

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday March 19, 2024 AM

Present:

Jon Neal (JN) – BOCC Chair, District 3

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

Chris Branch (CB) – BOCC, District 1

Cameron Burnette (Cburn) – Deputy 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:

- The State Legislature passed a bill to decrease Public Defender caseloads, but without extra funding for the Counties, expecting the Counties to bear the expense of hiring more staff.
- Public Comment: Isabelle Spohn suggests the BOCC put the Community Wildfire Protection Plan meetings on their website to get the message out for the best participation. Emergency Response Coordinator feels they have done a good job of getting these meetings (*for public input*) advertised, BOCC to get them advertised on their schedule/agenda.
- HR/Risk Manager: Received communication from the Public Defender contractor requesting funding to hire 2 new Public Defenders. She will work with Clerk of Board and Auditor to write this up. BOCC is considering using ARPA funds to pay for this. The County currently pays over a million dollars for Public Defender services.
- Public Works Update: Most road restrictions lifted today, new shops are still waiting for completion, closeout of Cameron Lake Road project funds to be used for chip seal.
- Meeting adjourned 10:21. No PM session.

9:00

JN remarks that the new legislative mandate to decrease the caseloads of the Public Defenders is going to bankrupt the counties. We can't afford that.

JN notes that Pierce County pays over \$300 million in Public Defender services. We pay \$1.3 million for these services to a contractor. I wonder if we can use ARPA funding for this.

Re ARPA funds, AH states that we (*the County*) took our revenue loss already, and JN adds also the roof and fire equipment expenses.

CBurn reports that Josh T will be bringing a resolution that didn't make it to the Consent Agenda.

CB reports that the Chelan County Jail had 2 deaths in one week.

9:15

Public Comment: Ruth Hall asked for clarification of Public Defender requirement, and whether there was an afternoon meeting or not. Isabelle Spohn suggested that the scheduled Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) meetings be advertised on the BOCC website – in their schedule/agenda. JN states that Everbridge has been notifying of these CWPP meeting. Anything more would help. BOCC to e-mail Emergency Response Mgr to put on the calendar.

9:22

Maurice Goodall (MG), Emergency Response Mgr in to explain that he feels these public meetings have been advertised well. They are being conducted by the Conservation District and they have the meetings advertised on their website. MG feels this is adequate.

AH also suggests maybe a hyperlink on the BOCC website to the Conservation District site.

JN notes that sometimes more is better.

9:30

Shelley Keitzman (SK)- HR/Risk Manager received a communication from the Public Defender contractor about the new requirement of lower caseloads and is asking for 1 new attorney. This would be \$15,500 per month starting in April until the end of the year. They are looking at \$139,500 total. AH asks whether we can pay this out of ARPA funds? JN – That's my suggestion. AH – I wonder if we can pay in lump sum. To SK – please work with the Auditor and Clerk of the Board to write this up. SK – I will get together with the Civil Deputy also.

CB brings up a lawsuit by Grays Harbor County that went to the Supreme Court and has been remanded. CB not sure where this is right now.

AH wants to write a letter to the Governor about the State's requirement for the Public Defender
CB wants to discuss the best way to handle communicating their dissatisfaction with the new requirement, with no funding attached.

AH notes the governor can lean on the different departments and can do something about this.

CB considers using the Association of Counties for this.

9:47

CB – It is a troubling issue. We already put a bunch of money out.

JN reports that attorneys no longer have to take the Bar Exam. They can do a 500-hour internship.

CB questions whether this compromises the standard.

AH disagrees because there are people that are able to practice, but for some reason, have not been able to continue law school or pass the bar exam.

CB gives example he learned from last week's job fair about a young woman who had to quit her schooling to take care of family members, and couldn't keep going to school, but eventually was able to complete with the help of Worksource funding.

9:55

Josh Thomson (JT), County Engineer updating for Public Works. On the Maintenance and road side, most road restrictions have been lifted this morning. The dirt roads seem to have come out of this winter worse than usual.

JT – The shops are still waiting completion. Also, the Cameron Lake Road project closeout funds will be used for more chipseal projects. JT is working on reports due to CRAB on April 1st, and this will require an electronic signature.

10:04

It is moved, seconded, and carried to approve Resolution 48-2024 regarding roadblock changed.

JT – Other changes I am working on. The small works roster changes by July 1st
JT is asked about using the small works roster for work on the upcoming Sheriffs' building. If the different parts were done separately, but most likely need to go out for bids.

10:08

BOCC approves minutes for 3/11 & 3/12

10:14

AH suggests inviting the new Dept of Ecology (DOE) person. We need to talk about the upcoming drought preparation.

10:21

Meeting adjourned. No afternoon meeting is scheduled.