

Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting Tuesday, January 9th AM 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
WM – Wes McCart – Stevens County Commissioner
KWY - Kayla Wells-Yoakum – WSU Extension Office
SK – Shelley Keitzman, Human Resources Risk Manager
JT – Josh Thompson, Public Works Director
AS – Amy Staggs, Public Works trails division
MW – Mike Wordon, Sheriff Dept
PP – Pete Palmer, Planning Director

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:

- *Presentation by Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner on a new organization National Center for Public Lands Counties) that he is urging Okanogan County to participate in.*
- *Contract signed to fund WSU Extension Agent*
- *Discussion about parking lot at new Justice Center*
- *Discussion about a grant to fund Public Defender*
- *Public Works update – concern that proposed Zone Code rules around gravel pits will be a problem for the county. All the county pits (and most private ones) would be out of compliance under the proposed new rules.*
- *Discussion about Whistler Canyon horse unloading site.*
- *BOCC approves proposal for new Sheriff/Coroner equipment building.*

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](#).

9:00 - Wes McCart – presents a power point on creating a National Center for Public Lands Counties. Currently have about \$5.5M. Has the approval of NACO. Mission is NOT a lobbying entity. It's intended to be a policy and research entity for public lands. Educating people about PILF, etc. It is amazing to me how ill-informed members of Congress are. We met with some Congressional staff who had no idea of how PILF works. Really this will be a research foundation. This will be a good resource for any county that needs to do research on public lands. There is a guy who has a wealth of knowledge on the subject, and all of his work could be there for others to access. There were some folks who were concerned about recreation. We now have a subcommittee on recreation who is represented on the board. Our goal is to have about \$15M over 2 years. We are asking each county to contribute 1% of their LATCF (Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency) funds. He goes on to discuss how many other counties have committed.

What is this research foundation going to give us, and where is it going? First of all we want to do a Public Lands 101 learning session. We all know that there is a constant turnover of county commissioners, and we want to make sure they have information available. It will be nice because if all counties are putting info in we can all learn from it. There is an oversight committee (shows screen with names of people). Mentions other subcommittees and names of members. Talks about how the org. would decide on what projects to do.

9:12 CB – Asks about the center that WM is representing and if it is similar to MRSC. Asks if Congress would put any money into it.

WM – says the national league of cities has a similar org. Gives example about how a large donor from NY made a donation, but then influenced what the org did. The LATCF funds - they were going to give the PILT money to all counties in the US. You would not have seen the payout that you do. You are the big winner in a sense. We are asking for a donation that is an investment in the future. If you put the half payment you have already received in the bank, you have already earned more in interest. I believe your PILT payment is north of \$2M. It's discretionary funding, so not guaranteed. We have asked them to make it permanent, but there is no guarantee that it will keep funding. And with the increasing deficits it's looking like it will not keep going. We need to work on another appropriation.

JN – Is Congress going to have open access to this so they can be educated along with us?

WM – I think the idea is that we will put information out there for Congress but they may not have access to every part of it. The idea is that Congress and their staff would use it to educate themselves. We want to educate congress on these rural counties and their plans. Right now the NW forest Plan is being updated, and it's pretty important. There are lots of things we can do. We are in the process of hiring someone to run the Center, and once they are up and running, we'll be asking folks to contribute data.

JN – What is the section on recreation? What is that?

WM – There are some counties that have “gateway communities”. Gives example of a CA county. There are a small number of permanent residents, but large numbers in the tourist season. Some concerns are for example when Covid hit, the numbers went way up and these places were overwhelmed. Not enough law enforcement and services. Not enough housing. How do we tell the story to the Federal Govt about how it affects us. The Fed Govt creates these places, but the cost is on the counties.

CB – points out that there are studies that show the benefits from having public lands and the associated tourism. Relates that the PILT payment last year was \$3.1M.

WM – Some counties have entered into cooperation with the Fed Govt. Gives an example in Wyoming that had to do with oil drilling and endangered species. WE are being attacked every which way. I don't know if you have been paying attention, but the EPA is getting ready to list the Columbia River as a superfund site all the way from Grand Coulee to the Canadian Border. We are going to meet with them to see if they will let the study be completed before they do that. That way if you do go to a NACO meeting, we could use the center to have current information,.

