

Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting Monday, November 6, 2023, AM and PM sessions

CB – Chris Branch, BOCC Chair, District 1
AH – Andy Hover, BOCC vice-chair, District 2
JN- Jon Neal, BOCC member, District 3
PP – Pete Palmer, Planning Director
CF – Chuck Ford, Fairgrounds Facilities Manager
SS – Susan Speiker, County Clerk
DM – David McClay, OBHC
CH – Cari Hall, Auditor
PJ – Pam Johnson, Treasurer
LJ – Lanie Johns, Clerk of the 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:

- *Fairgrounds considering waiving fees for certain organizations.*
- *DOE has identified 13 properties that are illegally in the flood plain. County has sent letters*
- *There will be a new chapter in the County Code (#19) to address enforcement on land use issues*
- *New software for tracking building permits will be coming online soon.*
- *County Clerk gives presentation on what her office does.*
- *OBHC report. Retention of employees is improving, still have work to do.*
- *Discussion about grizzly bear re-introduction and wildlife management in general.*
- *Work on budget for Emergency Mgmt Dist and others.*

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](#).

BOCC starts off with Exec Session to discuss union contract negotiation strategies.

Resumes with visit from a woman who wants to have a road renamed.

9:29 – Chuck Ford – has 2 groups looking for fee waivers.

Special Olympics holiday bazaar want fees waived. AH says he doesn't want to advocate that to you. You have to go through the litmus test. How does this serve the community. I would rather have them come to us and we can make the decision. There aren't that many of those. If they are a church group, then maybe we can do 50%, maybe we can do 100%

The other one is the spay and neuter clinic. In the past they had the fees waived 100% last year. That one is sooner and I wanted to talk about. AH – that one is harder. How is that serving the community and poor and infirm? CF – we need to find out more – are people paying, etc. AH – the documentation is important to us. The fee schedule sets the rates for schools at 50%. He should not have to come to us for anything that is set in the fee schedule.

CF – my goal is to have a spreadsheet for all of this.

CF – moving on, I have a conflict with 2 events that were scheduled before I got here. I would like to have 2 weeks before the fair to get things cleaned up. This event falls within that period so I will talk to them about rescheduling. Just want to make sure you are OK with that.

JN – we need to talk about the RV park and how that impacts the fair.

CF – I want the Fairgrounds empty for those 2 weeks so I can make sure that it is ready for Fair. BOCC moves and votes to direct CF to make policy that will clear the fairgrounds for 2 weeks prior to the Fair.

CF – discusses an email that he sent to the BOCC about strategic planning.

BOCC moves and votes to make JN the liason between the BOCC and Fairgrounds manager.

CB – brings up water plan for fairgrounds that is needed to apply for grants from State DOH.

CF – Am going to apply for some grants that I am applying for this week. AH – reminds him that the BOCC has to assign off if there is a financial match required.

CB – asks Maurice if he has anything to report. No. Asks Jim if he has anything. “Jim” reports that he hasn't been able to get anyone to deal with the tree. They are going to go do it themselves. AH – asks him to make sure they have safety wires any time they get up on the roof. This is required by L & I. Discussion about details of cutting the tree down (chainsaw specs, etc.)

9:47 – AH wants to talk about prevailing wage. It seems as though we have to pay prevailing wage. If someone wants to dispute it I would be happy, but for now we have to comply. I'd like to check into that. LJ- has been checking into it for certain services, and some are exempt. AH – we should have a checklist of public works with a flow chart to help us know how to proceed within the rules. Discussion about the list of jobs and what is left out.

9:52 – PP reports on planning dept and the projects that DOE has listed for our area. ([Click HERE](#) to see the DOE document that outlines the projects. You will need to scroll down to Appendix B). They have a lot going on. I won't get too much into conversation today as I would like a separate agenda item in the future. There are some items in there that fall on Okanogan

County such as meetings, website updates, etc. I went through it thoroughly this weekend and came up with a couple suggestions.

