

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday September 26, 2023 AM

Present:

Chris Branch (CB) – BOCC Chair, District 1

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

Jon Neal (JN) – BOCC, District 3

Lanie Johns (LJ) – Clerk of the Board

Cameron Burnette (CaB) – Assistant 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:

- Recommend listening to this in-depth discussion: Superior Court Judge Hank Rawson is being forced into retirement due to state law, due to his age (75), by the end of this year. The Governor will appoint his replacement. He thanks BOCC for his opportunities of working together and gives thoughts on ongoing mental health needs in jail. Staffing shortages at Juvenile and working on Opioid Abatement Council.
- Weed Office Staff get upgrades/reclassification.
- Mazama Advisory Board, working on the Methow Valley Sub Unit A, requests financial help to get planning services and other needs as they are essentially part of the County government.
- Public Works: Tonasket Shop to be completed in November, Twisp Shop to be completed in January. Some discussion of Cow Creek off Texas Creek – whether is a County Road.
- Adjourned 11:38

8:15

Superior Court Update with Dennis Rabidou (DR) and Judge Hank Rawson (HR)

DR – We're down 1 position in the Superior Court and 5 positions in Juvenile. The interpreter position is filled. We're doing okay with our overtime budget.

Kicking off a new grant with Okanogan Behavioral Healthcare (OBHC), keeping focused on prevention strategies. Looking forward to the official kick-off. States he will update on the Opioid Abatement Council later, researching subject currently. AH asks who is on the council? DR – the only one I know is Commissioner Overbay from Chelan Co. I'm not sure of others. Will meet in person this Thursday.

8:22

AH-there's \$149,000 in Opioid accounts/funds right now, but there are a couple different settlements,

and we should check where the payments come from due to different settlements.

CB – I have been coordinating with Commissioner Overbay and am expecting an invite to this group.

DR – I thought there was another award. I'll look into it. DR asks CB – Were you able to get to the VFW down there? They were looking at 2 or 5 years. CB – It's nice to have the revenue but not if they're going to move soon.

JN – If things progress, we may need to get them out.

DR – They have an extensive process of review.

DR asks the BOCC whether they have joined the other 22 counties on the lawsuit against DSHS regarding mental health services. CB – Do you want us to? DR – I was just curious. It is for failing to provide mental health services and relates to jails. AH – Because you're well engaged, please advise us if we should sign on. DR – We were surprised by this also.

Judge HR – We have people waiting in jail, people on the street waiting for a psychiatric evaluation from Eastern State, well over a year some times and there are a lot of issues with that. A lot of it. People need beds for substance abuse and mental health issues. Historically, in the 60's people were let out of the institutions back into society, and it seems as though it's all come back on us. Drugs are pervasive in high schools – even middle schools. I remember the DARE program. I don't think it's being discussed much in schools now.

AH asks HR- Do you think the lawsuit is warranted?

HR continues – If we arrest more, we have to build more prisons. We've changed. We're using less prisons. But now we have this mental health issue. So, they say let's build more mental health facilities. This doesn't really solve the problem. You need to connect with the person. Some of it is self-induced. Look at the meth issue. The Drug Court program requires a minimum of 2 years because it takes that long to get the effects on the body from the drug use out of the body. We know now the human brain isn't fully developed until age 25. There is a whole gamut of human development issues to consider. We want to give people access to services, get people timely evaluations and support for the long term. I've had attorneys recommend evaluation by the state, but that could take months. I don't want to keep people in jail. I'd rather evaluate while they're in jail. I'd like to see a mental health court in order to oversee inmates/patients treatment for addiction and mental health. They obviously have a disability, a mental health condition. They(*inmates/patients*) need to have someone come in, check on them, make sure they are taking their meds, get counseling, have that personal connection. You can't just let them walk the streets. They're just walking the streets.

CB- Relates that in his different organizations, he has been a part of many discussions regarding these problems.

HR- Would like outreach places in each town, and in different parts of town.

JN states there are certain areas that are broken.

HR – They are not always on meds in jail.

CB offers that he knows a former addict that is willing to go to jail to work with people. While in jail, there's a certain amount of detox where they are more receptive to changing their course. Helps them connect with programs once they are out.