JN – where will the office be?

WM – in the NACO DC office. Most of the interested counties are in the west, although there will be some East Coast participation. In May I will likely be President of WIR, so if you have ideas I will be in a huge position to influence that.

JN – I'm sorry AH isn't here because I'm sure he would have a lot of questions.

WM – I know that it's asking for a lot of money, but we just received all this potential funding and it would be a shame to lose it. We don't even know at this point if we are going to receive PILT in 2024. Congress hasn't funded it yet. If we have to fill that budget hole it will be really hard. ONC counties in Oregon is an org that got to keep timber receipts when others didn't. The school funding is largely funded by some payments that aren't guaranteed. Bob Wagner is out there telling counties that this is a waste of money. This is not true. He knows nothing about it.

CB – AH will be able to review this conversation and get back to you with questions.

WM – LAPCF funds can be used for this as long as it is managed correctly. You guys are the biggest public lands county, so you get the largest PILT payment.

CB – AH shared with me that they were going to come up with their own formula.

JN – We will be having that conversation and will most likely come up with a plan.

WM – we are asking all counties for 1%.

CB – We normally use that for projects, and this could be considered another project.

WM – we would like to take the entire \$15M and invest it and just use the interest for our operational costs. It's kind of hard for people to imagine something that is not up and running yet, but it's nice to know that you are in the driver seat. Gives cell number to BOCC so that AH can contact him.

9:38 – JN – I talked to Chuck yesterday. Sounds like they have a few more things to work out. *(referring to the new Fairgrounds manager)*

CB – I want to put a positive spin on it. There were some people who were going to step out anyway with new management. JN – that's the gist of the resignation letter that I read.

JN – I told him that the BOCC would fully support his as long as he stays in his lane.

CB – some folks were lined up with the previous management, but hopefully he doesn't take it the wrong way. I was hoping that he would be able to weather the initial storm.

JN – I sensed a lot of frustration with how slow things tend to move.

CB – there is a lot of internal stuff about the different uses and the priorities. I was looking at the Fair budget and am wondering if I read it right. I didn't look closely at the Fairgrounds budget yet. It seemed like it increased a lot. We should look at that at some point.

JN – I'm sure that the Fair budget typically runs in the red. It usually does. A lot of these numbers are through the end of the year so they don't show any carry-over.

CB – just glancing at the expense from 2021, it was \$204K, and this year it's over \$700K.

Discussion about the Fairgrounds facility budget.

JN – we're going to have to take a hard look at whether renting out the facilities is cost effective.

We've made some adjustments to the fees which may help to right the ship, but...

CB – we need to see if the facilities are adequate to meet the needs. More discussion of comparisons between years.

9:48 – LJ interrupts to say that the Auditor has cancelled update for later this morning. She has nothing to report.

JN – asks if they can bump SK up to 10:30.

9:50 CB – asks if JN wants him to bring anything up with the Leg while he is in Olympia.

Discussion about a couple of State Legislators who are also county commissioners and how that is possible.

9:54 – KWY requested meeting today so that we can get the contract signed between the county and WSU. This is to fund the position of the Extension Agent. The amount is different from last year, but it was an approved line item in your budget.

JN – asks if it is the same as in the WSU budget.

KWY – yes. You will see three copies that need to be signed. We need 3 originals.

LJ – asks what the fund number is so that she can code it properly.

CB – Discussion about budget details. Moves to approve the MOU to fund position. Voted and approved.

10:01 – LJ – the architect of the justice center needs some info to move forward on the parking lot. Needs to know about two products and which one to use. BOCC reviews info.

AH arrives at about 10:02 AM.

Conversation about earlier discussion with WM.

CB – says that there seems to be a difference of opinion about the role of certain individuals.

Back to discussion about the proposal of the non-profit from WM. AH asks if other states are paying into it.

JN – reviews conversation he had with Fairgrounds manager.

