

Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting

Monday, April 1, 2024 PM session

CB – Chris Branch, BOCC Vice-chair District 1

AH – Andy Hover, BOCC member, District 2

JN – Jon Neal, BOCC Chair, District 3

LJ – Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board

Cameron – assistant to Clerk of the Board

RS – Rena Shawver, Exec. Director of OCCAC

LH – Larry Hudson, Noxious Weed Board

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/bocc-boh-notes> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, click [here](#).

Summary of Significant Discussion:

- *Rena Shawver updates BOCC on Community Action Council work, focusing on housing. Okanogan County has a housing crisis of extreme proportion.*
- *Discussion about plans for updating the County promotional video that is on the website.*
- *Discussion about future updates to historic courthouse building*
- *Update from Noxious weed manager. Employee promotions, public presentation for Lake Mgmt District.*

The time notations refer to the time stamp on video that is published on the county's AV Capture site. To watch the video for this meeting, click [here](#).

3:42:50 – video for afternoon session starts. Casual conversation about history of BOCC and the different people who have been elected over the years.

3:50:00 - Update on housing from Rena Shawver, Executive Director of the Okanogan County Community Action Council. (OCCAC)

RS - Thanks BOCC for letting her update them on the homeless housing crisis.

25% of residents of OK County are living below poverty level. High teenage pregnancy rate (17%). Median wage is <\$20/hr. People are spending up to 60% of their income on housing. We are still dealing with pandemic -level needs but the pandemic funding has gone away. Our organization is here to help this population by focusing on basic needs with emergency assistance of food, utilities and housing.

Last year OCCAC:

Helped 800 households with utility bills

Helped 100 veterans per year (mostly with housing)

Sheltered 100 families in hotel rooms

Provided \$600K in rental assistance

Receiving 100 new calls per month for eviction prevention rental assistance.

Feed 1000 boxes of food through food warehouse

Improve safety and efficiency through weatherization program (15 households). We are the only program in the county doing this.

Last year our Board of Directors passed a resolution declaring a housing emergency.

Our Board also passed a resolution to build 4 low income housing projects over the next 8 years to address the housing crisis.

What is the housing crisis?

It's big and affects people who can't advocate for themselves. Data collection shows that there are 290 people living outside or in uninhabitable spaces.

Lifeline reports there could be over 1000 more based on their response calls.

Over 600 people are on housing waiting list.

2020 housing assessment done by the county predicts we need 2000 more units. State assessment is the same.

85% of these units will be for people making <\$32K per year, with a large number of those requiring permanent supportive housing which means they have a mental health disability and need ongoing support.

Our case managers work with this population and estimate that about 85% of housing clients have a substance abuse or mental health issue.

Most are on Apple Health plan.

Because of this, we are becoming a Medicaid provider under a new plan called Foundational Community Support run by the WA State Health Care Authority and the WA State Dept of Commerce. This program combines housing support with more intensive case management support.

We have 3 times more unhoused people (about 900 that we know of) than before Carlton Complex fire.

This is now officially a housing crisis of extreme proportion.

Who will build this housing?

Low income housing can't be built by for-profit private contractors because most of the clients are not able to pay. Must be built and run by non-profits. They will need support from the county.

We just today finalized a contract with [West/East Social Impact](#) to do our 5 year housing plan. Due on December 2024. We have applied for a grant to help with this. By the end of 2024 we should have a solid plan with action steps.

OCCAC is entering into a Medicaid contract to build housing, new this year. Thank you for listening to my update. Are there any questions?

JN – it was brought up this morning that there is perception of an influx of illegal aliens into our county. Do you know anything about that?

RS – I don't think so. Most of our grants require documentation. I don't think that we have seen a big population in undocumented people. We do get them occasionally.

AH – so you haven't seen huge numbers of people coming in?

RS- There might be a little increase, but nothing like what we saw when the food stamp program was cut and we had a huge influx of people coming to the food pantries. To be honest, our funds that area available for housing assistance have dropped dramatically (from about \$200K per month to about \$50K). We have had to adjust our criteria so that we are serving the most vulnerable population.

JN – Thank you for what you do. I wish I had a magic wand that could fix all the problems. Thank you for what you do.

RS – We do what we can. We are working with systems that are over 30 years old. We need to really update our internal infrastructure. We have a high turnover with case managers because they want to help people then get frustrated by the bureaucratic hurdles.

CB – I've always been amazed at the number of grants you manage. Each one requires so much admin work.

We are nearly 100% funded by designated grants. I think we are up to about 55 – some federal and some county.

CB – since I've been working with OCCAC they have had only 3 directors in 30 years. I think that says a lot about how dedicated they are. It's a solid agency. But they don't have much discretionary funds to spend.

RS – Yes, it takes a lot of creative work to make the grants work for us. They are often issued by people who don't always understand our needs.

RS – We are about to celebrate our 60th anniversary next year. We were created in 1965 after Pres. Johnson declared a war on poverty and provided funding. We've been fighting that war ever since.

