

**Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting
Monday, November 20, 2023, PM session**

CB – Chris Branch, BOCC Chair, District 1
AH – Andy Hover, BOCC vice-chair, District 2
JN- Jon Neal, BOCC member, District 3
KB – Karen Beatty – Central Services
CH – Cari Hall, Auditor
PJ – Pam Johnson , Treasurer
AVID – Aeneas Valley Irrigation District 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:

- *Karen Beatty gives update on status of technology used by the County (phone system, website, etc.)*
- *AVID board discusses financial situation with County Financial Committee. They have been using registered warrants, which cannot continue.*

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

Summary of Significant Discussion:

1:30 pm.

Karen Beatty, Central Services director report

Making good headway on getting new computers out across the county. I'm upgrading old computers with new hard drives and new RAM. It really speeds things up. Also installing some new computers.

We have added MS Office and Teams, we have incorporated Adobe pro with signatures.

Laserfiche – we are upgrading licenses. Driving force is that the new upgrades will do retention. It should help keep records cleaner and allow us to offload old records. Core Switch project has been postponed because we have to collaborate with 911. It's sitting in the server room. Didn't want to do it during fire season and elections, so we will do it in the new year. The new backup will go in then, too. We have purchased a white glove service to help with this.

Our website will be 4 years in April. They said that they would do a redesign after 4 years. The look is good, but some things behind the scenes aren't so good. Poor tech support, etc. I've

been looking at having someone else hosting the site. Possibly we could host it ourselves. We would still manage the content. I'm thinking about maybe in a year or so getting a different vendor. Civics Plus was an option before, but they are expensive. We have until April to make a decision.

Our phone system is already starting to sunset. I want to just let you know, but it's not urgent. Not even the next 2 years. Lots of folks are using Microsoft for their phones. I've done some research, and it seems like it allows for great flexibility. There are pros and cons. It would mean increasing our costs with MS. There is a lot to look into so I just want to let you know. It's also important to look into a redundant isp. Some counties are using Starlink. We're looking for an aggregator that can flip from one system to another. Our firewall may be able to do this already. CB – asks about a round table she went to and who organized it.

KB – it was the city of Bothell. They invited anyone who wanted to sit in. When I was at the ACES conference they had discussions about it.

Finally, in 2024 I'm looking at finalizing those two big projects and getting everyone trained on the new resources. I'm also looking at MS Teams to replace Zoom. It may be more secure.

AH – asks for clarification

KB – says it would be Teams replacing Zoom for the remote participation in BOCC meetings.

AH – talks about how it can be difficult to join a Teams meeting, whereas Zoom is easier for the general public.

Short discussion about the issues with different remote meeting programs.

1:44 – KB finishes report. BOCC works quietly on their computers.

1:59 – Aeneas Valley irrigation district meeting. Auditor, Treasurer, and members of ID board.

CB – opens meeting with discussion about how the AVID is in arrears on some of their registered warrants. Says they are not the first, but BOCC wants to stay on top of it.

They went into Sept 2021 \$181K. The treasurer set a 3 year time frame .at end of 2022 it was \$137K and today it is \$227K. It is going in the wrong direction, and we are concerned that we can't keep up. We are currently look at about 7.5% interest payments. So far in 2023 (not counting outstanding warrents) we have \$543K in expenses. We are short about \$183K.

AH – I read the reports and understand that you are board members not always by choice. I'm not saying that you did anything wrong. Aren't your assessments at about \$300 per acre?

When it gets to that point it's hard to make money on the land, and maybe you need to say to the members that you can't provide this service any more.

Member: we have started looking at the pumps, maintenance etc. Maintenance has been put off, but we are now just in repair mode trying to keep up with the repairs.

AH – asks how much their costs would be if they didn't have repairs to do?

Answer –just the electric bill and one employee at \$28K. Total around \$250K. We are trying to improve the pumps so they won't use so much power.

AH – asks if they have talked to the USDA about getting a solar system to offset the cost.

Answer – no, but we are looking into changing to VFD pumps which will save a lot.

PJ – recites budget numbers. Says there is a DOE interest free loan of about \$10K per year that goes until 2035.

Member – we are all just volunteers and have a small stake in the district. There is one large user that is about 80% of the district.

AH – says he totally gets it.

JN – wonders if the Economic Alliance could help out.

AH – asks what switching to VFD would cost.

Answer – don't have the numbers right now. We would have to get a grant to do that.

Expenses are over \$500K this year, mostly due to several large breakdowns. They are finally getting close to caught up. It's better than it's been in a long time. They are almost operating at 100%. They can't shut off water to individual users if they don't pay their assessments.

Discussion about how that is essentially stealing water.

PJ – their general fund has collected \$359K for 2023. Expenses are about \$250K. Have reached out to a bank to see if they can get a loan but it was denied. May be able to go to a local bank.

Board member – says they voted to not increase assessments at this time. This is because more people won't pay if it goes higher.

AH – basically, you don't have enough users to pay for running the pumps. You could go to members and explain that you need to raise the assessment for just a couple of years to get out of the hole.

CB – asks if they are using all of their water rights

Answer – yes.

PJ – if the district does shut down, we will still have to assess the users until the debt is paid off.

AH – the finance committee could just say that we are not going to pay expenses any more, and then you would go into bankruptcy. I look at this and see a no-win situation.

AVID board member – if everyone paid their assessments we would collect \$442K. We have kept water flowing, which is better than in the past when we couldn't run any pumps.

AH – We need a repayment plan. You figure out what you need, and then go to the members. You can tell them that if they can't, then there is a risk that the district will go away. Have a member meeting and tell them that the county is requiring this. I know someone on a board that I can talk to.

CH – says that nobody on the finance committee wants to shut down this district but we have to answer to the State Auditor. We are supposed to advise the BOCC. Bottom line is that we can't be acting as your bank. We need to have a meeting of the minds to come up with a plan.

PJ – reminds them that various state agencies have resources.

AH – asks if the tree growers association has some funds. They don't want to see orchards go out of business. When do you set your budget?

Answer – it is already in.

AH – suggests trying to fine tune it and pay it down if you can.

Board member – there are several things in the works to save us money in the future – VFD pumps, new piping, VFD booster on the hill that communicates with the one on the river. We need to see if we get funding.

CB – it would be helpful to meet on a regular basis with us and share your finance plan. There has to be a contingency plan. Worst case, do you sell your water rights? Maybe use the new water bank?

Board member – we would have to start metering and that's another expense.

AH – You may want to look into that because some plans make the water bank provide the meter.

CB – your conversation with the Conservation District will cover all your options.

AH – asks for AVID board contact info. He will look into USDA and FSA options. Suggests that Jon Wyss might be a good contact (he is the WA State FSA Executive Director).

CH – reiterates that there could very well be a State Audit that asks for a plan from you.

AH – we need to stay informed about your expenses. We should meet again with you in March or April.

2:39 – AVID board leaves.

CB – mentions that MRSC has some good info on registered warrants.

2:42 – BOCC goes into Executive Session with Civil Atty Esther Milner.

3:18 – BOCC returns from exec session.

Discussion about schedules. Discussion about different Irrigation Districts and what their assessments are. Small talk about childhood adventures.

3:30 – public hearing on budget supplemental for \$20,000 for election security.

3:32 – BOCC adjourns for the day.