

**Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Wednesday January 17th<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 1:30 p.m.**

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**Present:**

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2  
John Neil (JN), BOCC District 3  
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1  
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board  
Albert Linn (AL), Prosecutor  
Esther Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor  
Larry Hudson (LH), Noxious Weeds  
Daniel Higbee (DH), Building Official  
Will Bolton (WB), WA Dept. Natural Resources  
Craig Nelson (CN), Executive Director, Okanogan Conservation District  
Dylan Streeter, Wildfire Resiliency Recovery Planner, Okanogan Conservation District  
Eli Loftis (EL), Wildfire Community Resiliency Lead Planner, Okanogan Conservation District  
Emmy Engalls, Communication/Outreach Specialist, Okanogan Conservation District  
Maurice Goodhal (MG), Emergency Manager

*Time stamps refer to the time on the wall clock. An AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date is available at:*

*[https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live\\_streaming\\_of\\_meetings.php](https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php)*

**Summary of Important Discussions:**

- *Executive session with Prosecutor, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor and Planning Director to discuss a law asserting the right to hold executive sessions. Prosecutor mentions "overwhelming" incident in child support service which prompted letting 2 employees take rest of day off.*
- *Building Dept. report says this year "not far off normal"; new energy code to be adopted but not finalized yet, Wilderness-Urban Interface code required as of March 15th; requiring « snow roofs » for mobile homes would raise affordable housing issue ; salary boost for most valuable employee requested*
- *Okanogan Conservation District representatives present progress on County Wildfire Protection Plan to assess and reduce risk from wildfires, completion planned for June; not a regulatory document but adding acreage to Wilderness-Urban Interface will increase funding; Community study reaps 670 responses*
- *Motion of Understanding to participate in grizzly restoration environmental impact study approved*
- *PUD proposal for engineering of internet project doesn't satisfy Board*
- *Brief discussion during minutes approval suggests difference in Lodging Tax applications between Methow and Okanogan valleys; tourism discussed*
- *Meeting adjourned at 4:51*

1:30 - AL: Before we go in *(to the executive session)* I have a resolution to resume to the Commissioners. Earlier this morning there was an issue over at child support. It caused an overwhelming situation (inaudible)

making it difficult for *(inaudible)* to work today. *(Passes out the resolution.)*

CB: We have to address Resolution 7-2024 allowing the Child Support Office and the Prosecutor's Office the use of administrative leave. *Motion carried. AL, EM, with Planning Director Pete Palmer and two others attending remotely, go into executive session planned for half an hour to discuss RCW 42.30.110 (1)(i) which states "Nothing contained in this chapter may be construed to prevent a governing body from holding an executive session during a regular or special meeting." When the video recording of the public meeting resumes, LH has already given most of his noxious weeds report.*

2:56 - End of Noxious Weeds Report - LH: The last thing on my list here is I wanted you to know that our annual Noxious Weeds Listing hearing is next week, just prior to our regularly scheduled board meeting, at 4 o'clock. We adopt the state's noxious weed list as well as any selected by the Weed Board. No planned changes. Three select weeds: puncture vine, long spined sand burr and spurred flex. Control required in all public parking lots and right of ways.

2:59 - Presentation of Building Department Report - DH: The front staff worked extremely hard to get the numbers, going back five years. The Methow was typically the busiest. We were down from last year but we had over a hundred cannabis operation applications come in because of the situation with Planning so that's out of the ordinary. *(Otherwise)* we're not too far off of normal. Hard to say what this year is going to be. I'm sure you've all heard about the new energy code. It's set to be adopted March 15th. I've been receiving a lot of emails and phone calls but I can't say anything about it because they haven't finalized it. Because of the short time period there's not going to be any training so it's going to be a little rough. What people have been talking about is the Wild Land Urban Interface (WUI) Code which now is optional but come March 15th is going to be required.

CB: Does it have a definition of what that space is?

DH: The state has a map showing the urban areas, urban interface, and what we would be in, "urban mix" *(which, I think,)* puts us in the most stringent requirements.

CB: Have you talked to *(Emergency Manager) Maurice (Goodhall)* yet?