We need to form some kind of group to oversee the implementation of this plan. I suggest the initiating governments. There is a separate group that should report to that committee, which would be the project sponsors. They could meet quarterly, and update the information that we are required to report to the DOE. The ones I have not been involved with is waterbanking, etc. I would suggest either a public newsletter, keeping the website updated, and possibly an annual meeting. I was only able to update 2 projects, but after looking at it, I think we can do better, and should do better. I would like to ask for an hour on a future agenda to go over this.

CB – that would give us time to review it.

PP – on Nov 16 we will meet with DOE (4 people). I'm trying to gather questions that we want to ask them. There were several things they wanted to see (per letter) such as code change for flood plain management, and others. We have 13 violation letters that just went out. They were late and we have enforcement challenges. The DOE were the ones who identified the properties. We hit every requirement that they put in there. We have done everything they asked except the code amendment.

CB- were the locations of the property in any particular area? PP - up and down the valley mostly. If you would like to participate just let me know. CB – asks if any were on the Res. PP – yes, a couple.

PP – Our contracted permitting software company wanted another \$14K for data migration. We already paid it but they couldn't find it. They agreed to waive the fee and are going to do the data migration. JN – there had been discussion that the program isn't all that great. Building dept doesn't think it will help them.

PP – it is not about making our life easier, it's about making information available to the public. It will allow folks to get through the process a lot quicker, and also to understand it, and reduce the phone calls that we get. It will let people know what their neighbors are doing. We are looking at the first week in December for staff training on it. I can see how other departments are not happy with it because it was forced on them. Just like us – it was forced on us. I think that it will reduce phone calls to all departments when people get used to it and start using it. CB – we can check with the Assessor's office. I stumbled upon some info that was on a page that was not available for every parcel. I'm curious about mapsifter and how it will interface with this new program.

PP – my concern with mapsifter is that the information is not accurate (such as addresses, etc.). When people have more than one parcel it can cause some problems.

PP – can you sign the document to accept the contract for the data migration. BOCC moves and approves.

PP – updates on staff capacity. I appreciate that you are funding contracts for some of this work – it's really helped. I have a job description for a senior planner who will focus on enforcement. As you know Esther Milner is creating a new code chapter (19) that will be about enforcement. We will be pretty busy through the end of the year. Outlines schedule for creation of lake management district.

PP – I have created some content for code language. We are waiting for comment from Yakimas. Do you want to look at it before we put it out to the public? CB – yes. Decide on

Wednesday Nov 22nd. AH – suggests that if they are coming in they should also schedule some budget work as long as they are there. Discussion about juggling schedules.

10:20 – PP says that there will be a code revision on the shoreline mgmt plan title 20 – small revision regarding process. It won't affect Ecology's requirements.

10:22 - LJ – we have received emails about Similkimeen spur trail not being open. Want to know how long it will be closed. It was closed after the Eagle fire and there are safety concerns. PUD owns part of the property, and some the county owns. CB discusses the issue, mentions a grant that was received. Suggests talking to Josh (Public Works) about it.

10:25 - CB – Mentions an issue with an electronic calendar entry that doesn't make sense.

10:38 – CB discusses an undersized lot that was created and a complicated situation involving family members who want to sell it and can't. Had a meeting with the Assessor and he passed it off to the planning department to decide how to resolve it.

10:42 – AH asks when BOCC are going to look at LTAC list. LJ says she will add it to the consent agenda. CB leaves to meeting with building dept. while waiting for computer program to load on SS computer.

10:45 – SS shares PP on history and duties of County Clerk. She is sharing this with organizations and students to show what the Clerk's office does.

10:57 – SS in addition, I was able to order time clocks. There were some issues with the old ones and they will be refurbished. Some other new things, I am requiring staff only to stamp documents. They have to initial. There will be a new agreement from Christopher Stanley for an amended Blake Agreement. I have sent it to you. It includes Clerks for the billing process for Blake. I received notice on Oct 17th that it will be coming. I don't know when it will get here. On our website we now have future court dates link published 7 days in advance.

CB – how closely are you informed about jury selection process.