8:38

HR – We do have a navigator program, that is really helpful, but I think it would be more helpful getting attorneys and other staff education regarding mental health and drug addiction to help people who are incarcerated. When I was practicing, we used to go down to the jail and just talk face to face. Covid really changed the face to face. You just don't get the same vibe on the phone or video, you lose body language. Lawyers that talk legal ease and they talk way over their heads. You have to get down on their level. There are just a lot of aspects.

HR- To answer your question, it would be nice to lend a voice of support to that (*the lawsuit*). Usually, money needs to go toward funding, and it needs to be a long-term program, maybe go towards

buildings, but better to educate, get psychiatrists, doctors or nurses to check on them in the jail, for medication management and counseling. It's a lot to throw on the corrections officers. But I don't want to just throw money at the problem, but the best time (*for intervention*) seems to be when they are in jail.

AH- The reason I posed the question, it's good for us to be on the same page as the court.

JN- references the lawsuit filed by counties against DSHS to address mental health. The Commissioners have discussed it and Esther has proposed a resolution. I'll forward it to you.

8:44

HR -We've had local problems with DSHS and Washington Department for Children, Youth and Family (DCYF). Unless a good placement is found, kids remain in jail.

CB- 22 counties have signed on.(*to the lawsuit*) The suit pertains to a, ...preliminary injunction to compel DSHS's immediate compliance with state law. (*re: mental health*). At this point, I don't know enough about it.

DR- states that at this point, we (*his staff*) aren't coming to BOCC with our issues.

HR – There are more defense lawyers needed. Dennis states our problems with filling positions earlier. 5 Candidates have submitted applications for my position to the Governor. I wish I could have finished out my term. BTW, Inslee has appointed, I believe, about 2/3 of judges in the state. I think the people should decide. I want Robert Grim to take over as presiding Judge till the end of the year. He's receiving training. I will take care of the house, so to speak. I am adjusting but looking forward to down time/retirement. HR thanks the Commissioners for their service. I have always felt a responsibility to the citizens of Okanogan County and the State of Washington, the country and others for that matter. I feel a responsibility to uphold the constitution – the fundamental rights. Incarcerated persons are citizens, and presumed innocent. It is a fundamental right to be heard in court by a jury of their peers. I also think it is important for citizens to serve on a jury. I am concerned about incarcerated individuals, sitting in the county jail waiting for a mental health evaluation. I am a citizen like everyone else, I pay taxes and I am concerned about costs also. HR thanks the BOCC for the opportunities he has had as Judge and for use of the Commissioner's Hearing room for the family therapy court. I am being forced to retire because of being 75 years old. I will be having a birthday party at the Omak Elks on November 11th @6:30. You're all invited and Dennis will notify them of some other possible event. He will be retiring at the end of the year.

After Judge Rawson & Dennis Rabidou leave, this begins discussions regarding approaches to planning and mental health/substance dependence issues.

CB- It's about the intercept model. How people get into the system. At a county level, do we understand where our shortfalls are. Do counties need more facilities to deal with mental health issues? If DSHS isn't doing what they need to do, a lawsuit would really get their attention. One of our problems is staffing.

JN- With elections every two years, there are new participants, new ideas. We need a plan and stick to it. It's sad, there is a lot of money spent on studies and nothing ever happens.

CB reports that a Jackie from Skagit County wants to come talk with the BOCC about communication.

9:09

JN & CB – More fairgrounds discussions

9:18

Public Comment – Ruth Hall surprised to learn that Judge Rawson needs to step down now. She also

spoke to the problems of the mental health and substance dependence issues, not only here in the county but across America, and how there are such differing views on how to address the problem.

9:27

Board discusses Community Projects. & AH brings up how that related to the Capital Improvement Plan.

9:30

Public Hearing Budget Supplemental Appropriation LATCF for Dispatch – HVAC
No Public Comment. BOCC approved Resolution 128-2023 authorizing DIVCO to complete the HVAC project for \$48,375.