DH: Not yet.

CB: They're having that discussion about what it is for Community Wildfire Protection Plans. The complicated part of it is this is a Community Wildfire Protection Plan process so what's included and what isn't? They're at that point. *He says Maurice has seen a map, suggests that DH attend a meeting to find out what it's about.*

DH: I've ordered the Wildland Urban Interface Code book with the amendment set. It's backward.

CB: That's the Conservation District? They need to be aware of that.

DH: Not a lot of people were talking about it until recently. Up until now it's always been optional...

CB: We're beyond the comment point, but there should be a comment that there needs to be time for the training.

DH: It's part of the International Codes Conference. The state makes its adjustments. The WA state energy code has some of the international code in it but it's the state's own code. We're going to have to enforce that. It might be a little rough telling people what kind of siding, what kind of roofing they can have on their buildings. You might hear some complaints.

CB: So the cities and towns will be in the inter-mix?

DH: They're urban. On the edge of town is the urban interface. The county is inter-mix. If

you have wildland on one side that's interface. If you have wild land all around it that's inter-mix. *CB is worried there's going to be some confusion.*

DH: We're going to talk to Esther (Milner) about the mobile home ordinance. The building codes, plumbing codes of manufactured homes is all state law. The reason for having our own codes is for enforcement. The state won't do our enforcement for us. The 1983 ordinance is totally outdated but we've been following state law.

CB: That's what came up recently — L & I (*labor and Industry*) came up with a rule — it's easy to have a code that causes us to go overboard. ...Our code says any RVs that people live in year-round have to meet the mobile home standards. I suppose you all have to adjust your minds to that when you go and do that. You have to become certified. He has talked to a former Chelan commissioner about this, and about affordable housing. It depends on what standards things are built to. L&I are the ones that put the standards on things. They're a little ahead of us on those kinds of housing.

DH: ...State law says we can't require a manufactured home to be built to the snow load for the area. We can require them to build a roof over it that meets the snow load.

AH: Some people do it and that's great but I don't want to see a bunch of mobile homes with pole buildings built on top of them.

DH: Okanogan Co. has never required anything above (*what state law requires*). ...I don't know that in the last five or six years they don't automatically do it, because they want that snow load. But the issue is the older ones, they're going to be moved, and you're talking about low income people and if you require this roof that's going to (keep them from having) affordable housing as well.

CB: These opinions should be expressed. *He asks about snow damage to used homes, DH says just abandoned ones.*

DH: Most people take care of their roofs.

CB: I would want to put a roof over it.

AH: But do we mandate it?

DH: The roof's probably going to be twice what the used mobile home cost. *CB talks about how well a manufactured home he owns has weathered.* CB: I look forward to this conversation because it affects affordable housing.

DH: The only other thing I have is I thank you for the cost of living increase. Now I've brought everybody but Melissa up to snuff. She's pretty much the backbone of the building department, been here 18 years. If I were to have to leave today my recommendation would be for her to be the building official. She's the only one who knows the legalities, and the permitting process.

CB: And how to use the code book.

DH: She wouldn't be the inspector, but she definitely knows more than the other two guys. She even catches me once in awhile. *AH asks about doing a salary survey. DH says hers already went up. CB says they are their own business, can decide.*

AH: We aren't 100% of other counties because of the revenue that we've brought in but we have said 85%. (*Melissa is at 80%. The chief inspector is the highest paid after DH.*) Look at the grades. It may need a grade adjustment of up to 5%. It's something I could definitely see happening...