CB – asks about a grant through NCW CHI.

RS – We have a small grant with them.

4:04:55 RS leaves at 1:46 pm.

AH – wants to review a document regarding Room One.

CB – has to leave at 2 pm for another meeting.

4:09:50 AH and JN have a short discussion about the photos of previous commissioners whose photos are on the wall behind them.

4:12:00 – LJ updates BOCC about plans for updating the county promotional video. Company (CGI) has been contracted with and they will be providing a script, with input from BOCC. Discussion about what to include in video. Mention large Ag producers (Gebbers, ranchers, etc.). Suggestions about scenic locations that should be featured. *Notetaker observes that there is no mention of featuring small Ag producers or anyone from the Latino or Tribal communities).*

4:36:05 JN asks if Nick (new Fairground manager) has sent a proposal.

LJ – He is concerned that a fairgrounds project is just putting a bandaid on the situation rather than doing a permanent fix that would address the problem. *(They are referring to one of the barns at the fairgrounds but don't specify which one).*

AH and JN talking about insurance on the building that needs fixing. They want to take advantage of any insurance money that may be available but want the option to rebuild someday.

LJ – asks if BOCC wants to repair the building in phases, how should the bid announcement be written?

Discussion about details of publishing the bid.

4:43:15 LJ asks about Room One ARPA funds.

AH – says he will bring it up tomorrow when CB is present. He believes that Room one does important work and should be given the funds they need to close their funding gap.

Discussion about the good work that is done by both Room One and OCCAC. AH talks about how Room One was able to build a new facility that is a big improvement and enables them to provide needed services.

LJ – says they are very easy to work with and always provide the necessary documentation the county needs for its records.

4:48:00 LJ says that OCCAC has asked for an extension on a deadline. Short discussion.

4:49:05 LJ – last thing is the dept of historic preservation (DHP) is going through a new grant cycle for 2025.

AH – asks if they are done with their current project?

LJ – have just received a proposal from MJ Neal and will be publishing for construction. Washing and painting building and annex windows. (Old courthouse building).

AH – asks what remains to be done for 2025 cycle.

LJ – suggests that the courtrooms be renovated and preserved. Not sure how much original things are left there.

AH – suggests asking the judges what they think.

LJ – says they should ask if they need to add additional courtrooms to plan for future expansion.

AH – says that there is a 4th floor in that building. Maybe they could look at that to be used for something.

LJ – says there is some ventilation equipment up there. And access to the clock tower.

JN – Has MJ Neal given us any updates?

LJ – I have given them some dates and will check my calendar.

AH – could you find out where they are in the process? We are supposed to spend that money by April 25th 2025.

LJ – you will be getting an update on that tomorrow.

LJ – The DHP grant is due at the end of June. There is a 25% match required. Some of the exterior work that we are planning for this summer can be part of that match. If we don't get it all completed, maybe you could work on that.

AH – we are going to have to do the vestibule, too. As long as it meets the preservation conditions.

Discussion about what counts as historical preservation.

LJ – did you receive the grant for Fairgrounds safety. Talked with Nick (new fairgrounds manager) about it.

5:09:15 - Discussion about how the Hwy 20 clearing is going. AH says that a body was found in the snow during the clearing process. Short conversation about how that could happen and which county it was in.

5:12:00 - Larry Hudson, manager of noxious weed office updates BOCC.

Staffing – have a couple of employees that I would like to promote. Darla Dahl to assistant manager. Naomi Neal to field tech 3.

As I discussed last December, I could desperately use an assistant manager. Darla is ready to step up.

AH – what do you see the Asst manager doing?

LH – filling in when I'm gone, managing staff, representing us at meetings and events,

JN – what would the fiscal impact be.

LH – we came up with a draft supplemental. Had some adjusting due to one position being overfunded. Bottom line is a \$15K increase.

Discussion about how to make budget work out due to impact on Lake Management District.

BOCC votes to approve recommended promotions in the noxious weed department.

LH – next thing is about the LMD. I've been talking to our contracted companies for lake mgmt district. They are willing to do a presentation for the public to explain more about the treatment needs and the process. Will include the Canadian folks, too.

AH and JN – approve of the idea and would like to encourage more communication on this issue. People want to know about what is being sprayed, how notices are given, etc.

LH – we have been using the county alert system, and the contractors send out a letter to all affected residents.

Discussion about the budget numbers for noxious weed department.

LH – got some good news for Spectacle Lake. The Bureau of Reclamation is going to fund their treatment for the next 5 years.

AH – asks if they are going to spray Patterson Lake again.

LH – has reached out to them. They were going to do it last year and then it fell apart.

Haven't heard from them about this year. If they want us to help we can certainly do that.

The Bureau of Rec funding is for Conconully area, mouth of the Okanogan River and Spectacle Lake.

LH leaves at 3:12 pm.
BOCC adjourns at 3:12 pm.