

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Monday, April 1, 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
EM—Esther Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor
Cam—Cameron Burnette, Deputy Clerk of the Board
NB—Nick Bates—Fairgrounds Manager
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning

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:

- During the public comments time, Ms. Jackson asks about reported sightings of white busses dropping off illegal immigrants in Omak who would then become part of the local homeless population. She asks what the commissioners are doing to protect the community. The commissioners say they will look into the matter but point out that orchardists are doing a lot of spraying right now and that Gebbers Farms has busses to transport their workers to the orchards. Ms. Jackson also asked why there are no meeting minutes posted for March on the commissioners' website. They reply they haven't corrected the March minutes yet.
- Commissioners hold an executive session under RCW42.30.110(1)(iii)—legal risks of a current practice, inviting Esther Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor, and Cameron Burnette, Deputy Clerk of the Board.
- Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management reports that the two Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) held recently went well. The meeting in Okanogan was attended by about 80 people.
- Commissioner Hover proposes giving Room One, a social services organization in the Methow Valley, \$100,000 of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds over two years. They would use the money to serve the homeless population.
- The commissioners discuss contract modifications with the Okanogan County Tourist Council concerning their kiosks.
- The meeting adjourns for lunch at 12:40.

00:40—JN—That was a weird settlement thing we didn't sign on to. Irish court has exonerated them.
AH—Weird. Exonerated a malware company?
JN—An opioid company. Endo Pharmaceuticals. We talked to EM (Esther Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor) about it.

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02:15—Pledge of Allegiance.
Commissioners correct minutes.

17:25—JN—It's 9:15. Time for public comment. Ms. Jackson?

Ms. J—On March 18 at the Omak Town Hall, someone who had a son killed by illegal immigrants spoke and asked the city council if there were busses dropping off people in our towns. I asked today after talking to many people that there are busses dropping off people for the last four weeks. I wonder what the county will be doing about something like this. Will you protect our community?

Ms. J—Also, I looked for your minutes for previous meetings but I can't find any newer than Feb. 27.

AH—They haven't been finalized for March. We were supposed to do it last week and we couldn't get them done. We hope to do it today.

Ms. J—Thank you.

AH—Re: illegal immigrants being bussed in. Right now all of the orchards are spraying. We've got H2A workers and a lot of folks who live full time in Okanogan County. Gebbers has a lot of private busses they use to move people around to the different orchards.

AH—I just read about a senator in Michigan upset about a bus load of illegal immigrants but it was really the Gonzaga men's basketball team that was going to play Purdue in the NCAA tournament in Detroit. I haven't heard of any busloads of immigrants. I'd do more investigation before I conclude people are being bussed in here.

Ms. J—The busses are white. They've got Canadian license plates. There have been several sightings in the last four weeks. There have been pictures taken. I'll investigate more and they could work in the fields. And it's not just illegal immigrants, but homeless, too. We are a sanctioned (?) state, so I imagine with all of the homeless money coming into the county so it'd be an opportunity to help them. There have been several people in comments. I wonder what the county will do to protect us. Hopefully more people will speak out. Thank you.

JN—Okanogan County is not a sanctuary county. And it baffles me is people are being sent here because we don't have adequate facilities to deal with the people we've already got.

AH—It's be a good question to ask Community Action—do they know the immigration status of people they help.

CB—They do know a lot about this because of the in-take forms.

JN—We'll look into it.

Ms. J.—I talked to some local homeless people this morning. They were camping out at Omak and they hadn't seen any newbies. Community Action and the homeless—They say they're all booked, so there they are, camping on our roads in downtown Omak. I'd like to actually see the data at Community Action and see what they're doing for our homeless here in the community.

JN—Thank you.

CB—There's a conversation about it at 1:30 today. It's on our agenda.

CB—I guess Gebbers is hauling its workers on buses to Walmart to shop. Don't know if it's this time of year.

AH—Doesn't Gebbers have some orchards in Canada?

JN—Don't know. They were looking to haul fruit to Canada to the fruit leather place.

27:50—CB—Anyway, Dale (?) was working with OCTC (Okanogan County Tourism Council). I thought he was working with Roni to write a grant.

AH—LTAC (Lodging Tax Advisory Committee) funded the kiosks and state law says they have to be on county or city owned property. OCTC thinks they own the kiosks. That's part of the contract language.

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They don't own the wood structures so the municipalities own them OCTC can apply for money to update them or whatever they need to do. The VICs (Visitor Information Centers) own the (*ground?*). Does that seem...

CB—There's no reason for OCTC to own them. If I were on OCTC, I'd say I don't want to be responsible for them.

AH—There needs to be an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the municipalities that you can't put other stuff on the kiosks. They're for tourism information only.

