

Okanogan Board of County Commissioners
04/13/2020

JD—Jim DeTro
AH—Andy Hover—from home
CB—Chris Branch
LJ—Lalena Johns-clerk to the Commissioners
Kevin—Chair of Okanogan Co Fire Chiefs Association
LJones—Laurie Jones, Community Health Director, Okanogan County Public Health—by phone
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
PP—Pete Palmer, Director, Planning & Development
SO—Sheriff's Office
Craig—Craig Nelson, Executive Director, Okanogan Conservation District,
Jay—member of WRIA 49 planning group
Todd—member of WRIA 49 planning group

This is a paraphrasing of conversations by one of several volunteer citizen note takers and published on the website of Okanogan County Watch (countywatch.org) Any writer's comments or explanations are in italics. For officially approved minutes of Board of Commissioner meetings, normally published at a later date, see www.okanogancounty.org.

Summary of significant discussions:

County Burn Ban: Commissioners discuss whether or not to institute a county burn ban. They decide not to issue such a ban, but to have Maurice Goodall issue a press release instead.

County travel and Residential Construction Restrictions: Commissioners and Laurie Jones, Community Health Director from Okanogan County Public Health discuss a ban on overnight transient accommodations (OTA). Commissioners also discuss the ban on construction on residential property.

WRIA 49 Discussion: Some members of the WRIA 49 planning group are concerned that they're not making progress towards a report because it's being bogged down in process minutia.

Burn Ban:

AH—Received 6-7calls from Methow residents asking why there's no temporary or full time burn ban. Kevin is part of the process for the county to institute a ban. This conversation is warranted because we need to listen to people. If the Fire Chiefs don't want a burn ban this early, we could still put out a statement.

JD—The fire season is typically April 15 through October 15, per the Forest Service.

CB—We don't really need another emergency right now, so the burn ban is warranted. Even if there's no wind, a fire can still re-ignite at night.

JD—I have no objection to a burn ban. Some people aren't very smart about it and it's the only way to control them. The burn ban should be 100% if we do it. No exceptions. The DNR has a burn ban but only for DNR land.

AH—Who would enforce the ban? The Sheriff's Department? What about someone burning a little pile of leaves in the driveway?

CB—Incorporated areas can already have a burn ban.

MG—The issue is enforcement. Our hands are tied with Covid-19 and the a burn ban

JD—There's also agriculture. There's a lot of orchards where the trees are being torn out and those trees need to be burned.

MG—The burn ban needs to be blanket.

AH—We need a press release, urging people NOT to burn, but not have a burn ban.

JD—Maybe preliminary step like AH wants. A press release, and if that doesn't work, a burn ban is coming.

CB—Setting a ban isn't perfect but it helps. If the Sheriff's Office is enforcing the burn ban, then it can't be doing other stuff.

SO—Burn ban calls would be prioritized like other issues. Talk to them first and crack down with repeat offenders.

Kevin—I'm chairman of the County Fire Chiefs' Association. I polled the chiefs. 12 out of 12 say no to the burn ban. Conditions don't warrant it yet. There's the green-up. If there's a ban, who will enforce it? Enforcers will have to go out and make contact with the burners, and who wants to do that? No chief would have a problem with asking people not to burn at this time.

JD—A press release was one idea. Orchard burning is mostly regulated by the DOE, not the BOCC.

AH—Plus it's burning in dirt fields, so there's not too much danger.

Kevin—Field and ditch burning creates fire breaks for later on. Is the desire for a burn ban just because of Covid?

CB—Our resources are already strapped due to Covid and the question of who does the enforcement.

JD—If all the Fire Districts say no, I'm fine with a press release.

AH—Can Maurice write something for the BOCC to look at?

MG—Yes.

CB, AH, JD—We don't need to see it, Maurice. Just release it.

SO—I support the Fire Chiefs. They're the experts.

County travel and Residential Construction Restrictions:

CB—In Chelan, they'll charge \$500 if you're doing overnight rentals.

LJones—Public Health has a stake in this. Gov. Inslee said B&B's, overnight rentals, etc are not necessary & Okanogan County Public Health (OCPH) has asked them not to rent. We're asking the county to support the ban to make sure of the national companies like AirB&B know about it. The rentals put a burden on the county with a potential influx of Covid patients.

