

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
June 24, 2024 AM

JN—Jon Neal, BOCC, Chair, District 3
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, District 1
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, District 2
LJ—Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board
NB—Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning
TM—Tim Meadows, Maintenance Supervisor
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
TE—Tom Ever, Veterans Service Office
WW—Wayne Walker, Tonasket EMS District

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.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 https://okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners_proceedings.php

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Summary of significant discussions:

- Commissioners go into executive session under RCW 42.30.110(1)(i)—current litigation—inviting Esther Milner (Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor), Pete Palmer (Director of Planning) and Rocky Robbins (Planner) for 20 minutes.
- Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager discusses bids for weed control at the racetrack and repairs to the Horse Barns.
- Pete Palmer, Planning Director, tells the commissioner about work by the Mazama Advisory Committee on the sub-area plan. The committee has an intern from Western Washington University working this summer on the plan update, but if very many other sub-areas wanted to write their own plan, the Planning Department might not have the manpower to assist them.
- Tom Even, Veterans Service Officer and others update the commissioners on the work of the Veterans Relief Board. They are receiving many calls about the [PACT Act](#) (Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022).
- Wayne Walker of the Tonasket EMS District tells the commissioners (sitting as the EMS District Commissioners) about several problems in the district. Their most urgent need is for a new ambulance, as their best one is becoming increasingly unreliable. A new ambulance would cost at least \$250,000 and would not be delivered until about 280 days after it is ordered. The commissioners promise to develop a plan in the near future. They also discuss the possibility of merging the Tonasket EMS District with the Oroville EMS District.
- Meeting adjourned for the day at 12:51.

-3:33:25—Pledge of Allegiance.

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AH—I move we go to executive session under RCW 42.30.110(1)(i)—current litigation, inviting Esther Milner (Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor), Pete Palmer (Director of Planning) and Rocky Robbins (Planner), for 15 minutes, (later extended another 5 minutes).

-3:31:45—No public comments.

-3:31:20—AH proposes that the staff updates start early. He wants to talk about last weekend’s Barrel Race.

Because of the technique for grooming used at the Barrel Race, one barrel was too low. They decide that different raking techniques and soil amendments would help solve the problem.

-3:21:-25—NB—Last week, the Washington State Sheriff’s Posse meeting worked out well.

NB—The Junior Rodeo will be this weekend.

NB—The spaghetti feed and auction on Friday did about \$5,060 at the auction and also sold tickets. Made more than \$6,000.

NB—Weed control. I sent you the clarified quotes. One is for two applications and the other is for three applications. He thinks two applications will be sufficient.

NB—I can call Larry (Hudson, Noxious Weed Board) after the second application to see if he thinks it’s OK.

JN—Well, it definitely needs to be done.

CB—We can compare the bids by cost per application.

CB—I move to approve the award for AgPro Northwest. Motion passes 2-0.

-3:08:35—Discussion of repairs to the Horse Barns. NB called everyone on the small works roster and two contractors made a combined bid: Lees & Dukes Excavating, and Sageland Construction.

LJ—One bid for repair and one for lifting the barn?

CB—One will be the contractor and one the subcontractor?

NB—Yes.

CB—It’s not often we get a joint bid. I’m concerned about who is going to be the lead. Then it can be one bid. Otherwise, it’s fine.

NB—I’ll get it clarified. NB leaves.

-2:59:35—PP—Good morning. I’m Pete Palmer, Director of Planning.

PP—The Planning Commission meets tonight at 7:00. They want to go through the District Use Chart for a second time and get into the changes triggered by the public comments.

PP—The intern starts today for the Mazama Advisory Committee (MAC). She works through the end of August. She’ll have community meetings, etc. to get the sub-area plan updated. We’ve been having at least one staff member at the MAC meetings. There was an email asking for funding from the county to host a website and a survey for them, and a zoom account and money. Can we just give them a place on our website, or at least have a link to their site.

CB—The only thing that would concern me—the county needs to be prepared to have people in other areas to want to have a sub-area plan.