DH: That number they're giving me is the base salary without longevity. *CB agrees they should work with the HR director on a proposal. DH says he'll keep them posted on what he learns about the new energy code. DB had been worried about how it would affect their local suppliers but he talked to "Nick" who had adopted the code and didn't seem to be worried. CB pays compliments to the office staff for the report and the graphs. DH leaves.*

3:21: - AH (to LJ): I emailed the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between us and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service. *At the January 9th meeting AH had aired his views on the lack of opportunities for hunters in the agencies' conservation policy*

*draft and the commissioners decided to co-sign a letter. AH says JN has signed it as chairman and his own signature is below. He was pleased to be contacted by Fish and Wildlife's Brad Thomson who noticed they hadn't signed the MOU and invited him to a meeting this Thursday.*

Internet Access - AH: We need to sign this. ...I got all the acreage from GIS. *He asks LJ about the PUD's scope of work. I'm just giving my feedback but I would not give \$500,000 for this scope of work.* I'd give it for the first phase of construction but they would have to budget their own money to do (*inaudible*). Basically we said we'd give half a million dollars to build better internet in this county. This scope of work says they're going to do engineering and design work, which means —this wasn't a grant funded thing for them— they were going to fund this through their own budget and I heard there was some opposition to that. So I'd be very cautious that it ...not collect dust because they didn't want to budget the construction part.

CB: I'd agree. Basically it's like we were providing a match for this project. ...Comparatively speaking, we're paying for part of this, that's okay, but we need a clear objective that they're going to do (the construction part). AH suggests to LJ they set up a meeting with Roni (Holder, Economic Alliance). LJ asks if she should relay what they've just discussed; AH would rather relate it face to face. LJ suggests the 29th. CB says he'd been summoned again for jury duty and asked to be excused for the year. CB: Actually we're at the LSC (Legislative Steering Committee) arguing for issues that help the court.

3:30 - Discussion, County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)- EL: We're basically here to update you on the Wildfire Protection Plan and to make some requests. I'm sure you're aware of what the plan is. Passed into the Happy Forest Restoration Act 2013, required by the federal government to receive certain types of aid e.g. FEMA (*Federal Emergency Management Agency*), post-fire aid and some Forest Service and BLM (*Bureau of Land Management*) grants, including the Community Wildfire Defense Grant that the Conservation District has fought tooth and nail to try to get since they became available in August 2022. We'll get there fairly soon. Our last update was in 2003 and our current WPP expired in 2023. If it were not for the Hazard Mitigation Plan we would not qualify for certain forms of federal aid but it's much easier to have this plan ready to go. That's why we've been working ahead with the assistance of County Emergency Planning, Mo (*Maurice Goodhall*), and the Department of Natural Resources (*DNR*) to get that set up. AH: So this was all done under a grant? There was no Title 3 money that was taken to do this?

CN: The State Conservation Commission received \$15M to do fire-fuel mitigation work, ranging from Firewise-type activities to the wildfire plan. They asked for and received \$1.5M of that funding. EL shows an organigram of the agencies involved, says he has met with the Emergency Manager and the fire district chiefs and they will be engaging with them throughout this process. EL: They must identify the highest priority for fuel reduction treatments. The previous plan was written pre-Carlton (*Carlton Complex fire, 2014*). The landscape has changed pretty drastically in the ten years since. We're thinking of enforcing that emphasis on cross-boundary treatment and ability. We have a lot more resources in the county since 2013, since folks are expanding and moving into the WUI (wildland-urban interface). AH asks if he can fetch the Building Official, this seems to concern him. CB says they were talking earlier about state building codes, and the Urban Interface Code. AH evokes questions about why people are building wood siding and shingle roofs in the WUI, why there is no specified defense perimeter in the building codes. EL agrees on the idea of including building official in this process. (MG comes back with building official DH.) AH explains they are discussing the plan: Part of the plan is structural ignitability... CN: Welcome to the party!

EL: The document is non-legally binding and is not a funding source. It is a powerful tool for getting funding... for fire resiliency practices. What it contains if wildfire risk assessment, landscape-scale risk reduction plan and a structure (inaudible) risk reduction plan. *Other elements: fire behavior analysis, neighborhood assessments using Conservation District data, public outreach and education, post-fire planning, assessing local fire districts' ability to work with the expanding issue on the landscape...*

AH: Do you know if people can get reduced insurance rates if –

EL: Not in WA state.

AH: So it's how far you are from a fire station.

WB: That's one of the factors... That's part of the big discussion in legislature, the risk analysis of insurance companies...

JN: Fire rating usually has nothing to do with response times, it's a matter of how much money and equipment you have in your district.

AH: That's why my rates are so low, then! Those are important factors for people to think about.

