

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, April 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
Susan Speiker (SS), Courts Clerk
Lisa Janicki (LJi), Skagit Co. Commissioner
Sean Smith (SSm), Chelan Co. Commissioner
Tiffany Gering (TG), Chelan Co. Commissioner
Peter Browning (PB), Skagit Co. Commissioner
Paul Jewell (PJ), Director, Washington Association of Counties (WSAC)

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:

- *Citizen's letter accuses County of under-funding Oroville EMS District*
- *Lone bidder for surplus auction is online company; search for auctioneers continues*
- *Member removed from Lodging Tax Advisory Committee*
- *Superior Court Clerk plays "squeaky wheel" in urging fix for discrepancies between staff salaries and comparable county posts; BOCC says get HR's opinion, anticipates resolution through June contract negotiations*
- *Participants from five counties weigh-in on re-vamped Grizzly introduction plan: three commissioners object, others want more information, all public comments in favor*
- *Meeting adjourned at 5:00.*

1:30 - *Public Hearing on Auction on surplus is postponed until Sheriff's office can add vehicles to the list which will be sent to the auctioneer.*

1:37 - *AH outlines his approach for the multi-county meeting on grizzly re-introduction in the North Cascades, says the counties qualify as "cooperating agency" given their area of jurisdiction and expertise relating to environmental issues pertaining to the proposal. Mentions tourism, asks CB how he sees counties cooperating. CB doesn't know about this status—they should look at that. AH—they have "statutory responsibility" regarding land use.*

1:41 - *LJ: Dave Mullins from Oroville is requesting 20 minutes with you. He forwarded a "white paper" on the EMS (Emergency Medical Services) levy this morning. JN says he and Wayne Walker were asked to join a meeting that evening in Oroville where the paper would be discussed. JN: I'm hoping I doesn't turn into an open debate... CB: A few things concern me about what he's presented, like "people are dying every day"... JN: His big thing is response time. Well, you compare Okanogan's to Seattle and ours are typically faster. Some of that's a moot point. They*

had a meeting last week with Wayne Walker and (Mullins) disputed all the results Mike Worden got him from Dispatch times. **CB**: It would be helpful, when he does this, to say “send these points you’ve made to us on paper and we will respond. **AH**: I would like to know where he got his facts. **JN**: He wrote a letter to the editor of the Oroville paper. We’re “just putting money away for a rainy day. *He and Walker have told Mullins they are trying to increase the time the EMS spends in Oroville.* He’s living in the past. He expects you can put people on call and just pay them a nominal fee. **AH**: There’s overtime, labor laws. *AH and JN agree that the present contract with the EMS providers is an improvement over the volunteer system, offering more safety, involving less county liability.* **CB** hasn’t heard any complaints. **JN**: Some issues getting folks to Molson/Chesaw, but with the new fire chief that’ll get worked around.

1:52 - *AH asks to go into a 10-minute executive session to receive and evaluate complaints or charges brought against a public employee.*

2:05 - *Approval of \$8,137 in CBDG (County Block Development Grant) funds for Community Action and a special voucher for \$41,098 to buy the Assessor’s automobile from Sunrise Chevrolet. For the last time, BOCC signs Public Health vouchers. In the future these will be signed by the Board of Health.*

2:11 - *Motion approved for the Board Clerk to draft a letter advising Terry Lagrou of his removal from the LTAC (Lodging Tax Advisory Committee) “for various reasons”.*

2:26 - *Brief reference to a Forest Health Collaborative meeting and field trip. AH wants to go; is involved in the salmon recovery part. They joke about renting a cabin.*

2:30 - Surplus Auction Bids - *An online business, Good Deals, is the only one who responded to the request for quotes; they report experience with 200 government agencies, would provide additional advertising, real time reporting and outreach to targeted bidders and charge a 10% fee. LJ: They require that we upload all the photo and descriptions. ...AH: We should reach out to local auctioneers, see if they want to do it. If not, come up with a plan to do it this way. This is ongoing. ...CB: I didn’t see a reference to a license. ...I have the (state law) that requires certification of registration, a license, ...and to be registered with the Dept. of Revenue. They finally decide to re-advertise since this is the sole bidder. Besides, the May 23rd deadline is too soon to get everything ready. AH will make some phone calls, and hopefully they will receive other bids to consider along with this one.*

2:50 - Discussion of Court Clerk staff’s salaries - *SS has brought job descriptions and pay charts showing “huge discrepancies” between the salaries of her staff, including the legal processing assistant and legal secretary, and comparable county positions; one is \$1.94 an hour less, another \$2.03. She talks about stress level. SS: We deal with class A felonies. ...AH: These are coming up for negotiation. They are going to get possible increases. SS repeats that people with the same job are treated differently: SS: We have to figure out a way to get it right. CB: Last time this issue wasn’t brought up. You didn’t have a solution. You had a goal, and Commissioner Hover says the solution is in the contract. AH: There are too many things. There will be a cluster (of people wanting raises).*