PP—It’ll be a lot of work for us to do sub-area plans. The other subunits in the Methow area want to get going.

CB—Is there a way to incentivize other groups so they get their own funding? Even if we’re just applying for grants for them, that’s work.

PP—It’s helped a lot that Western Washington University wanted us to have an intern for the MAC, and I don’t know if it’s going to happen in another area.

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PP—That’s all I have.

CB—Regarding water banking, we might need administrative funding, and have tried not to burden the Planning Department any. Since we’re applying for the Pine Creek water right, and it might be an opportunity to do more about water resource management. Maybe have a water resource manager.

PP—That would be great. If we ever get through the zone code change, our staff would be able to work on this, but it’s complicated. We almost need a legal person to evaluate the issues.

CB—At this point, we need to know who’s going to be responsible for water funding outside of elected officials. We need something longer term. Things change very quickly about what elected officials want to see done.

PP—It needs to be built into the government somewhere. Water banking is going to be real important.

CB—Maybe you’d like to come to a meeting with the Conservation District about these issues.

PP—Yes. Please send me the information.

-2:48:10—JN—Tim?

TM speaks very softly as he updates the commissioners about the roof on the courthouse, landscaping in the front of the courthouse, and installing the second counter in the Auditor’s Office.

-2:41:29—MG—I’m Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management. He distributes this morning’s update about the Gold Creek fire.

MG—Good morning. We have Fire Advisory Committee meeting this morning. We decided not to go to the fire ban yet.

AH—About the Gold Creek fire—There were boats in the river sucking up water for the helicopters and there were a lot of cars along the highway.

MG—If they were in the way, we’d make them move, but if they weren’t, we let them stay.

MG—Can you take a look at our webpage to see if it makes sense about how we handle things.

MG—We’re still working on the Wildfire Protection Plan.

JN—I looked at the Wenatchee fire and they had Level 1s and Level 3s, but no Level 2s. Is that normal?

MG—Yes. It’s only my opinion, but I don’t like the 3 levels. We don’t have the manpower to tell people multiple times. Level 1 is an advisory that something’s going on. And a fire can jump right to Level 3. With this fire, I said we fail if we have to evacuate after dark. The most important notice you receive is the first one.

MG—Any other questions?

JN—Will you be in the office later?

MG—Maybe. Call me and I’ll come around. MG leaves.

-2:25:55—LJ—The Auditor’s update is scheduled for July 8, but she says she doesn’t have anything to update you on. Is it OK if she cancels?

JN—That’s OK.

-2:19:50—JN—Gentlemen? Members of the Veterans Relief Board will present an update to the commissioners.

TE—I’m Tom Even from the Veterans Service Office with some of my partners.

TE—Our service report:

- We’re always working with the SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families). They were down to two employees, but they just got a new guy, so they’re back up to three.
- Room One is going well. They offered us space to help veterans.
- We’ve given out approximately \$500 in rental assistance, \$635 in utilities assistance and \$200 in fuel assistance.

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- We've had 29 health care applications.
- We've received a portable printer for our outreach programs, and it works well with our portable scanner.
- PACT Act claims are going strong. It's a hot topic for veterans whose claims have been denied before and now fall under the PACT Act. About half the calls we get are related to it.
- On July 25 we have a Veteran Resource and Job Fair in Nespelem.
- On August 28 & 29 the Serving Those Who Served Conference will be in Spokane. Usually, it's in Wenatchee.
- Breakdown for the numbers of assistance we've provided: June—9 claims, 160 calls, served 31 veterans in the office, and about 5 out of the office, 20 paper-work assists, [DFAS](#) (Defense Finance Accounting Service) Claims, which is for retirement of military people, we've done 3 of those claims this month. So we're helping not only veterans that are service connected, but veterans who are retired as well. We're learning the DFAS system. Jim is learning it very well.

Michael—It's a hot topic on TV. 60 Minutes had a thing about the PACT Act and the lawyers involved. The government has raised the limit of what the lawyers can charge for recovery—from 20% to 40%, even though the veteran has to provide all the data to get the damages.

