

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Monday, Oct 25, 2021 PM

JD—Jim DeTro, BOCC, District 3
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC vice-chair, District 1
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC chair, District 2
LJ—Lalena Johns-clerk to the Commissioners
CH—Crystal Hawley, Deputy Clerk of the BOCC
TE—Tanya Everett, HR
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
GT—George Thorton, TV District #1
VV—Victoria Velategui, Chair of Board of Directors of TV District #1
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning and Development

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Summary of significant discussions:

Several staff members who are not part of a bargaining unit discuss their need for a raise in pay.

George Thornton and Victoria Velategui give the commissioners an update on the TV Reception District. They're making good progress and think it's possible to get all the repairs and upgrades finished. FEMA has been a big help funding the work.

PP asks the BOCC to allow the Planning Department to waive the job requirement for the Senior Planner to have a valid driver's license. The applicant interviewed very well but her license was revoked. Since the Department needs a new Senior Planner very badly and driving it's really needed for the job, the commissioners agree to waiving the requirement. Another Senior Planner has resigned to take a job in Montana and PP is trying to take over some of her duties. She was the expert on water issues in the Methow. Gina McCoy has resigned from the Planning Commission. BOCC and PP discuss the resignation and the time line for the ComprehensivePlan.

2:44:30—Discussion of various remuneration revisions

CH—We non-bargaining employees are concerned with our wages not keeping up with inflation. I've put together some information for you. Social Security got a COLA. TE told me that the wage in 2020, 1.5% was to deal with inflations. 14% over the last 11 years.

CB—There are a variety of graphs that will take a little going over.

AH—There was the 1.5% last year.

CH—I thought that was a general wage increase.

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CH—Our buying power is going down.

AH—So what are you asking for.

CH—Now that there's an automatic increase in the minimum wage if there's inflation, it would be nice to have something that shows when the minimum wage goes up, our wage goes up.

AH—Anyone else have a proposal?

MG—I gather from what she's saying—there needs to be a study done. Not comparing us to other counties, but just to see what we're doing here. There have been some increases, but they aren't sufficient enough. We need to be paying our employees good wages. In today's society, you can make more money on unemployment. Yes, we got the 1.5% increase, but it's still not keeping up.

CB—to AH—In union negotiations, have we reached a point where we can compare values.

AH—Basically, we're faced with a fixed income. We can't up the property tax collection by more than 1%. Right now it's about \$6,000,000, so 1% is \$60,000 plus the money for new construction. There's a lot of new construction right now. Probably between \$150,000 and \$180,000. When you're talking about inflation, rate is increasing, we have no way to charge more to recoup the money we'd need. Some are increasing application fees, etc.

AH—I agree everybody should be paid well, but when we compare with other counties, we need to know that they're collecting more money.

MG—With bargaining units, how have their wages & benefits changed since the last 11 years? That needs to be figured in. Insurance is different.

AH—We discussed something the other day in a closed session. Do we want to open that up today?

CB—Why did you do it in a closed session?

AH—Because it was specifically for union negotiations.

CB—I don't know the answer to your question. I do want to see the comparison with bargaining.

AH—I had TE do a salary comparison in Planning Dept.

CB—I'd like to see comparison of bargaining vs. non-bargaining.

TE—I have the figures. I explained to Crystal, and a lot of people don't understand, is that if someone gets a 2% increase in wages, there's another 2% in FICA, insurance, retirement, etc.

AH—Over the last 5 years, increases for bargaining units have been between 1.5% and 2% per year. Over the last 5 years for non-bargaining, it's been 1.5%. That shows the difference.

MG—We understand that it costs the county more than just the amount we receive in a pay increase.

AH—The budget right now has an \$80,000 deficit, which isn't that bad. If we have a 2% increase for non-bargaining, TE can run the numbers. And also look at 8% and 10%.

CB—I don't want to be bargaining about this right now. Have a conversation among the BOCC before.

MG—When can we expect it? How can we move forward?

CB—We're in the budget process now, so it'll move forward

AH—I'm glad you've come here and said the salaries are out of whack.

Discussion of increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

AH—We'll look at increases of 2%, 5% and 10%. Then we'll have good numbers to look at.

