

Okanogan Board of Health (BOH)
Tuesday, September 12th, 2023, 1:30 PM

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Present:

Lauri Jones (LJ), Board of Health Director
Mike Harr (MH), Okanogan County Health District
Jim Wallace (JW), Health Officer
Jon Neil (JN), County Commissioner, BOH board chairman
Chris Branch (CB), County Commissioner, BOH board member
Andy Hover (AH), County Commissioner, BOH board member
Kait Schilling (KS), attorney
Mariann Williams (MW), BOH board member
Jim Wright (JWr), BOH board member
Denise Varner (DV), Board member, Okanogan City Council
Sara Bates, Director of Community Data, Thriving Together Northwest

Summary of Important Discussions:

- *Accountability audit third and final step in \$24,000 complete audit; Consolidated Contract provides increase of over \$1M*
- *Staff benefiting from team building sessions*
- *Search is on for Local Emergency Response Coordinator*
- *Administrative aid granted to Environmental Health*
- *Employee handbook updated to reflect current laws, increase readability*
- *Covid numbers up but hospitalizations low; new vaccine arriving soon*
- *New RSV treatment available for high-risk infants*
- *Overdose calls to 911 set to top last year's*

Financial Report - LJ says they're balanced with the Treasurer's office. They are advancing money for a subcontract with Family Health Centers to do rural equity work. Two parts of an audit have been completed; work left to do on the accountability audit. The whole audit has been estimated at \$24,000. AH is surprised at first, then says it figures because it's about a third of the county audit which comes to some \$75,000.

MW: Behavioral health skills?

LJ: We contracted with Dr. Tiramasa to do six sessions with staff on team building. The financial report is approved.

AH: Consolidated Contract amendment no. 16 .

LJ: This is an increase of \$1,095,627. It involves stop-gap funding for Covid, effective in July. It's also for emergency preparedness from the Office of Resiliency and Health Security and additional foundational funds for our maternal block grant. It's a lot of money but a lot of deliverables. We are required to have a LERC (Local Emergency Response Coordinator). This Incident command training and public health knowledge. It will enhance our overall response in coordination with County Emergency Management Plan. MW asks how this differs from the County's Emergency Plan. This is a coordinator for public health, especially pandemics and other threats. MW asks

the percentages is for gap funding and for emergency management; LJ will pass them the amendment. ...The Covid 19 is ARPA (American Rescue plan) money, for example, if you need to set up an isolation facility. CB asks if they anticipate any additional staff, LJ says no, just the LERC, paid for with foundational funds.

DV: Who is this contract with?

LJ: The Washington State Department of Health. It's a consolidated contract. *She suggests to DV, a new board member, they go over all this together. (Through our two-year contract) we get \$995,000 in foundational funds plus \$900,000 for specifics— LERC, environmental health administration and a fiscal portion.*

MH: It's the first time it's ever covered environmental health—\$50,000, which is good.

LJ: *(It covers) fee-for service, for example, to look for a test hole. It may or may not cover transportation. Policy development and writing.*

CB: Everybody who put that through should be recognized. They've been working on it for years.

MH: And it's beneficial to county customers because it means we don't have to raise our fees.

LJ: We're updating our employee handbook. It's the first time since 2017. We liked what Grant Co. did with their handbook. We've asked the attorneys to look at it and to streamline, eliminate what's frivolous...

KS: Just to be clear, no employee compensations or benefits changed but *(with the County's consultant attorney Chuck Zimmerman)* we took out some sections that could lead to pitfalls, like advertising for new jobs, and another on internal transfers or promotions. By taking those out it gives the department more flexibility... We've cleaned it up a little, updated some state laws...

DV *(or MW)*: How much was changed from the previous version?

KS: ...We've changed several sections, removed several sections, Got the trial period part cleaned up; about 75% carried through.

LJ: It's based on changes in law and things that needed to change.

KS: We cleaned up the part about medical leave, the Public Records Act. Now we report complaints to the administrative board chair or vice chair. ...a lot of things *(were changed)* for consistency with laws as they are today. CB recalls a recent question they had on nepotism; the lawyers decided the laws didn't require anything on this so they struck that section.

LJ: Like Lionel Orr said, "if there was a nepotism clause for tribes, no one would be hired." I really like the readability...

AH: In the section on longevity pay, I don't think the scale should be in there. *LJ agrees. KS says it can be struck. There follows a discussion on meals-lodging-travel reimbursement. AH feels they should follow the state's policy with approval by administrator. (26:40) LJ outlines holiday pay. They work forty hours a week, four 10-hour days. She gives an example: if a holiday falls on Monday they run two shifts, Monday through Thursday takes Monday off and Tuesday through Friday takes Tuesday off. They discuss paid family leave. Again, this should follow state policy.*

Medical Officer's Report - JW: ...We had a light wildfire season. Oroville was hit hard. I appreciate the efforts to keep people safe up there. We talked a lot about communications, clean air shelters. Our teams were quite busy with creature-based illnesses. We talked about rabies and bats last meeting but there have been no cases. I encourage people not to collect bats. Nothing unusual in the past month. We're preparing for RSV (*respiratory syncytial virus*) and influenza. It came earlier last year. Covid hospitalizations are up but we haven't yet reached the 10/100,000 threshold where we would put *(extra measures, masking...)* in place.. Wastewater amounts increased in July but increased less in August. For the last week of August there were

zero Covid hospitalizations. Statewide the average is 3.4/100,000. No outbreaks; schools are doing a good job deciding when to send or not send kids to school. The CDC Advisory is today receiving a new Covid vaccine and there's a new monoclonal antibody being given to infants at high risk for RSV. Our partners are preparing to administer these in the next week or two. Emergency preparedness: I have the LERC job description almost completed. Also we're building resiliency against disasters across the County. That's a brief report, all I've got.

Administrative Update - LJ: We're working on the budget. We can't justify raising fees (*given the financial hardships people are going through now*). We were able to distribute over 65 air purifiers through the Transportation and Nutrition Program which identified high risk people. We had two visits from the State Department of Health, and a site visit from Maternal Health, as well as from regional health officers. Things are going well with the team building workshops. There are so many suffering from post-pandemic burn-out. They need to get clarity, look at team core values. It's going well.

Environmental Health Update:. *LJ is asked about Fentanyl overdose numbers.* LJ: Over the entire year last year there were 105 calls to 911. This year through August we're up to 100. *MH has seen the coroner almost every week using the new Radox machine to detect drug levels. AH says when the new coroner's suite is built on the other side of Oak Street Bridge, the machine will be moved over there. ...LJ asks what year they will build the suite; AH says pretty soon. It is being paid for by their bond, and was recently permitted.*

JWr: Are we seeing a downturn in selling (*of Fentanyl*)?

JW: We're seeing an increase in Meth and Fentanyl.

LJ: They have to use Fentanyl so much more often (than heroine). ...We've seen a decrease in our program because people are smoking it and not injecting.

56:44 - Meeting adjourned.