SS – that is under the court – I don't do anything with that. I only get involved during jury selection.

CB – we got notice that this room was reserved for jury selection on the 27th.

SS- I did not know that. I would like to know where it is also.

CB – I have a personal interest as I am on the list for that week.

SS – thanks BOCC and leaves.

11:06 – I haven't heard from Mr. McClay that he cancelled. I don't know why he is not here.

11:11 – BOCC approves vouchers.

11:14 – DM shows up. I sent you a document showing where the money we receive from the county is being spent. Our current staffing situation is: we have an opening for a crisis director. We will hire two child therapists, which will leave us two short. One of our folks will be leaving for the AG's office. Another will leave in January. We are recruiting to fill these positions. We are getting closer to fully staffed. Our turnover rates are about 17%, down from 32%. We have made an effort to reduce that. I would like to see around 10%. We are looking for a third DCR. We are open to subcontracting. We keep up with the SIMS mapping. We had a meeting to meet with the hospital ERs and the Sheriff and talk about what is working and not working. It was a productive meeting. CB – comments that he was there and thought so too. He remarked on something that Three Rivers talked about regarding a story they told about handling a difficult patient.

CB talks about how housing is so important to recovering from mental health issues.

DM – says there are many approaches. We need to deal with existing patients, and try to reduce new folks from falling into that situation.

The next one is the funds that go to the highland center. We are transitioning into daily living skills like cooking, doing laundry, etc.

The next is therapeutic courts. That is 100% county funded. It shows the number of people who have been served. There are a lot of good stories that come out of that where people end up clean and sober and good productive citizens.

The next one shows individuals who are served under a different program (developmentally disabled). 30 – 35 is the max for this program. Mostly funded by the state, but there are some county money in it.

AH – goes back to therapeutic court and asks why the numbers are so different from the approved budget.

DM – that's because we have not built out to what we have asked for.

LJ – it's offset because the December expenses are not paid until the following year.

DM – I think it's because the Shove House, Highland Center and Therapeutic Courts are listed separately, but funded from one source.

CB – asks to clarify this. Discussion follows about details of where funds come from.

DM – Next is Mental health and SUD village. 100% county funded. Chart shows numbers of kids that we are trying to get involved in programs. This is a lagging indicator. We spend the funds and then request them. We provide money for bus passes and free services. Discussion about difficulty of transportation in our large county.

DM – we have a couple of folks trained in mental health first aid. We'd like to get it in the schools to teach it. I don't know if you noticed at the SIMS meeting, but the talk is all about risk and lawsuits and attorneys, rather than actually getting people care. It's unfortunate, but people are reluctant to help for fear of lawsuits.

CB – mentions that the county insurance has gone up. Talks about tort reform and how that could help. At the risk pool with have a blend of different insurance. Some of the companies are refusing to cover certain things. The legislature can do their part by not making laws that open us up to lawsuits.

Ah – has question about mental health budget. Are you using all of those funds that you request?

DM – I think we could. I forget what we asked for this year.

AH – reviews the numbers with him. I know that this is a fixed budget, but we are going to do what we need to do. I think we will have more money than we had last year. Can you use more money next year?

DM – I'm not a fan of asking for more money just for the sake of it. But I think we could use it. For example, we are spending about \$5K on bus passes this year, so we are helping folks.

CB – asks about vacant positions and if they can be effective in filling them?

DM – I think we can spend that money. I will go back and take a good look.

CB – I'm thinking out loud. For example, CAC has a budget that is a lot of grants. We look at What grants are being spent, and which are not. Some can't be used because they can't find contractors for example. Sometimes you want to provide the service, but there are reasons why you can't deliver, such as not being able to fill positions.

DM – the staffing we do have, it does play a role in retention. Our clinical staff here gets frustrated when they want to provide a service but can't because of inability to pay. They want to help people.

AH – asks what bus passes are they providing.

DM – explains that OBHC purchases bus passes and gives to clients who need them.

AH – asks because he is on the Trango Board. Trango is funded by sales taxes. If OBHC is buying bus passes with county money to pay another agency it might not pencil out. Thinking it may be more efficient to have them pay for the passes rather than taking the money out of our limited funds.

