

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday April 2, 2024, AM

Present:

Jon Neal (JN) – BOCC Chair, District 3

Andy Hover (AH) – BOCC Vice Chair, District 2

Chris Branch (CB) – BOCC, District 1

Lanie Johns (LJ) – Clerk of the Board

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer via Zoom. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. 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:

https://okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners_proceedings.php.

Time stamps below are in real time. To locate specific topics, a click on the AV Capture video screen at <https://okanogancounty.org/avcapture.html> can assist in finding the correct spot on the video recording.

Summary of Significant Discussions or Actions:

- County Clerk directed to work with Room One in Twisp to allocate ARPA funds of \$100,000; \$50,000 per year over two-year period.
- Public Comment: Mrs. Jackson requests information/help with county codes for burning, timeframes. Finance Committee: Meeting with Aeneas Lake Irrigation District to work on becoming solvent, rather than utilizing County funds. Economic Alliance to help with finding grants/loans to help financial situation, and the District will work with the PUD to help decrease costs of electricity. Will meet with Finance Committee again in June.
- Sheriff's Dispatch Deputy Update: staffing: 11 of 13 positions filled, radio project looks favorable – there is more to do – awaiting funding from Congress budget. Working on the Sheriff's building on Railroad Avenue – site visit on 4/17. Picked up the Radio Tech van for the new employee to use.
- Public Works: Loomis/Oroville drainage project. Working on asphalt pad at the landfill, this is from the grant tied to organics. Looking at the Loomis right of way for the kiosk sign. Will ask DNR about a boundary line adjustment to accommodate the kiosk.
- Meeting adjourned at 11:46

9:00

JN reports getting an e-mail from the Okanogan Fire Chief regarding parking around courthouse AH – Maybe we should have a discussion about the parking.

9:15

It was moved, seconded, and carried to direct the Clerk to work with Room One in Twisp to write up request for ARPA funds equaling \$100,000, to be given in \$50,000 per year for the next 2 years.

AH notes that the ARPA funds are now down to \$200,000 in the fund, so we are close to having all the funds allocated by the end of the year 2024, which is the requirement.

9:17

Public Comments: Mrs. Jackson (*whom also watches the BOCC on Zoom*) has been searching the county codes covering burning and cannot find whether it is okay to burn at night or not. Someone in her area (Eng Road/ Omak River Road) was burning the other night and the fire got really big and scary. No one was there to attend to the fire and there was no water close by. Mrs. Jackson has been doing a lot of research for herself and neighborhood due to problematic water well – from the mobile home park nearby. She hasn't gotten anyone (health District, State DOE) to answer her questions. AH asks if she is in city limits. No, in the County – outside of city limits. AH notes there are no codes regarding burning at night, but states that the person building the fire should have notified the local fire department, especially if the burn pile was over 4ft by 4ft. JN will check into the afterhours burning, to see if there is anything governing that. CB added that maybe the Fire Advisory Board could discuss this.

9:30

The Finance Committee: (Auditor, Treasurer, and Finance Mgr + BOCC) meeting with the Aeneas Lake Irrigation District (ALID or the District) (4 -5 representatives, including Secretary Paige Davidson) Pam Johnson (PJ) – County Treasurer reports that the outstanding warrants for the ALID are \$260,035.00 with the county (these need to be paid back). PJ also reports there is \$35,900 in the district's general fund and the balance in reserve - \$84,408.

AH asks about the background of the ALID. It was formed through the BOCC many years ago. AH suggests the district talk with the PUD to help determine highest usage times and suggested variable frequency drives and soft starts to save energy. The district has looked into both of these and found the variable frequency drives to be cost prohibitive for them, which puts them in a Catch-22. Roni Holder (RH) with the Economic Alliance in attendance has been able to look up different programs that might work for cost sharing, grants or loans.

AH asks if these programs are only for domestic water? RH is looking for grants for public systems. The district – operation wise, we have pumps in need of repair. We've looked into different grant/loan programs, but we end when cost-sharing is a part of it.

AH asks if ALID can take some of their reserve funds to help pay back debts, and whether they have had a meeting with the ratepayers/users. Per the district – Most of them don't show up. Our biggest user – the owner lives in Wenatchee, and this is a pear orchard. We've had a huge breakdown of equipment which has put us in this position. AH asks if the County gets paid back some from the reserve funds, would you be able to operate? How do you operate? The ALID only uses pumps, there is no gravity feed. Therefore, we pay high PUD bills. ALID – If we get paid back on our late assessments, we should be able to operate and not have to utilize more registered warrants. Also, we provide water to the aquifer. We take from the river and the overflow goes into the lake. This, in effect, feeds a lot of nearby wells. AH asks how low the lake would be without adding the water. The District states “low”. The District has heard about aquifer recharge funds in Oregon. They have a system for this and had wondered if that might work here, given the District helps with the aquifer replenishing.