MG—Can we make it adjustable?

CH—If we get a schedule, we'll know what we can look forward to.

AH and TE—Explains the CPI more. Based on costs of various items people buy.

AH—Our contracts aren't tied to CPI.

MG—The 1% we can increase is absorbed by labor costs and unions get their raise?

AH—Yes.

CB—It's hard to get people to work for us.

AH—Recruitment will be awful moving forward. Young people these days have different priorities.

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CH—When you got started on the budgeting, that’s why I went to talk to the bargaining units. We non-bargaining people don’t have a voice. That’s why I decided to put something together.

AH—Tanya, can you do the 2%, 5%, 10% numbers for non-bargaining.

TE—Yes.

CH—I appreciate you guys

3:13:20—Update and discussion of TV Reception District #1 of the Methow Valley

GT—distributes 3 page report to the BOCC.

VV—I’m, Victoria Velategui, Chair of the TV District and George’s understudy.

GT—The report shows where we are—the funds we’ve received and where they’re going. Some projects are in the pipeline, some are installed and some we can’t start until we are sure of the funding.

Antennas are installed. Emergency winterization couldn’t be done this summer due to road conditions and smoke. It’ll be a surprisingly big bill. We’ve put a deposit on replacement towers.

GT—FEMA has been very helpful. The reimbursement is authorized at 87.5%. Reimburse damage related to the winter storm and includes new building if building codes have been updated or we do mitigation so that it won’t be damaged the next time.

GT—We have to pay upfront and there’s a big gap until we get reimbursed. We’re hoping the money gap will close when we get most of the work done.

GT—Puts us in a cash flow pinch.

CB—Okanogan County funds are also restricted?

GT—FEMA money is tied to specific damages, but they’re flexible. They’ll cover labor, transportation, etc. But the money you offered is just for capital expenses.

CB—So, do you commissioners get where I’m going? If we had less restriction on the funds, would that help. I wonder if we could do it that way.

CB—The work you’re doing is leading to capital improvement, so....

AH—I don’t know if it’d work.

CB—We could talk to Cari (Hall, County Auditor) about how that might work.

GT—We have to send the invoices in with justification and then they let us know. But they’ve been very supportive.

GT—They’ve divided it into three projects. First is emergency repair. Then there’s the building and that gets more complicated on a weekly basis. Finally, there’s the tower. They’re all separate funds that they call projects. Until we close a project, we don’t get funding from FEMA.

VV—So it’s hard to move things forward because we get jammed.

GT—We’re going to make up a lot of the money from FEMA. Anything that’s a capital good, there’s a good opportunity we’ll be reimbursed. But we don’t get reimbursed for electronics.

CB—Hard to do a risk assessment.

GT—I’m hoping we’ll get over \$100,000 from FEMA and I’m busily writing grants to cover the difference.

VV—We’re communicating with Safe Start again.

GT—They’d said there were more opportunities for funding, but we haven’t heard from them since last week.

CB—Capital improvements for the TV District, we could talk about how the .09 funds could be less restricted.

AH—With Roni in the Economic Alliance.

CB—Have the conversation with her as well.

GT—We’re getting a lot of support for the concept of emergency service for local TV, but the TV District can’t provide management or content. After they hear that, the conversation slows down. Primary role is infrastructure.

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CB—Demographic info about your customer base?

GT—Yes, but not in hand right now.

CB—If you could show there's equity issue that's attached to the ARPA funds...

VV—We'll get the demographics, but I answer the phone at the TV District. There are a lot of elders, many are shut-ins, don't have computers. They've expressed thanks for having the TV, especially during emergencies.

GT—Our plan is to install the capability, but somebody has to do the content and management. Maurice Goodall and the medical community. All think it's good, but somebody has to step up.

GT—I'm going to retire some day, so we've got to work something out. We're recruiting new commissioners and we're looking for tribal members because they're a big audience. We've got two names.

GT—We've come a long way since we started this.

CB--\$310,000 on your report—the pool of money needed to keep this rolling?

GT—Yes. We have the \$170,000 and expect \$100,000 from FEMA and that doesn't leave us too short.

GT—And viewers willing to pay will be a good source of income. That source can increase over time.