AH—(Speaking to the fact that some overnight rentals are switching to 30 day rentals) People need to know that if you rent for more than 180 days per year, you'll have to have sprinklers.

LJones—We'd like Okanogan County to prevent overnight rentals like Chelan did. They're not essential.

AH—What about motels?

LJones—Motels aren't included in Gov. Inslee's statement, and Public Health doesn't regulate motels.

JD—Douglas County is allowing construction that was permitted or on-going at the time of lock down. It's not bringing an influx, and most crews are 1 or 2 people.

AH—But L&I can enforce the governor's proclamation and pull licenses. I understand JD's point. I've got people calling on both sides.

JD—People order concrete from Canada. The Border Patrol can't do anything. Can L&I follow a truck to the job site? This happens in my district only.

MG—We've talked to Canadian cement trucks, and they'll comply.

CB—About L&I issues: Was Douglas County in violation of the governor's orders? Sounds like it was. Sounds like we think maybe the governor should reconsider.

AH—The thing about construction is there's such a short window. As we push projects back, they're hard to finish. Construction includes federal guidelines. We don't want the liability.

JD—But if nobody can do anything until there's a vaccine.... There's a complete divide on social media. People think it's all due to a conspiracy about Bill Gates producing a vaccine.

LJones—2 things. 1—Grant & Douglas Counties' cases all due to Boeing & Microsoft employees and construction. And 2—The divide isn't that big. I back Bill Gates. He paid \$100,000,000 while the feds sat on their hands.

LJones—The next two weeks are critical to keep the cases low. There are 15 people who tested positive right now, but the number could go way up because of the number of tests we don't have results for yet.

CB—For today, we won't do anything. Is there a lot of construction, Andy?

AH—Yes. Residential. Seeing trucks hauling gravel, excavators working, etc.

PP?—Construction crews come with 4-5 RVs, with kids. More of a vacation than work.

LJones—Public Health appeals to the Commissioners to pass a ban on overnight accommodations at this time.

AH—Who would draft the letter/resolution?

CB—I've got a resolution from Chelan County.

PP—I've got a draft concerning overnight rentals.

CB—I move we approve Pete's letter. Motion passes 3-0.

LJ—I need a copy of the signed letter.

CB—Concerning the resolution about overnight lodging. I can work with Lanie to write a resolution based on Chelan County, but it's on their website.

LJones—Public Health is also issuing a letter about overnight transient accommodations (OTA) Cease & desist.

Jenn Tate—Short term rentals are all converting to 30 day rentals to sidestep this, so Chris needs to know this when he writes the resolution.

CB—Andy made the point about sprinklers.

SO—What's the method of enforcement? This will be way ore taxing to address the rentals.

CB—Can we have this conversation tomorrow? Chelan told the sheriff's office to be the enforcement arm.

AH—I agree about tomorrow at 10. Public Health & Building Dept. permit overnight rentals. They can yank their license if they're out of compliance.

CB—Then without a license, the sheriff could go then. I'd like to discuss this with the Sheriff first, before the Public Health meeting.

AH—Chris, are you thinking construction should move forward but we need the governor to say it's essential?

CB—Not quite. We need to talk about what permits are active right now.

AH—We'll talk tomorrow.

CB—I'm interested in talking to building officials and Pete to see what permits we've got out there.

AH—A construction guy is complaining the Public Health isn't signing off on his test hole, so he can't get a permit. We don't want to disobey the governor's orders, but we don't want to see a backlog to get permits when this is all over.

PP—I don't think there's a big backlog right now anyway. We're just doing administrative stuff, not hearings.

WRIA 49:

CB—Some people in the WRIA 49 planning unit feel there's an excess of process minutia and it's preventing them from completing the plan.

Jay—We need a way to empower Craig Nelson to run the meetings and stay on track. We all need to have a say, but we all need to stay on task, too. Todd?

Todd—Empower Craig and George (Thornton) to keep us in line to do specific tasks.

Craig—I appreciate the guidance. I'm trying to get a feel as to where we've crossed the line from productive to not. I realize we need to keep comments directly on the question at hand. Start each topic with asking what does Aspect need from the group.

Much discussion too rapid to record. The gist is that Commissioner Branch is concerned with a lack of progress, as are several members of the WRIA 49 planning group. He wants the meetings to stay on track and not get bogged down in minutia so that it will be able to write a plan, and not have the DOE write it instead.