Discussion about Trango in general (schedules, routes, etc.), then more talk about where the funds should come from for the bus passes.

CB – mentions that they are using opioid settlement money for investigations, and it may be more productive to use it for some of these other things.

DM – talks about working with an organization who is using a mental health block grant to provide some services such as putting a person in the jail to help with transitions. It makes the funding more straightforward. That may free up some other funds.

Discussion about value of this service.

DM – asks if there are more questions. CB says he hopes that DM benefited from the SIMS exercise. It was short notice, and a lot of people showed up. They made special mention of Okanogan County because the folks there are very passionate about what they are trying to do. There is a need for more resources. He was impressed with presentations from organizations who presented what they were trying to do, and the funding shortfalls they were experiencing. There is a big questions about working with other counties in terms of building a common facility (mental health, etc.). Everyone agreed that you can have the best facility in the world but if you don't have staff it's useless.

11:59 - DM leaves and BOCC adjourns for lunch.

Afternoon Session

1:30 – BOCC reconvenes and approves vouchers for Oroville, Tonasket and Methow Valley EMS districts.

2:07 – JN says that Seattle is going to triple property taxes to pay for housing. BOCC discusses how this is possible. *JN does not provide any evidence to back up his statement.* Says that when Jeff Bezos leaves the state it will cost WA state a couple hundred million dollars. CB talks about a rule regarding mobile homes that gets them around the tax rules. Mentions that some RVs can be modified to be considered a mobile home. Talks about how Okanogan County should update their ordinance to account for RVs and tiny homes. Discussion about this subject. Do tiny homes have to comply with the building code? AH reads a document from L & I regarding building codes for manufactured homes and tiny homes. Sounds like tiny homes will have to comply as of 2024. Question about why L & I is involved. LJ relates a story about an old (1973) mobile home that got moved to 3rd street and is being torn down to the studs and rebuilt. It caused a stir because it looked so bad when it first showed up. CB speculates that L & I will inspect it. LJ – says it doesn't look like the roof has any support. She was told that the town of Okanogan had a public hearing about allowing this vehicle to move into the mixed use neighborhood.

Discussion about pre-1976 mobile homes and the issues around them.

2:28 – CB gets call from civil attorney that he needs to take. BOCC moves and approves 100% fee waiver for Special Olympics use of the Agriplex on December 8-9.

2:31 – JN asks if AH went to the Methow Grizzly presentation. AH – says yes and it was pretty respectful. He said that he said it was a bad idea because we are a state that doesn't operate with common sense, but by litigation. Distrust of the process makes everyone complain and causes a lot of trouble. JN – said that it was brought up that in Yellowstone it sort of works, but they don't have 25K acres of fruit orchards. AH – says that Montana has very low population density compared to North Central WA. Gives an example of someone at the meeting who said that North Cascades Natl park is bigger than Banff and other Canadian areas. AH claims that is inaccurate. CB – says he talked to people who are scared to death of bears. He has a lot of respect for bears. When he goes to Alaska he carries a shotgun. AH – speculates how different it will be to have to put a fence up around their tents. CB – says he studied environmental studies and understands the ESA, but disagrees with some of it. In this case it's just asking for trouble that we don't need. AH – we can't come to consensus on how to manage wolves, how are we going to handle grizzlies? CB – If the only way we can manage them is to shoot them, then we have a problem. We have all kinds of problems like mental health, crime, and now we are going to add this to the mix? AH – says that his brother is adamant that he not shoot the coyotes on their ranch unless they are doing something that would harm livestock or people. Because they do a lot of good and learn how to behave around people. That's how he feels about wolves. Discussion about how many mice coyotes control. AH – I don't believe in just shooting animals just to shoot them. You have to manage them. If you have a bunch of coyotes killing your ducks or rabbits, then go out and shoot one or two, and they will get the message. CB – mentions a cougar that was shot and someone painted a message on it. That just encourages bad behaviour. AH – this is not a state that manages wildlife by common sense. This Spring WDFW scientists brought to the fish and game commission a study that said we should keep a Spring bear season. The Commission voted against it. The message is about how people feel, not about the science. That 10J rule (*one of the grizzly bear proposals*) looks good on paper, but who is going to defend all the lawsuits? CB – no matter what you do there is going to be someone that complains. You have to look at the makeup of the commission. I have been hearing some things I don't like. AH – they are trying to dismantle hunting. CB – Heard that they weren't considering subsistence hunting as part of their decisions. AH – and when that happens you don't get management of game. Gives example about a guy who lives up north. CB – the tribes manage it for subsistence and also consider the spiritual aspect. AH – that's like salmon. It's not just about putting your rod in the river. It's a way of life. It would be like if someone told me I couldn't go to church. CB – what would it look like if the tribes were in charge of WDFW. AH – I hear a lot about the Yakimas that some tribal members don't like. CB – even the tribal members disagree about things. AH – did you hear about the buffalo? Someone called me up and said did you know there are 30 buffalo in Okanogan County? CB – are they allowed to be hunted? AH – doesn't think so. Heard that they are pretty much staying put. JN – back to the grizzly discussion. Didn't hear anything about the Newhalem meeting. CB – there was some crazy stuff at the Methow meeting. I don't see any reason to beat up on the wildlife folks.