Discussion of the location on a kiosk in Oroville and if it's on city owned land or DNR land. If it's on DNR land, they discuss the possibility of a land swap.

32:35—AH—I move to go into executive session under RCW 42.30.110(1)(iii) (legal risks of a current practice) for 10 minutes, inviting EM and Cameron. Off they go.

48:15—JN—Nick?

NB—I'm Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager.

NB—I've got an approval for the temp hire that I need to give you guys.

NB—Camp Host for the season—April 1 to Oct 1. The host gets a free RV site.

NB—We've got travelling nurses wanting a long term rental for two months (April and May). There's a qualified long term stay in the fee schedule. \$350.

NB—Another person called me and he'd like to stay in the RV park because he bought property here and the RV spot there won't be completed until mid-May? Does that qualify for a long term stay?

AH—The rules say no stay should be longer than 14 days, if he just moves to another spot, it's OK.

JN—The 14 day limit lets us be rid of them if they're not good tenants.

NB—OK. The request for bids for spraying has been put out. It'll be a commercial sprayer with a license.

NB—The bid for porta-pottys has been put out. It's for the fair.

AH—Does the fair have enough ear tags for the auction?

NB—I'll check on the tags.

AH—Were you running the fair at your other job.

NB—I was Fair Manager and took care of the fair and the grounds. I worked for the county. The advisory committee was strictly advisory.

AH—Our Fair Advisory Committee is just advisory, too. They help put it on, etc.

NB—I've talked to them about what's my role and what's their role.

NB—About the horse barn. Last week Shelley (Keitzman, Human Resources and Risk Management) sent me an email from the insurance guy. I called him. They were about ready to send in a cancelled claim because nothing had happened on it for a year. Was I supposed to hire someone?

AH—You need to put it out for bid.

Discussion of the \$80,000 insurance claim for snow damage to the horse barn plus other repairs that the horse barn needs.

NB—I've got a new gal starting as clerk. And we've got the part-time position.

NB—And I've asked for approval for the pest thing. We don't want a bunch of dead rodents lying around. (*The commissioners had previously talked about using traps instead of poison to deal with rodents in the buildings.*)

NB—That's all.

1:05:00—MG—I'm Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management.

MG—I'm applying for an EMPG (Emergency Management Performance Grant) for \$18,000. It's for two units so we can use Starlink during a power outage. We can do wifi calling, etc. We put in for one year of

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service but you don't pay if you don't use it. I've tested it and it works. I'm been approved and met the criteria so we want to proceed.

MG—Each system is \$9,000, so two is \$18,000. I match it with funds out of our budget—even my wages. The cost is for the hardware.

AH—How many people can use it at one time?

MG—Quite a few. Plus this is mobile. You can put it in your truck and take it somewhere. We can have communications in the field, or a hospital could borrow it in an emergency. We have to have the funds spent by the end of September.

CB—You've been approved to make the application. You want us to approve it, but there's a \$9,000 match.

MG—Yes, but the match can come out of our operating budget. It's an in-kind match.

CB—OK.

MG—We have an EMPG grant right now I use for wages.

Commissioners approve MGs application.

MG—Second thing—we had two Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) meetings—in Nespelem and in the Barn at Winthrop. Nespelem had good attendance, especially people from the tribes.

MG—The Winthrop meeting was also well attended. Someone made the comment that since money was not an issue, we needed to put up a lot of signs about evacuation routes. None of us have ever said money's not an issue, so I don't know where that came from.

MG—The other thing is—there were about 80-85 people there and someone wondered where our county representation was. I wanted to point that out. Several people said it.

CB—Next time say "They sent me instead."

MG—Several people commented on how well the meeting went.

CB—Only one person said something that might not be true? That's pretty good.

MG—The meetings have all been good.

CB—The people who are interested are positive and they come to the meeting.

MG—The Methow is strong in our notification system and thanked us for notifying them.

CB discusses notification issues and wonders how many people look at upcoming meetings on the commissioners' weekly agenda.

MG—One other issue is one that bothers me. During the department heads meeting (last week) my assistant said that I wasn't attending because I was at another meeting. There was an elected official who said that was about half quicker than normal.

JN—Said it saved us 30 minutes.

MG—And other elected officials laughed about it. I can live with this but I think it's not proper. I don't think it's right for an elected official to say something like that in my absence and have other elected officials laugh.

MG—Any questions?

JN—Point taken.

CB—I didn't quite catch that part of it. There was a lot of talk about emergency management during fires, etc. but Emergency Management wasn't mentioned as one of the department's you'd collaborate with, but for me I was going to say—"Don't forget. This is Emergency Management's department."

MG—I listened to the meeting and I'll just say—we are prepared.

MG discusses animal sheltering at the Fair Grounds and how to coordinate donations, etc. and also sheltering for people coordinated by the Red Cross or a church group.