AH – I think we should contract the Fair out to a non-profit. It would be beneficial to the Fair itself. The regulation that govt has to put on vendors and contracts precludes them from being flexible. The FAC are volunteers who try to make the Fair work, and they have done a good job, but the interplay between county govt, the Fairgrounds manager and FAC has always been ambiguous. The responsibilities that are put on the volunteers are a lot. Other counties have done it successfully. You just have a contract with the org that say we will pay you X amount to put on the Fair.

CB – It takes the politics out of it. We should look into it carefully and make sure that we are thoughtful about the process.

AH – I just meant that we should make the effort to look into it. I think Douglas county does it.

CB – Whoever would step up to do it needs to have clear understanding of the expectations. I would be curious who they contract with. Would we go with a new business, or one who has done it before?

AH – comments are due on the 12th for the wildlife conservation policy – that's a bunch of junk!

10:15 LJ- just before you came in I asked the other BOCC members about moving forward with choosing best materials for the justice center. I sent you an email with the details. At 11:45 Mike Wordon is going to be updating you on equipment for Sheriff's building.

CB – asks about justice center parking lot material.

JN – asks if it is just for during the construction phase, or is it intended to be long term?

More discussion. LJ calls the architect and gets him on the phone to answer the BOCC questions directly. CB – asks if the asphalt mix shown on the site plan includes the whole parking lot, or just the utility strip.

Arch: we are a bit over budget, so we wanted to run it by you. Right now we are just going to cover the trenches that have been torn up to install utilities. There is going to be quite a bit of the parking lot, including some of the public works building next door that will be torn up. The question is how far do you want to go? Right now it's patch and repair, but it is an opportunity to take care of the larger area.

CB – we will want to talk to our county engineer about that. It might be good for us to make a site visit. Now that we understand, we will discuss it and get back to you.

Arch – while you are chewing on that, you might want to consider pavement markings, etc. Some of them are pretty old and if you want to update we can do that.

CB – I did see some emails about that, and agree that markings in parking lots are pretty important.

10:29 - SK – We were approved for the SPAR grant, which is for public defender. It bills back to July 1 of 2023. It will don't supplant our existing contract. I think we are good to move forward, and may be able to recoup some funds to move forward. They are asking for a decision by Friday. I've sent it to the office of public defense and they have no objection to accepting as written.

CB – It's a drop in the bucket but it's a start.

AH – when is our next report due for ARPA?

CB – I will have to look it up.

SK – this is all I have for today.

BOCC – agrees that it should be approved. BOCC votes to approve.

AH – mentions a nurse care manager in the jail who helped get the program started. We then added another position. What they are asking for is up to 4 additional per diem positions.

What I would like to do is look at the resolution that created the nurse care manager.

Discussion about how to set up system to accommodate what is needed.

BOCC moves and votes to approve the necessary steps to do what is needed.

10:44 – BOCC goes into Exec Session for 10 minutes to discuss union negotiation.

10:56 Josh Thompson and Amy Staggs arrive for Public Works update.

CB asks JT about a section of road and who is responsible for it.

AH – asks LJ how long the Sheriff needs and suggests that he come in the afternoon.

11:00 JN – opens the Public Works update.

JT – maintenance and roads – not much snow, not much activity. The cold is a good thing, especially on the dirt roads.

The shops are making good progress. Need to move the "day tank" inside for waste oil heaters. There are a few things that we don't like, but may not be able to change.

Regarding the proposed Zone code, with R1 going to R2, and then new rules for R5, gravel pits over 3 acres are not permitted, even for conditional use. That covers every pit we currently have. We wouldn't be able to permit any new ones. We are not even sure that we could make changes to existing pits. That applies to commercial pits as well. It looks like we would not be able to make any modifications. Anything that we could possibly use in the future would fall into this category.

CB – it could still be a conditional use?

JT – I think so.

CB – talks about examples of ways to modify code to accommodate need. These pits draw a lot of attention.

JT – I don't know the reasons behind the change. For example, our Greenacres pit is on rocky high ground zoned R2, but there are not a lot of houses there. There is a spot up near Havillah that we are looking at.

CB – asks if he submitted a comment.

JT – yes, we did yesterday. I see that the comment period has been extended so we may do another one.

LJ – asks to clarify whether these changes have been made yet.

AH – explains that the Zone code has proposed changes that are out for comment now – the changes have NOT been approved.