EL: ...*(referring to the Power Point display)* We've broken the entities involved into three groups: a core team engaged throughout the entire CWPP process, the general group of partners engaged in certain parts of the process, and the general public. The first includes the Conservation District, Tonasket and Methow ranger districts, BLM, Fish and Wildlife, DNR, Winthrop City Planner Rocklynn Culp representing the Methow, Brett Armstrong representing the Okanogan Valley, also the PUD and– AH: Co-op? EL: We're working on it. Also we will get someone to represent the Tribe. We'd like to get one of you if possible involved in this group. *JN volunteers.* EL: This is easier than I thought! We'll also add in the Building Department. That broader group includes municipalities, fire districts. We sent out a survey and have received 670 responses covering the whole gamut of public perceptions about wildfire risk in this county, and many other issues and values that we will incorporate into that larger document. Currently we're at the stage of engaging with those community partners. We're beginning to do the hazard and risk analysis, developing the prioritization and implementation planning and will eventually present that document to you and to FEMA and the State Forester for approval and acceptance. *AH will be the alternate BOCC delegate.*

EL: The first core group meeting will be at 9:00 on January 31st. We'll probably meet twice monthly, hoping to have this in place before fire season. It also includes community engagement meetings *(throughout the county)*. *CB asks if there's a deadline, EL says no but money has to be used by June of 2025.*

CN: We also know that a lot of folks who will be involved in the approval process will be busy come June-July.

3:47 - *EL asks if MG wants to expound on their previous discussion regarding the urban interface.* MG: I think you need to define it. There's no standard for the WUI. It seems to me like the whole unincorporated county was in it.

WB: With the CWPP *(permits?)* we'd have to reference the map you're speaking to, but we are allowed to expand that buffer as much as we thought that map was going to be labeled "planning map". *(inaudible)*

EL: The logic behind that is two-fold. We are expanding that area people are likely to move into, and the Forest Service has to put metrics around WUI treatments. The larger we designate the WUI in this plan the more the Forest Service is able to utilize this CWPP for their planning into the future, something the Tonasket Ranger District was particularly interested in. *MG and AH exchange about community reaction to building codes and it is repeated that the CWPP is not binding.*

CN: You're holding a pail full of holes to try and carry the regulatory burden, to say that's now going to define where certain building requirements would have to occur. But if the map is referring to the actual code book and says "this is the WUI", we have more dollars

available to us now for this greater area, to be able to start doing great things, but it shouldn't drive what (DH) has to do as far as requiring.

AH : I'm thinking about someone challenging the CWPP about "why did you make the WUI the whole Okanogan County?" because if I had my druthers, I would. Because then the forest can treat everything.

WB: ...Any planning map you produce has to have some justification behind it. There'll be no retaliation against why you did that as long as there's justification. *He talks nearly inaudibly about a county where there was mining equipment...*

CN: ...That's why I jumped on this opportunity to go after this state money. I didn't want to deal with their rules and regulations and process in addition to have to go through the (*inaudible*). So broadly, besides the WUI and to see which of you would like to be the representative for the county commissioners, that's mostly what we had to bring here today. Any other matters of discussion?

CB: When I talked to MG about it I was thinking that the information we've gotten from some folks about desiring to have some wildfire protection plan, it sounds like some of those folks were really into it and wanted to have that happen in their neighborhood. I was then curious about how things would unfold as far as interested groups and their neighborhoods. It sounds to me like you've done quite a bit of research about the WUI part of it. There was a community study done, and they were getting opinion on whether they wanted rules in their neighborhoods as well; it's not regulatory, it's a planning document, and I was curious as to how you might approach— there's parts of the county that don't want to have anything do with this stuff and they want to figure things out themselves so it's more of an education issue than anything else. ...How local government would respond to it. There could be a regulatory portion. Knowing that we have this international building code coming at us too. It should be an interesting integration that we get. It's great that you guys got all these responses. *EL says it will be a challenge getting the report out but they will be publishing a version in Spanish as well.* CB: So you really know the broad opinion and view of what this is all about. People are just afraid this will be used to regulate. But a lot of people want to be regulated. *Like in the Methow, says EL.*

3:56 - EL: We will find the ways to ebb and flow through all those disagreements and differences of opinions as we go through the process, but this document essentially has the potential to become the wildfire resiliency bible for the next half-decade to a decade. So we'll make it as powerful a piece of work as we can.