MG—Any further questions? MG leaves.

1:31:55—JN—Pete?

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PP—Good morning. I'm Pete Palmer, Director of Planning.

PP—We've got two new planners now. One started last week and one began today shadowing the person who's leaving the position in two week. We'd interviewed about nine people and couldn't find anyone with the level of expertise for the Senior Planner position. I propose we drop that position back to Planner 1 so I'd have three Planner 1s and maybe in six to twelve months promote one to be a Senior Planner. I've submitted a resolution to Lanie. The Senior Planner--Compliance Coordinator Planner is a position we couldn't fill.

CB—Did you get anyone with experience in planning.

PP—Yes. A guy who just came to the area. In the military he did a lot of strategic planning ad GIS stuff. His first week he was going site analysis.

PP—I also want to mention to Cameron to take out all the dates on the calendar for the Hearings Examiner. The new Examiner will work different dates that the old one worked.

LJ—I have the resolution ready if you want to consider it this morning.

PP—That's all I've got. Any questions?

CB—Just curious if you learned anything from the latest hearing with the Hearings Examiner.

PP—I have. The staff person working on the permit worked really hard with the person trying to get the permit (for a meat processing plant in JN's district). Because the legislature has changed the rules about animal waste disposal they want to make sure the owner has a plan for what to do when he can no longer take the waste to the transfer station. It concerns me that someone on the outside has a problem with the situation when the applicant doesn't have a problem.

CB—It was Rachel McClure who called me.

PP—According to the comment we received for the Solid Waste Manager, the rule doesn't go into effect for three or four months.

CB—There can be a problem when communications get mixed up and that's what happened here. I don't think we're looking for someone to blame.

PP—The application has had a decision made and the LUPA (Land Use Permit—Application) was issued on Feb. 14. Right around April 14 will be the last day to submit an appeal.

JN—I talked briefly to the applicant around the first of the year and he's got an application to either a state or federal grantor to do on-site composting.

CB—Nobody here at this table would expect you to do anything with a decision that's already made.

PP—It would behoove whoever is having issues with it to contact the department and get the full application instead of just looking at parts of it. We'd like to hear from the applicant and according to staff we've given them information just last week.

CB—That was all resolved with the applicant in the first place. I didn't get it as a complaint. I got it at someone who's both working for a Congressperson and as someone who's head of the Cattlemen's Association has an obligation to react. Just like we do, if someone contacts us about something that happened in one of our departments, we've got to go ask questions.

PP—Right. We get inundates with these public information requests. This person should just ask for the application and educated themselves before they blow it up to the legislation.

CB—That's not what happened here. But I'd rather have that happen than have a public information request forwarded to the Planning Department. I'd just ask you a question about it. This is a good situation compared to what we're experienced in other things.

AH—I'm not sure what's going on. It's the new meat shop in Oroville? And the condition that was put on it and raised the eyebrows of someone else?

CB—Yes.

PP—A person from the Cattleman's Association.

AH—What was the condition placed on it?

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PP—I don't have it right in front of me, but they had to haul organic waste. They contracted with a place called Baker's. It's one of the few companies that handles this type of waste. They're on the coast. So there's a house bill passed a year or so ago. It talks about how this type of waste can't go into the landfills anymore. So they're trying to see how to ween this out of putting it in the land fill. We got a comment from Solid Waste, saying it's coming up and we should look at a long term situation. We're looking at sustainability for the long term.

CB—I think the applicant was aware of the situation. I think they had some things in place. I think it was just a timing issue. In response, I said that's not what we want.

AH—I want to make sure we promote organic digesters or composting facilities.

PP—They're looking to WSU to design a composter specific to their waste. It's been thoroughly thought through. When this came up, it sent a lot of people sideways.

CB—It shouldn't send people sideways. It's just an inquiry. She wasn't would up about it. There was no mention of the decision by the Hearings Examiner.

PP—The condition was they had to come up with a management plan before the time when they have to stop using the local landfill.

JN—We've discussed with Kent (Kovalenko, Solid Waste Manager?) a little bit about the county doing it. There are a lot of businesses that will need it.

AH—The state is imposing so much regulatory stuff. When they say municipalities have to buy X amount of compost for projects, maybe they're just trying to implement what the state says you've got to do. Maybe they think they can make money on it. We need to look at it from a regulation perspective.

PP—And I know that for this permit, the person working on it spent a lot of time walking him through the process and holding his hand, working with the college when they were designing their composter. But on the flip side, we need to look when they're designing the facilities, they're safe, healthy and they have a long term plan. One time I had to clean up an illegal dump used by one of the butcher shops. It's not good.