CB – mentions that proposed gravel pit areas could be identified as places that are not appropriate for development.

JT - asks how it got this far without the Public Works dept being notified of this change.

CB – says that unfortunately it is driven by lawsuits with deadlines for revising the zone code so it forced them to rush it.

AH – says this would be a significant change that would require it to go back out for another comment period.

JT – we helped a private individual get a pit going, and they are starting to become aware of the issue. You might be hearing from them.

AS – talks about the recreational trails. As you know, I recently took over the trails for the county. I have talked to the Methow Trails folks and have a meeting with them on the 17th. They have info for me. I've been up to Whistler canyon and Similkameen to see what's up there. Peggy Swanberg has been emailing me about Whistler Canyon. They want to install a horse corral. They spend 40 hours per year on weed control and they think that having horses there would help keep the weeds under control.

AH – I would be hesitant to just put one big corral there. You can't have a bunch of horses all together. I would go check out the horse camp on the Loup Loup summit put in by the forest Service. It's a nice facility and could be a good example of something that works.

JT – I think they want to remove some trees that have been planted. There is a large open area right next to it so I'm not sure why they want to remove trees.

AS – she did say that it didn't have to be a corral, just anything to control the weeds. And they are not asking for any funding.

Discussion about looking into the history of the spot (check with the Back Country Horsemen) to see who has been maintaining it in the past and what did they do?

CB – I'm pretty familiar with the place.

AS – they mentioned that somebody put in a landscape mound in place that wasn't part of the original plan and nobody knows why that happened.

AH – suggests obtaining some water from the neighbors and installing some sprinklers with battery operated controls.

JT – bottom line is that somebody put some work into it and we shouldn't make changes without finding out the history.

AH – pointed out that it is county owned property and anything that is done needs to be by the book.

AS – they are asking that the county pay for the porta-potty that is there during the summer. They have paid for it for the past few years. (about \$177 for the year).

AH – you can install a vault toilet and pay for it with LTAC funds. Methow Trails did that.

LJ – mentions that LTAC is going to begin the 2025 LTAC application process in February. You may want to look into that.

AS – says that the person who emailed mentioned that they would like to have a permanent toilet there but didn't have the funds.

CB – there are a lot of people who use that area. When they have the guest books out at the trailheads people fill them out and they come from everywhere. Some are from a long ways away.

JT – there is some funding that we are strategizing about. Thinking about applying for it. There is so much state and Federal funding we need to look at all options. We need to be strategic about when we apply so that it corresponds to the road conditions.

JT – we have some cattle guard renewals. We have an annual resolution for Temp employee wages. Most bumped up by 5%.

That's all I have.

JN – we had a question about some paving at the new justice center when they resurface the utility trenches.

JT – it would be best to compact it and dig down 2".

CB – of course we are looking at the budget, but the condition of both the public works parking lot and the justice center are not good. So that's a budget issue. I hate to let that stuff go for a long time, but we have to find the money. It leaves a bad impression to do all that work then leave the parking lot in poor shape. The public doesn't understand.

JT – if there is not a bigger plan, it would look better if we just did a seal.

CB – asks about the gravel with treatment. What is it?

JT – they sometimes have a binder that they use on the top two inches. Sometimes they call it a dust palliative. Discussion about different products and the pros and cons.

JT – bottom line is a parking lot really should be paved.

11:39 – BOCC says that's all they have. Some casual conversation about a guy building a house.

11:41 – Mike Wordon (Sheriff's dept). Asks if Pete Palmer is coming. She was invited.

Sent up architect MJ Neal proposal for the Sheriff and Coroner equipment shed and storage space. PP has been good about reviewing the plans. We have reviewed it and are happy with it at this point. We would like the BOCC to start the process of designing and building.

PP – I reviewed it to make sure that there wasn't a lot of duplication, and to ensure that we got copies of all documents.

AH – moves to authorize proposal. BOCC votes to authorize.

11:48 - MW and PP leave.

AH – talks about draft comments on WDFW draft conservation policy. He tried to keep his comments to asking about why the proposed policy does not align with the RCW.

11:51 – BOCC adjourns until afternoon session.