Eric—The purpose of the PACT Act is to revisit some claims that were denied for maybe Agent Orange. It's much broader and covers things like burn pits, etc. It allows claims previously denied to be reconsidered now.

Michael—The veteran still has to do all the work, but now the lawyers get twice the money.

AH—Basically, attorneys can now present claims to the government?

Eric—They could always do that, but now they get paid more.

Michael—We have a new website we'd like you to link to, so people can download our pamphlet.

Eric—It's on your Veterans Services page.

Michael—(hard to hear) speaking of new Board Members.

Michael—Thank you for continuing to fund the program.

Eric—SSVF is good at connecting with our guys. They've got a form for information sharing. It's good if we have to send them outside for a referral. It's a lot better process, and it's getting easier for homeless veterans because they go to the top of the stack.

Michael—Hoping we can find some money so two people can go to a conference.

AH—Come to us if you need help with the money.

TE—I stumbled across a flyer from Colfax. They've got a transportation system for veterans on a volunteer basis. So you don't need special car insurance—you can transport veterans in your own private car. They reimburse you \$0.67 per mile if you take veterans to Wenatchee or wherever. It's fully funded under a grant and I'm looking to see how it's done.

AH—We hope to get TRAN-GO to have a bus to Chelan that connects to the bus to Wenatchee.

TE—They cover five different counties, but I think we're too far away to join.

TE—That's all we've got.

CB—Question—Is the rental assistance just from your office?

TE—Yes. Community Action has a lot more money.

They leave.

-1:51:15—JN—It's 11:00 AM and time for the public hearing for the Budget Supplemental Appropriation for Emergency Management.

JN—Staff report?

MG—We got a grant, so it's money in—money out. We'll buy some devices that use Starlink. There's no cost for us. Also small generators we can use in the field.

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No public comments.

AH—I move to approve Resolution 87-2024 for a budget supplemental of \$18,000 for Emergency Management budget 124. Motion passes 3-0.

-1:44:15—JN—Another public hearing for a supplemental appropriation for Affordable Housing. Staff report?

LJ—These funds for expenses related to housing services and projects that the Housing authority of Okanogan County and FYRE (Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement). Both agencies have contracts with the counties. They were authorized by Resolution 39-2024 but not budgeted for completely.

No public comments.

AH—I move to approve Resolution 88-2024 for a budget supplemental for Budget 141—Affordable Housing—for \$140000. It's just a \$40,000 increase to the budget. The rest is just moving money around. Motion passes 3-0.

CB—I move to approve the vouchers of June 26 for \$491,571.31. Motion passes 3-0.

-1:32:32—WW arrives late because traffic on Hwy 97 was stopped.

AH—I move to adjourn at the BOCC and reconvene as the Tonasket EMS District. Motion passes 3-0.

WW—I had three things to make sure you're aware of.

WW—One—We're working to get the backflow preventor on the station because we're got faulty piping. We haven't yet talked to the person who'd do the work, but I want to remind you that we've got plumbing issues. There's asphalt pipe that's collapsing. I want to make sure we don't make it worse by putting in the backflow preventor.

CB—It should be on the incoming line.

WW—But we don't know what kind of pipe it is, plus there's also the condition of the outgoing line.

AH—What's the condition of the building? Should it just be torn down?

WW—It needs a big excavator and a couple of dump trucks. (Lists several problems with the building which was built as a fallout shelter.)

AH—There's some property in Ellisforde that the county owns. Maybe we could put a new building there.

WW—The roof leaks, the walls leak when there's snow up against them in the spring.

AH—Look at the Ellisforde property and do an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) for an architect. The fire station just south of the Bebee Bridge—is that about the right size?

WW—Maybe just a little bigger.

CB—Ellisforde fits into a bigger plan?

AH—It's in the Tonasket EMS District. I think we should do it. Maybe get an appropriation for someone to do it. Maybe it'd cost \$1,500,000 to \$1,750,000, which is ridiculous.