CB—That's one of the points. If you don't have an alternative, people will turn to... There was actually no mention of Planning or the planner.

PP—I know. But we did so much work, and people don't educate themselves.

CB—That didn't happen in this case. They were just looking for information.

JN—That brings up the question about what the DOT does with road kills. The raptors love it.

CB—Maybe we should just have all the eagles come in, but that won't work. But whatever happens, the tax payers are paying for it. It's like hearing complaints about the Planning Department and how long it takes. I tell them the Planning Department doesn't recover funds for the tax payer. If people aren't paying a fee for what they're doing, then tax payers are paying the fees.

JN—And all the money spend on information requests.

CB—I appreciate all the effort that goes into all the permits because you're got to be ready if it goes to the Hearing Examiner. Someone asked what don't they just take what they're given. I said because when all those other agencies comment on it, they want to be able to defend their application. It's for the applicant.

PP—In the end, it's the application that ends up with a well-thought out product that won't cause a lot of problems later on.

AH—Did you ever switch when doing site analysis to where you have a building envelope?

PP—We are moving towards that. We're getting them to look at the whole development.

AH—Not necessarily look at the building plans, but just telling them what polygon they can build within.

JN—Back to the Hearings Examiner. I had someone comment the other day that he's happy with the new guy.

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PP—Good. We had our first hearing Thursday and the staff liked how he ran the hearing. He ran the meeting efficiently over zoom. There's no decision yet. It was about the three sons and the gravel pit near Tonasket.

PP—That's all I've got. PP leaves.

1:59:00—Commissioners return to correcting minutes. They also trade stories about road kills, animal bodies and Solid Waste.

2:15:10—LJ explains the bids she's received for the contract to publish the county's legal notices. After much discussion about cost per inch of columns and column width, newspaper circulation numbers, etc., AH moves to award the county's legal big award to the Omak-Okanogan County Chronicle.

CB—It's always a challenge to do these things and it's hard to get an apples to apples comparison. But we're just going to one paper now.

JN—No. We'll still be putting notices into other papers.

LJ—Notices are required to be published in the paper that's local for that particular project or change. So some will go to the Okanogan Valley Gazette and the Methow Valley News.

AH—In the last few years, the Gazette was a lot less expensive than the Chronicle, but this year, the Chronicle's come down quite a bit.

CB—Also, there's only one person who complains about the lower Methow, and we publish in the Methow. I don't know what's going on in Pateros. Maybe they aren't interested in the Methow.

AH—Well, we have these requirements and if we send postcards to everyone, that takes money away from other projects.

Motion passes 3-0.

2:29:55—AH—Room One is having a real shortfall this year in programmatic funding. They're asking for \$50,000 this year and \$50,000 next year. We've got it in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) to do that. They're a group that doesn't ask for much money, so I'd like to fund it. They offer a lot of services and lots of people use them. I can ask them to give us a presentation if you'd like. They don't ask for a lot of homeless money in their asks. And we know there are a lot of homeless in the Methow—couch surfing, living in their cars. People in domestic violence situations or behavioral health problems.

2:33:10—JN—It's 11:30. Discussion of Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) and Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) discussion about contracts for the kiosks and the Designated Marketing Organization (DMO).

Four women from the OCTC are present.

AH—We received the amendment for the DMO contract. We want to discuss the e-kiosks and the wooden kiosks to make sure we're all on the same page.

AH—The wooden kiosks—It's our understanding is that because it's LTAC money, the wooden structures would belong to the county or city, but OCTC should have an agreement with the city or the county that since it was built with LTAC money, they can't put things not related to tourism on it.

AH—OCTC shouldn't own the structure.

OCTC people introduce themselves—

Jan Tate, Contractor for OCTC

Carolyn Davis, Secretary-Treasurer for the OCTC

Terry Lee, President of the OCTC

Claire Painter, VP of the OCTC

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Jan—OCTC never wanted to own the kiosks. Originally we had several proposed kiosks that weren't on county or city lands.

AH—We have a right of way for the Loomis one, and if we can do a government to government property swap, it'll be OK. Maybe we can do this with the other parcels, too.

Discussion of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to agree what can be put on the kiosks. The front side would be OKed by the DMO and the backside would be tourism information in consultation with the city where it's located. The OCTC could get annual funds from LTAC to maintain the structure. The towns would maintain the grounds.

Discussion of e-kiosks. The software needs an annual license.

Discussion about the Visitor Information Centers (VICs). They're eligible for LTAC money for some of their operational costs. VICs can help direct tourists from heavily used areas to more lightly used areas. Talking about tourist facilities and opportunities in the north county.

Finally, a discussion about training people to apply for LTAC grants. AH thinks the process is not difficult, but OCTC personnel disagree.

3:42:35—Adjourn for lunch at 12:40.