AH – They are just people doing their job.

JN – the biggest thing I would say is that everyone there loses sight of the fact that government is put in place for the people. The politicians do what they want no matter what the people want.

CB – that is why it is important to make sure there is trust.

JN – the facilitator got off on the wrong foot by saying that those two people are the most important people.

2:53 – Maurice Goodall and Finance committee arrive to discuss the Emergency management budget. CB – reminds everyone that this is a continuation of a conversation.

2:56 – budget discussion begins.

3:01 – AH – asks where they are on the wildfire protection plan. MG says that the Conservation District has funds and will be doing it. No funds needed for Emergency management for that purpose.

3:05 – finish with Emergency Management budget. AH asks to take a look at the LTAC budget. CH – there is no fund called LTAC. AH – fund #126. It's called something else.

3:17 – There are 5 jr taxing districts that have not submitted budgets yet. We gave them a deadline of Nov 1. BOCC will decide how to handle it.

3:22 – BOCC convenes as MV EMS district. Cindy has not submitted a budget and they are figuring out what to do about it. AH speculates that it has not been submitted because they are changing how they calculate it. PJ- We can just use the amount that you just approved. AH calls the Assessor.

3:33 – CH explains that the county is not required to track budgets for Jr taxing districts. They do it as a courtesy. If the jr district doesn't get their budget in, the checks will still be cut, the revenues will still get deposited, but the tracking won't happen. No monthly balances to compare to budget projections.

CB – suggests that they create a formal policy regarding what happens if jr taxing districts do not submit budgets.

CH – there are several financial policies that we will want to look at.

AH – asks how much cash is in the MV EMS fund.

CH – says that she was frustrated when she first started her job that there was no formal finance policy manual. We still need to look at the advance travel policy, the credit card policy, cash handling policy, and several more.

People talking at the same time – hard to hear the conversations.

3:46 – Finance committee decides to give a grace period this year until Nov 10th. Next year there will be no grace period. (For Jr taxing districts to submit budgets.).

BOCC convenes as LMD. Discusses options as there is a LMD election coming up. AH asks how will they know when LMD revenues have been deposited? PJ – It will be on your report.

CH – you can just submit a preliminary budget now, and then do a supplemental later when you have the actual numbers.

BOCC reconvenes as BOCC.

CB – says he just got a complaint about a junkyard. We should tell them that we are working on an ordinance with teeth.

3:53 – CH mentions that they have a budget meeting scheduled for the Wednesday afternoon before thanksgiving. Asks if they can reschedule as there are many people who will be gone.

All agree to cancel meetings for the 22nd.

4:00 – public hearings on several budget supplementals interspersed with anecdotes about encountering moose on the highway.