Discussion of other sites for a replacement building.

WW—Any decent structure that would be large enough for the ambulances and some storage. Maybe a double-wide next to it for people to be in.

WW—Also, I need to bring this issue to you guys. We're having plumbing problems in the parsonage, and it doesn't get repaired even though we're paying rent.

WW—Also, there's the current state of the ambulances. The newest one (#361) has 100,000+ on it, and it's basically been out of service since October 2023. It's been towed four times. Its cost per mile is \$0.73 for maintenance. That doesn't include fuel.

WW—From January 2023 to October, it cost \$0.40 per mile for only 11,000 miles. We're at a crossroads with it. The mechanics say we might put in new injectors for about \$4,500 but that might not fix it. The

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only other solution is to get a new 6L motor. Cost about \$15,000 to \$18,000, and it's problematic to get the new motor in.

WW—We've been using the backup rig--#362, but it has problems with the electronics, and it's real hard to get parts. I have to buy off of eBay.

Discussion of repair issues and costs.

WW—A brand new box for an ambulance is about \$250,000 and \$270,000.

-1:17:25—WW—I see our options to be: invest in \$4,500 to see if that fixes the #361. If that doesn't work, we need to put the motor in it, but maybe the box will have to come apart to get the motor in it.

JN—And then you're still working with a 20-year-old rig.

AH—I see \$2,000,000 for an ambulance and a building hall. Maybe ask the legislature?

CB—Strategically, maybe a short-term loan would be a good idea. We've talked about combining districts. And there are the levies.

WW—That was third on my list. I think the Tonasket Levy comes due. Lifeline is willing to help with campaigning. What we learned with Oroville is that we have to campaign ourselves.

AH—We talked about this last week. Both levies come up in December.

Discussion about when the levies end.

WW—The Tonasket levy was only at \$0.38 or \$0.40 per \$1,000. I don't know if there's thought about raising it.

AH—Go to \$0.60.

Discussion of whether the levy limit is \$0.50 or \$0.60.

CB—Times have changed a lot since we first contracted with Lifeline. It seems like they'd provide more reasonable service at lower cost if the districts are combined.

AH—If we annex more area, we won't generate more money by combining the districts. The city of Okanogan just contracts for service. But we could do an MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) saying we'd build a building that both districts could use.

WW—If the levy doesn't pass in the city of Oroville, it's not that big of a deal. The city is so much larger and manages a smaller area inside the city. If the rural district levy fails, but the city passes, what happens?

WW—You're kind of putting all your eggs in one basket, but you're getting a bigger voter population. Are the boundaries of the Oroville EMS the same as the school district? There are areas outside the district that the district is providing services for.

AH—Do people outside the district get a different charge than people in the district? Cody (Acord, Fire District 6) charges people outside the district if the district responds to a call.

WW—We charge everyone the same amount—inside, outside or just passing through the district. What we charge is supposed to be the "cost of ready". Our charge for responding is supposed to cover the operational costs.

LJ—in 2018, the Oroville EMS district levy failed. So we tried again in 2019, and it was approved.

CB—That's because we put out more information in 2019.

LJ—if the 2018 levy had passed, it would have ended in 2024. But now it'll end in 2025.

JN—I'd talk about consolidation of the levies with Oroville.

AH—I've asked in the Methow, but people want to have their own levies.

WW—It sure opens up Pandora's box. If one fails...

WW—if one district fails...

CB—Since the districts were established, a lot has changed. It changes how we look at EMS Districts. We have to get the word out to have this discussion. People are willing to listen and understand. I think it may be time to do this, especially since we've got some time with Oroville.

WW—We've been able to offer more hours of service, and that makes some people happy.

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JN—Tonasket covers for Oroville and visa versa. You can't have six rigs ready at all times.

WW—As long as all three or four don't explode all at once, it allows for serge capacity and we can pull in other resources. It's not perfect but perfect is very expensive.