The users of the ALID are mostly for the pear orchard and residences. The residential pump is on all the time.

AH asks RH if maybe an efficiency grant might be appropriate for this District to get back on their feet and do the needed repairs.

Once again, AH suggests soft starts and variable frequency drives to save power. The District states they can look at a rate increase next year to help pay down our warrants, and if we have significant rain events, will shut off the water for periods of time to save electricity.

AH – if you get a hold of the PUD, they can help you with monitoring your electricity usage daily. AH defers to the treasurer.

CB compared this small water project to what is happening in the Columbia Basin, where they have a lot more residences to provide water to.

The District notes that we are providing water into the aquifer and wells are getting a benefit.

10:12

AH – If you can find out from the PUD what the startup charges are, you can limit the water at different times.

The District notes that when the orchardists turn on, other users get a lesser amount

AH asks if they can all meet in May or June again? Ask the PUD about it. Let's meet back in a month and RH can give information on different funding sources that might be able to help.

PJ – I want the warrants taken care of, but I also want you (*the District*) to survive. We're going to stay working with you guys.

AH notes Agriculture is a big part of the County. He also wonders if maybe LATCF funding might be appropriate in this instance. We want you to be solvent.

10:31

AH commends the ALID Board for making the difficult decisions. It is not an enviable position to be in.

It is agreed to meet again in June.

10:37

RH will work with the District on some Department of Commerce grants as we are in the process of hiring grant writers.

The District thanks the County for working with them, and also asks, “We are a public board, why are we paying 100% to the PUD?”

AH and JN believe they are getting irrigators rates – different than full price.

10:43

Mike Worden (MW), Sheriff's Dispatch Deputy gives a report/update.

Dispatch has 11 of 13 positions currently filled.

The Radio project is looking favorable – we have a quote from a vendor. We still have to figure out interest rates. We're waiting for the Federal Budget to help with the radio purchases. We did get \$1 million from the state – we were hoping for \$3 million. We are continually monitoring congressional funding as they have not passed a budget yet. We also need to finalize our contract with the Department of Transportation.

Also, working on the Sheriff/Coroners building on Railroad Avenue. We've submitted updated permits and posting for bids tomorrow for the demo. All stakeholders have been notified; we're just waiting to hear back from Mo (Emergency Services).

There will be a site walk on April 17th.

LJ notes that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) is needed with the Economic Development Council regarding this building.

MW reports that they picked up the Radio Tech van for the new Radio Tech position's use. He is very pleased with the person he hired.

JN asks MW about people doing burning. Should they be calling it in? MW – Yes, in order to match up the calls and also wants people to make sure they are visible by their fire. JN- We should encourage people to call in their fires that are started on purpose. This would avoid wasting resources.

11:08

Public Works Update: Josh Thomson (JT), County Engineer. JT – The roads are drying out. We are trying to figure out what to do with the Chesaw Roads that are coming apart – 5-6 miles worth. We plan on Dura-patching. We have added some other roads to do chip seal on.

Libby Creek road is in decent shape, but there's no way for the snowplow to turn around, so that is why we do not plow snow there.

AH will talk with homeowners about building a turnaround for the plow.

JT – other projects; Brewster/ Old Hwy 97 will be starting on April 15th.

Also, the South fork of Gold Creek is not a county road.

AH – Considering having the ATV groups pay for a 1-time grading in the spring.

JT – We've also been hearing that the weed board will be requiring weed free fill dirt. That would be difficult.

JT – also working on the Loomis/Oroville drainage project. Also, working on asphalt pad at the landfill, this is from the grant tied to organics.

CB asks whether JT has been looking at the Loomis right of way for the kiosk sign? JT has been looking into it. CB suggests that maybe DNR would be willing to do a boundary line adjustment for a kiosk sign.

11:27

Mrs. Jackson (On Zoom) has more questions for the BOCC and JT about the Omak River Road by Sandflat Road being a county road. It does not get plowed or graded, and she is finding it difficult on the Assessors site to find out ownership of road.

Mrs. Jackson also has other issues in her neighborhood she is trying to sort out; bad wells, road maintenance, and an increase in rent prices.

11:46

Meeting adjourned.