CB: You've got the capacity to do it, so I appreciate it.

CN: We'll get her done. A lot of interest and expressed commitment already. A lot of emails filling up. They know how to engage in this process. (*Inaudible*)

EL: There's also possibly a lot of good cooperation across county boundaries as both Chelan and Douglas counties are updating their CWPPs as well. *Conservation District representatives leave.*

JN: I guess the House approved a rule that you can split properties down to 2000 sq. ft. lots.

AH: That must be within city limits.

JN: I would suppose so. I haven't looked that close.

CB: They would have integrated the thought of water.

AH: Absolutely not.

Grizzly Project - LJ: I just talked to Esther Milner. She's gone over the MOU, says she doesn't see anything wrong. She thought it was just about the board having a seat at the table.

AH: Because we're the ones that live here and represent people.

CB: So I move to approve the MOU between the Dept. of the Interior, the State

Department of Fish and Wildlife and North Cascades Ntl. Park Service in Okanogan Co. It's a cooperative development of the Environmental Impact Statement for the North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan. Motion carried.

*Minutes of January 9th meeting corrected, AH was nominated and elected as vice-chairman and not chairman. Confusion in the mention of Public Health funding nurses for the jail. It will read "The commissioners discussed funding the nurses through Public Health.*

4:20 - *In discussing the minutes, CB asks to include a paragraph he wrote regarding tourism and LTAC (Lodging Tax Advisory Committee) funds. They talk about how one scenic byway in the Cascades is publicized and receives funds but not the ones in the Okanogan Valley and the Coulee Corridor.*

AH: I know you don't do this on purpose but every time you start talking about tourism it makes me feel like there's such disparity between here and there but if you look at the minutes, often I say we need—

CB: And I'm going to keep doing that until I'm walking out that door. And I might even write you letters.

AH: I'm going to keep telling you if you listen to the minutes, every single time, I put a lot of emphasis on what you do here.

CB: We need to understand what is all there and what the challenges are. And we're doing it. And we're acknowledging the Pacific Northwest Trail, and the challenges we have, and only parts of it. Sorry, but I've got to keep doing it.

AH: If you look at that marketing plan, and you see some things up north that would be just great to do, bring them up in conversation.

CB: We always have to have a group that's part of that.

JN: The TOI (?).

AH: There's other folks too. The guy that's putting on the jet ski races. That's a destination event that will bring a lot of people in.

JN: A lot of times people don't realize what's eligible *for LTAC funds*). So you try to get the word out.

AH: So that's what our designated marketing organization should be for. Working with the people to help market the county.

JN: I don't know if beyond local VICs (*Visitor Information Centers*), local chambers should be involved.

CB: If there's cross interests, they have to pull together. It's tough. We're talking volunteers. They're not trained. Often times you'd hear them tell someone (*something doesn't exist when it really does*). The other challenge is the equipment that comes into them. Often times there are elderly people who run it.

AH: Sometimes it's a kiosk. *They get back to discussing the minutes.*

JN: It should say the the county got a feasibility study grant, not just "grant".

*Minutes, consent agenda, vouchers and payroll approved. Motion carried to approve the exit letter signed by the state auditor.*

CB: When we went into executive session, I didn't cite the statute.

JN: It was on the agenda as such.

LJ: I didn't get that. That last blurb on January 8th.

4:46 - AH: I'm going to put away my computer. The meeting has ended after 40 minutes of idle time. *Laughter.*

CB: I was wondering about that.

LJ: No one was on.

*CB talks about having sent something in an email that he hadn't put a link to, about the Legislative Steering Committee. A round table on health issues, relative to jails. I'm going to send the link to it. It's 6 to 7 tonight. JN and AH each have an hour of commute so might*

*not tune in.*

*4:51 - Meeting adjourned until Monday.*