9:33

Larry Hudson to discuss Noxious Weed Staff Re-Classification Request. Mr. Hudson had previously, sent the resolution to the Board to re-classify. We are having problems attracting and keeping people in the Weed Office. We have lost staff to better opportunities. We're eliminating our 6 month seasonal position and want to pay others more to keep them. There are 2 full time staff whose main job is inspecting for weeds and talking with the landowner about the problem. 3 vacant positions. AH shares his personal story regarding how well the weed staff helped him with the Water Hemlock problem at his ranch.

9:44

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the Resolution 129-2023 authorizing the reclassification for Weed Office staff.

10:00

Representatives from the Mazama Advisory Board;
Karen Reneau (KR) and Jim Gregg (JG) in the meeting.
Other Board Members: Casey Smith, John Sunderland, Claire Bunning, Bill Craven

KR explains how they are appointed by the BOCC and are Sub Unit A in the Methow Valley for the Comprehensive Plan. They are working on weeding out a lot of old information as land use changes over time. We've done what we can so far but we need the help of a planner and we don't have any funding. We're happy to give of our time but we need to be part of the County budget.

AH explains that we (The County) has a procurement policy to follow so we need to be a part of the conversation.

KR states that Pete Palmer, Planning Director is saying to apply for funds through the Economic Alliance.

CB says that however, the County has the responsibility to provide this service as this advisory group is part of the County. He also explains how Barnholt Loop also is their own planning area. We would have to provide planning services. JG states that we want to submit a subunit plan to stand on our own. The Planning Director has met with us 2 times. JG – Last year we applied for shaping of Mazama Plan and were rated #4. KR goes on to explain how they are no longer a 501-c (*nonprofit*) which was maybe not a good idea to let go of.

10:20

AH discusses other possible funding. CB – if it goes toward Economic Development, then the Economic Alliance is possible.

10:24

AH -also the project could get funded with LTAC \$\$\$. He asks if the other 2 Commissioners are okay with asking for LTAC funds. CB – LTAC has to sort that through. JG explains that there have been so many boundary line adjustments that makes it difficult for them to do and that is another reason that

they need planning services. They have paid Kurt Danison (*before*) but they do not have the money now.

10:30

KR – I've put in an application and have written up a letter of intent. LJ states this needs to go for the Infrastructure Committee.

AH would like to talk about this on an ongoing basis and wants to determine a process for future applications.

LJ – We need to get all this information into the record. Would this be outlined in the resolution? AH – Probably now in the resolution as would be kept separate – maybe it's own resolution.

CB – The Mazama Group is no longer a non-profit but the County is eligible to apply, so we can authorize the application in the name of the County. This would be part of “planning” for infrastructure.

JG- we are working as a committee for you guys, but we don't have a budget. We would like to get a book printed.

10:55

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the letter for the Mazama Sub Area Planning Unit's request for funding.

11:00

Public Hearing on Utility Franchise U-05-23 Kellie Davis – waterline on Valley View Drive

JoAnn Stansbury gives the Staff Report – this is a renewal. No public comment

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve this Utility Franchise renewal under Resolution 130-2023.

11:05

Public Hearing on Utility Franchise U-06-23 for Marva Junea -waterline on Valley View Drive

JoAnn Stansbury gives the Staff report – renewal No Public Comment

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve this request with Resolution 131-2023.

11:09

Public Works Update with County Engineer, Josh Thomson (JT)

On maintenance and roadside, grading is easier with the new rain

Construction projects:

Johnson Creek/Greenacres Road project going well.

The County Shops construction – Contractor expects to be done on time. Tonasket shop to be completed in November. Twisp Shop – by January.

JT reports on the paperwork for the sale of the WDFW pit from DOT.

11:15

It was moved, seconded, and carried to authorize the County Engineer to sign letter of intent and landowner acknowledgement form for the property south of Carlton to give to the WDFW.

JT also reports that the Mazama Bridge property of \$115,000 purchase price is set. Money transfer with RCO still being worked on with the Methow Conservancy. Still not complete and will run the “surplus real estate purchase form” by the Civil Deputy.

CB asks JT about a road off Texas Creek, near Cow Creek Road. JT doesn't believe it is a County Road. *There was quite a bit of discussion about this road and even went after the meeting was adjourned. Also, old RV's parked in roadways being discussed with JT, JN & CB*

Meeting adjourned at 11:38 until afternoon session.