We've made progress. We have a potential gap we're working on. But a \$40,000 gap is probably doable. Probably.

JD—I agree you've come along way.

3:41:50—Dave (Gecas, Deputy Attorney) wants an executive session for 20 minutes. To discuss moratorium on building permits.

CB—And I'd like one about the evaluation of perspective employee.

CB—discusses Whitman County hiring contract employees who'd be paid for by ARP (American Rescue Plan) and wonders if Okanogan County would be able to do the same.

3:51:30—Planning Department update

PP—discusses a situation for a potential hiree for the Senior Planner position. The applicant interviewed very well, but one of the job requirements is to have a driver's license and the applicant's license has been revoked. PP says that the person wouldn't actually have to drive on the job and would like to make an offer to her with the stipulation that she gets a license before April, 2023. PP would like the BOCC to pass a resolution she's written, waiving the license requirement. The attorney has reviewed the resolution and approves of it. Commissioners pass Resolution 135-2021 with a vote of 3-0.

PP—I was requested to consider rescinding Resolution 171-2020 and consider adding a GIS tech into the Planning Department staff budget. We'd pay only half, with the Sheriff's Department paying the other half up to \$75,000/year.

AH—Move to approve Resolution 136-2021 which would replace Resolution 171-2020. Passes 3-0

PP—Next is the revised fee schedule so the fees will reflect the actual cost of services. BOCC passes Resolution 137-2021—the revised fee schedule.

PP—Last week we got a resignation from the natural resources senior planner who will be taking a new job in Montana. We're trying to get a new person hired and working right away. This person knows all about the Methow Valley water stuff. I'm taking two full days to try to learn as much about this from her as I can. My goal is to keep the county at the least risk possible, and assigning this all to her was the way to go, but now I'm going have to rearrange what I'm doing and take on the Methow Valley water stuff.

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PP—I need an appointment letter for Carter Thomas on the 7th Okanogan County Mazama Advisory Committee member. LJ has drafted the letter.

4:02:15—PP—I haven't seen the letter yet, but you're probably aware we lost a Planning Commission member.

AH—We know and we'll have to advertise for people to interview'

LJ—I usually do the advertising. Who is it?—Gina McCoy.

CB—I'd like to talk about the resignation letter.

PP—I've been told there's a few things Gina is upset with. The capacity of the commission is advisory and she's real hands-on in rewriting the Comp Plan and word-smithing it. We don't have time in the time line to do this. I thought everybody was on-board with this. So when they asked me what her capacity was as a commission member, I forwarded her the definition out of the code about being advisory. People ask me if I'm following it real close, and I'm not. Adjustments in legal review shouldn't change the intent.

AH—Where are we time-line-wise? Are we going to have a public hearing on the DEIS.?

PP—No.

AH—We're not going to have a public hearing about the Comp Plan, but a public meeting instead. Correct?

PP—Yes. The Planning Commission has the hearing. The BOCC has the meeting.

AH—So when we either adopt it or remand it back, we'll be at a public meeting. Will it be interactive meeting where people can comment? I was asked that.

CB—We haven't looked at it, but if the attorney says it meets the requirements... I'm hoping it will meet our needs. Also, there can be amendments to the Comp Plan whenever anybody wants.

AH—So, in a year, if we or someone else, proposes a change, it can be done.

PP—I've been sitting in zooms with Jenna, Tadis (?) and Tess. They've done a real through job. They pulled things out of the comments that Angela and I didn't see. So I'm very confident in this new draft. Angie & I spent some time going through it & gave it back to them. Friday we're supposed to get the draft back and we'll advertise for the Planning Commission hearing on the 22nd. We'll hold a special Planning Commission meeting on Dec. 27th to have them consider the comments received. It comes to you guys of the Wednesday, Dec.29. It would be just on your normal agenda.

AH—This has gone through a process but maybe there's some blatant stuff I'd want changed.

PP—They haven't changed anything, but they moved some things around.

AH—Everything I've seen says it's completely normal for the Planning Department to do all the leg work and bring it to the Planning Commission and say—here's what we've got. Here's what you're looking at. You're the technical resource for the Planning Commission.

PP—That's all I've got.

Commissioners adjourn.