CB—It provides predictability for you. It's easier to plan.

WW—I'm preaching to the choir—but the challenges get more difficult all the time. Minimum wage raises? That's a challenge for every business and everyone.

CB—I talk about strategic, but it's going to be required.

WW—Maybe more in depth talk about where we want the districts to go. Oroville is a nice station, but it wasn't built to have people staff it 24 hours a day. Even if Oroville booms in the next 4-7 years. People want 24-hour service, but there's no place to put the people we need.

WW—I just wanted to get the priorities on your radar. The ambulance situation is at the point where we need to make decisions pretty soon. I need some guidance as to what you think is the most responsible thing to do. I'm torn on the \$4,500 investment, which might buy a year if it works.

AH—I agree.

CB—I think the responsible thing to do it to figure it out. You'll use it for a long time.

WW—It's been a good test. Basically, using three units—Tonasket backup, Oroville primary unit and Oroville backup unit. It used to have five ambulances. If we had two dependable units and a reasonable backup unit, we don't need five.

CB—The extras cost a lot.

WW—I'd be happy to surplus the oldest one we've got--#363

WW—My fear—if we have a catastrophic incident with an ambulance, we'll have to use one of our two floaters. There's no margin of error.

CB—I think we should look at combining the districts. What if we think of several options to look at and prioritize them in a public discussion.

LJ—Look at expanding the district boundaries?

CB—If we combine the existing districts, then maybe look at expansion. I don't know. Or have two districts with an agreement. But it's important to involve the public because they're going to be paying for it. Being a volunteer district isn't one of the things that I want to put on the table.

JN—A volunteer district looks good on paper, but the reality of fulfilling it is hard.

CB—EMS needs to be more predictable.

JN—What irritates me the most are the calls out of district. They take the most time and so they cost the most.

CB—Even Fire Districts have to look at that. They should be annexing places, or they'll get a free ride.

WW—Your points are valid. Some people think volunteer is synonymous with free, but it's not. We have to pay for ambulances. Volunteers get stipends, and it's hard to get volunteers to be able to take time off work, and people don't want to make the time commitment.

CB—And different laws applicable to volunteers can limit you.

CB—I think if we put options on the table, and let the public be a part of what we put on the ballot, they like that.

WW—If the levy amount ends up being \$0.50, combining the two districts wouldn't take much effort. That would just leave the city to decide if they wanted to annex into the EMS District.

CB—People want what they want to be theirs.

JN—I can see an Ellisforde station on both ends. It could take an extra 10 minutes, or depending on the location, it could decrease the response time.

WW—Discusses how to speed up response times depending on where stations are.

WW—But I know what you think—nobody likes to lose their identities.

AH—

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AH—The RCW says the commissioners have the sole authority to create an emergency services district after a public hearing. If we did enough pre-investigation, we could dissolve Tonasket and Oroville at the same time and create a new district from Omak all the way north.

CB—However you do it, make sure the public knows what you're doing. Word gets around on social media, and it turns into something you're not trying to do. All you need is 4-5 people who oppose it. They start feeding the information source and everybody will be reading it. It's better to meet with them.

WW—That's what happened when Oroville failed the first time. They were getting their information from one source and that source wasn't factual.

CB—And it's worse because of social media. If you have to return that's OK because people have questions, but it's better to get the information out first.

CB—If someplace gets a lot of calls, we can look at census data and see if they're elderly or what.

-35:14—WW—What direction can you give me about #361? The one where it's basically put \$4,500 in it on a maybe.

JN—Just throw money at it and pray. Not fiscally responsible.

WW—We've thrown money and prayed for the last two years. Especially in the rural districts, and the ambulance has a breakdown, we can say we've done all we can but the vehicle is not dependable. If the rig breaks down halfway there for a really sick person, what to do?

WW—If I had a pocket full of cash, I could go out tomorrow and order an ambulance, it's about 280 days until we get it.

CB—One thing is: do we want to buy a new one? I think we buy a new ambulance one way or the other. The fire hall is a problem, but the ambulance is more critical.

