available through Farm Service Agency?

CB tells JN about witnessing a drug overdose on his way home from Legislative Steering Committee meeting in Olympia. The person collapsed into the back of his truck and might have died if CB hadn't called 911. Law enforcement officers

resuscitated the person. CB relates conversations with an officer from Yakima who said ODs are routine down there.

Public Comment Period - Melvin Tibbets has a long list of complaints against the county. He speaks of a ruffled friend who, to get back at him, issued a warrant for his arrest because he had built a staircase in his restaurant without a permit and when police came they beat up his wife, then his complaints weren't received; his neighbor refuses to return his back hoe and told sheriff's deputies he'd been hired to use it, Tibbets says sheriff has stood him up four times and he has no water because of this problem; police never pursued a drug investigation though drugs were being sold openly. Finally he explains he's had heart attacks, stents, a stroke, and is "starting to lose it". Comm'r Branch says he will question the sheriff about these complaints.

Emily Sisson, note-taker for website County Watch says they appreciate the change in camera angle for the videos of the meetings but they can no longer see the wall clock which serves to refer readers to different parts of the notes. She offers to pay for a second clock. The commissioners say they will accommodate her wishes and try to move the clock to the other side.

Isabelle Spohn follows up on her email commenting the Mission timber cut in the Methow and including photos. The audio quality of the retransmission is unfortunately very poor. The timber project was supposed to be a model of sorts. People admitted that things hadn't gone well. She will call in later since they are out of time. Commissioner Branch, a member of the Forest Health Collaborative, said that maybe it was time for him to visit the site in person and Ms. Spohn agreed.

Emergency Manager's Report - A "kick-off meeting" was held to present the County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) to the departments and entities involved. Members of the public attended but were disappointed at not being allowed to comment. There will be six public meetings throughout the county where comment will be welcomed, says MG, and he assures AH that these will be properly publicized. During the cold snap he was able to assist with getting water back for three houses including one in Riverside and one in Tonasket.

Fairground Manager's Report - CF would like to have a private conversation with the commissioners to talk about some friction with the Fair Advisory Committee. They understand that the roles aren't easy to establish, and that there need to be conversations about each one's relationship to the county and to each other, that its rather unusual to be a county that runs a fair, and that for that reason there are a lot inefficiencies due to requirements of state law.

AH addresses the question of the Okanogan girl's basketball team which, through his own neglect, was not paid for helping in the parking lots during the last county fair. The FAC (Fair Advisory Committee) should be able to foot the bill of \$3,500. CF says there are people every month who they must refuse because they signed contracts that he didn't know about when he took on the manager position late last year. He has been very busy dealing with all this, and looking for missing contracts. AH then approaches him about getting one of the groups programmed for March at the Agriplex to change their date because Sunrise RV, who contributes significantly to county sales tax, planned it's annual March event without signing a contract. AH says he will give a discount for multiple rentals. CF will use this to "entice" one group, which has not signed its contract yet but has now gone through all the hoops, to change dates. This

is someone who has rented for a series of dates with bands geared to the Latino community, and CF stresses that this would be a good revenue source and a benefit to the county. The group has refused once to change dates but CF will approach them again and do all he can to persuade them.

58:15 - JN wants to double check on the family camping fee of \$100 for the entire fair which includes free fair passes. He's not sure that's charging them enough if it's a large family.

AH wonders about the \$148,000 in the Opioid Abatement account. CB says they just had a meeting and court administrator Dennis Rabidou would probably soon be giving a report on it.

1:25:05 - AH has arrived from his meeting. Consults with LJ while CB suggests to JN that they create a visual presentation of the Homeless and Affordable Housing fund's funding efforts through time to get a better idea of where the money goes. He talks about the State Finance Committee bringing new opportunities for aide while he wonders what happened to the old opportunities. AH sits down and expresses the view that the Housing Board shouldn't have all of the commissioners on it as voting members, that it wasn't set up that way, as a non-profit. Says they're going to put a committee to fix the salary schedule.

1:30:37 - Discussion with Raven Aea about possibility of hiring a county administrator. After coming twice before to talk about her problem with a stalker and her issues with the Sheriff's office and the Prosecutor, RA says this conversation is a "tone shift". She has come today with job descriptions (*and thanks LJ for assisting her in this*) for several kinds of county administrators in the State. She explains her background in political studies, working with public health and management hundred of millions of dollars for global health; she did management consulting with the United Nations, and lived in India, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia doing public health. She feels having someone to write grants, to field complaints about elected officials, and to be a project manager would free up the Commissioners to do other work and the Board Clerk to concentrate on clerk duties. AH questions whether filling this position would help her concern with holding the Sheriff's office accountable, says elected officials are judged through the electoral system. She counters that the administrator could ask the State Patrol to monitor county law enforcement, it's something that has been done. While the possibility of funding such a position and changing the system seem to the commissioners unlikely in the short term, AH and CB have had lengthy discussions on the benefits such a position would offer. They invite RA to come back and continue these conversations with them, and they appreciate how well-prepared she is.

AH reads an email from Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife commending County Engineer Josh Thomsen's role in a land purchase deal.

CB shows AH notes from a meeting in Olympia with the Legislative Steering Committee, AH is curious to know more about the wolf question, and he'd asked the Finance Committee about fund balances. CB shares his idea about a visual aid for the conversation about housing funds, considering changes that have taken place. Also, CB wants to better understand funds for mental health. AH talks about the Housing Authority getting \$8.5M for a project but them coming up short of \$1M because five of the proposed units are for 80% of mean income and they were two units short of the number of 30% to 50% mean income units stipulated in the grant. AH recalls the

USDA talking about low-interest loans. They talk about people who speculate on rentals and that, while charging a maximum is understandable, it hurts the affordable housing market.

JN earlier expressed concern about orchardists who took a hit this year because of low prices, AH mentions substandard California fruit flooding the market, drought; they talk about how hard it is for cattlemen to sell beef locally. AH says to ask at the Farm Service Agency and see what programs they offer to crop growers, what paperwork do they need from us to help folks get assistance. JN says proper insurance is the only way the people he knows have been making money.

2:33:08 - *Meeting adjourned*