2:56 - **SS**: Something you need to be aware of: the big picture. Commissioner Branch, you asked me about the cost of training. It’s two years. Six months comes to \$52,418. We’ve lost 18 people in the last 14 years. If we fix the pay issue we’ll keep people. I understand, but you need to be aware it’s an equal pay issue. ...I don’t want this to get caught in the cracks. I’ll be the squeaky wheel. **AH**: your in discussion with your union steward. Negotiations start in June. **SS**: I’m doing you a courtesy by going to you first. *They discuss the positions involved.* **SS**: Note that I’m

requesting for (*pay increase*) to be retroactive to January 1st. If it's more than my department, that would be wonderful. I'm curious what the next step is. **CB**: Yes, negotiations. In the meantime have (*Human Resources*) make these comparisons. That's an HR responsibility... **AH**: I've never had anyone in six years ask to move that bar up. This is news. **SS**: I'm so sad I'm the first to bring this up but let's go! That's the bottom line, retaining, if they all get a bump. **AH**: But how many will we have to lay off? **SS**: It's a slippery slope, folks doing similar jobs. **CB**: We get that. **SS**: I was hoping for a better response. I will continue to come back and put this before you gentlemen. (*She leaves*)

4:00 - Zoom Meeting with Skagit, Snohomish, Chelan and Whatcom counties: Grizzly Re-introduction - *There are about 27 participants. Elected officials introduce themselves.* **AH**: I sent you the Chelan County letter (*stating opposition to re-introduction*) asking for cooperative agency status. We want you to sign on a joint letter. ...In 2017 Chelan County discussed with the National Parks issues the counties would face. ...In Okanogan we had a comment meeting—400 or 500 people at the Fairgrounds. There were a lot of comments against. In the end the Dept. of the Interior decided not to continue. In December (2022) we received an email that they've issued a new EIS (*Environmental Impact Statement*) and opened a 30-day scoping period through four online forums. The counties were not asked to participate in the process for a new EIS. ...Tribal government can become a participant with special expertise. With that we are eligible to become cooperating agencies with the EIS. The National Park Service must consider all requests. If there's a denial, they must state the reason.

4:17- A Motion of Understanding (*MOU*) with the Park Service is what the letter is asking for. Participant status. ...We need to be involved in the EIS. You may have seen the photo of all the parked cars on Washington Pass. They're high use trails. They haven't been asking how counties would deal with changes in use, economic impact, hunting—a lot of issues need to be brought into the forefront... The commissioners have looked at issues, social impacts. We've dealt with wolves. Endangered species are mounting but we don't have a good grasp on dealing with animals. Why add this animal? We haven't been able to come up with a management plan. It's like the cart before the horse.

4:21 - (*Skagit Commissioner*) **LJi**: We went through the (2017) process. There was a large outcry from the public. They were polarized (*between*) “natural and original territory” and (*the interests of*) cattlemen. There's a compromise being put forward with this proposal: a controlled population. It's different. I lived in Alaska. Bears' interactions with people and dogs never end well.

AH: We can't say “No, we don't want them” but (*rather*) “We have specialized knowledge of the area and want to make sure that information is imparted. I saw points on a map. They said they were drop-off points. I said they were campgrounds.

(*Chelan Commissioner*) **SSm**: I just got into office in January. The letter was an objection, especially since we have no say in where and how many. Our stance hasn't changed. We're too dependant on tourists for the economy. People already pack a handgun, now it's going to be a bigger one...

(*Chelan Commissioner*) **TG**: We support having a seat at the table. We're getting conflicting information. We need more information. *AH recommends joining the inter-agency Grizzly Committee as a way to know what is going on.*

4:30 - **AH**: As a follow-up Okanogan County will send out signature blocks for the

commissioners. ...*He mentions the Endangered Species rule: If they're going to move forward there has to be adaptive management. ...There's more potential for livestock to be killed. If bears come down (to private property) they shouldn't keep bringing bears in. He asks for comment from the general public.*

Snohomish County resident: I'm a lifelong hiker, using the national parks. Im delighted it can be restored to wilderness. In proximity to big population center, you hnned to learn your behavior- not to attract with food. I've lived here 40 years. In reference to people using guns walking on trails, bear spray is a lot easier to manage, with better results.

Retired Forest Service employee: I was involved in the last EIS. I as the county commissioners that you rely on good information when you make decisions: livestock losses, real numbers, tourism. Look at the information. Millions of visitors come to (places like Glacier Park) in part because of the Grizzlies. Look at the facts.

4:46 - *Member of National Parks Conservation Association: I'm really excited about the amazing things you can find in national parks. There are definitely safety concerns and (necessary) education. Information shows negative interactions are very minimal. There are a lot of precautions we have to follow. ...We'll develop a map, where grizzlies belong and don't belong. It will take 100 years to reach a maximum of 200 bears, 20 bears in five years. The impact will probably be minimal.*

Chelan resident: I love wilderness, have been close to grizzlies and wolves, never felt threatened. I would encourage you to contemplate: ...grizzlies live in the most beautiful places in the U.S. Their presence will expand our tourism beyond the Northwest. It might preserve a way of life that landowners might want to preserve. The presence of grizzlies will discourage development in the long term.

4:50 - *Skagit Commissioner PB reminds those who are in favor that they will have the responsibility of educating the communities and selling them on the government's plan.*

4:54 - *Woodland Park Zoo employee: I've worked in Park conservation research for decades. I appreciate everything I'm hearing. The tone. ...On behalf of the zoo it's a big part of our work, to promote co-existence between people and wildlife. It' is so exciting that we actually have this opportunity because these opportunities rarely exist across the world. We need to think about how we co-exist with these animals in the long term and not put them on a landscape with the idea that they're not going to be able to make it because we're not prepared for them.*

CB: I studied the Endangered Species Act in College, didn't come up with any solutions. I hate to see us building populations, then the wolves don't do what we want them to do. I've talked to (*frustrated people*). I've never had to deal with grizzlies. Everyone's input and staying positive is really welcome. Thank you for coming. *A participant:* Thank you to the clerks and staff who made this happen.

5:00 - *Meeting adjourned*