WW—The staff would love new facilities, but if I can't get to your house in an emergency, nobody's going to be happy. We need to have a plan for getting a new ambulance for the Tonasket EMS.

LJ—250 days?

WW—It's about 280 days if you want a demo model. If you want it built specifically for you, it's 460 days. Discusses pros and cons of suspension systems.

LJ—Do they need a down payment?

WW—If the commissioners OK it, I can sign the paperwork today and there's no payment until receipt of the vehicle. On the day you receive it, you have to pay 90%. The other 10% is due in 90 days or so.

Because of all the vehicles we've bought, we don't need to make a down payment. I think we'd just need something from the commissioners says it's OK to buy one for no more than X.

CB—to AH—we've been talking about what it takes to get started getting a new vehicle.

AH—I agree that's the best thing to do. Basically financing it is the issue.

CB—I don't think we'll be paying cash, but we need to take some action.

WW—to recap, I can get the process going today with the vendor. But we don't have to write the check until the delivery date.

AH—It's a quasi-municipal district, so we have to abide by the purchasing policies. So maybe we have to take bids.

LJ—Is this a special type of purchase?

AH—Are there many ambulance vendors in the state?

WW—Just one.

AH—Then it can be a sole source because of delivery, etc.

CB—There's all those things that you have to make an extra check on. We know we need one and have a lot of time before we get it.

WW—I don't know about bidding.

AH—Do we buy the ambulance through Lifeline? If Lifeline actually pays for it, and we pay them back on an amortized schedule with interest. We have to check to see if that's legal. It'd be easy for us.

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WW—I have to check with Paul. I *think* Lifeline would be OK with that, but the contract with the EMS District has to cover the cost of it. (WW calls Paul on his phone.)

AH—I'd like to educate myself more on special levies for the ambulance (or even two). It might be a lid lift. We need to talk to someone who knows about this.

WW—Can I just call Paul right now, to see if Lifeline will front the cost and get the cost back.

AH—Yes. We'd be buying it from you.

AH—to LJ—What's the reserve amount for Tonasket EMS District?

LJ—It's \$142,000.

WW—Paul said that would be OK. He'd like something in writing ahead of time.

CB—I think we need to look at MSRC (Municipal Services and Research Center) and get Esther (Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor) involved later. I'll get a list of questions about special levies.

AH—The problem I can see looking at the budget, we've only got about \$140,000 extra.

CB—I didn't think we'd have the money to buy one.

AH—One other thing—If we can get a better estimate of what the Sheriff's building will cost, we could talk about ARPA. Counties can fund districts. We could look at LATCF (Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund). I hate taking money out, but if it's an emergency, we could get it done.

AH—I don't want to order it today.

CB—I agree.

WW—I'm not saying we need the decision today, but the sooner the better. This way we can have a controlled decision.

AH—Do you need one or two?

WW—My need is one. My desire is two. If you have two, then we don't have to rely on what we have as backup now. It's never stranded anybody, but it's not new.

AH—But we're not wasting money buying a second ambulance because you don't need it?

WW—Yes. If we went with buying two, we could surplus four ambulances we currently have (in the two districts combined).

AH—I don't know how it would work if we combined the two districts.

JN—I can see how Oroville feels about this.

LJ—Do you want to hear Mike Worden (County Dispatch Center) brief us on challenges at the demo site today or tomorrow?

AH—to WW—You're done?

WW—Yes.

AH—I move to reconvene as the BOCC. Motion passes 3-0.

AH—We'll discuss the ambulance as soon as we can.

WW—What about the backflow preventer? Requirement by the city.

AH—If it's in the building, go ahead. If it's in the ground....

WW—I'll talk to the plumber and get back to you.

Discussion about when to hear from Mike Worden.

AH—Let's squeeze him in tomorrow morning.

CB—FYI, I've had my last meeting with MRSC. And also my term will soon be up on the State Health Advisory Board.

Adjourn at 12:51.