

Okanogan Board of County Commissioners
05/11/2020

JD—Jim DeTro
AH—Andy Hover
CB—Chris Branch
LJ—Lalena Johns-clerk to the Commissioners
LJones—Laurie Jones, Community Health Director, Okanogan County Public Health
DG—David Gecas, Dept Pros Atty
RHD—Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director of the Economic Alliance
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning and Development

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:

Discussion—Governor's Variance, Public Health and BOCC

Lauri Jones and the Commissioners have a long discussion about getting a variance from the Governor's Office to move Phase II.

Discussion—Opening North Cascades Highway

Commissioners discuss when Hwy 20 will open and what that means for Okanogan businesses.

Planning for the afternoon's Executive Session

Commissioners discuss whether the session to discuss a complaint against a public employee. The employee is Laurie Jones.

Fair Grounds

Commissioners discuss opening up the Fair Grounds and whether or not the County Fair will have to be cancelled.

Update from Department Heads

Department Heads from the courts, jail, Treasurer's Office, Assessor's Office, Public Works, Communications Office, discuss what each department is doing to assure safety during the Covid-19 situation. This discussion ends early when the meeting is zoom-bombed.

Update from Planning Department

Planning Director lays out a timeline for the Comprehensive plan, reports that Winthrop would love to be given Sa Teekh Wa Park, and asks that a Certificate of Appreciation be given to Pam Wilson because of her exemplary work in the office.

Executive Session

BOCC meets in executive session for 50 minutes. Laurie Jones and Brian Pyper from Public Health also attend.

Governor's variance:

LJones—Okanogan County can be eligible to move into Phase II if we have the right data. We're working on an application. We've received letters from hospitals in the county. There have been two more positive test results but we could still get the variance.

AH—When will the Public Health office be ready to sign off on the variance?

LJones—I don't know. We'll need to look at the new cases. We've drafted a document to show the Board of Health and we have to get Dr. McCarthy on board. Also, it would be good to get the Tribal Council to support the variance.

AH—Contact tracers. Some are adamantly opposed to tracers. Ask people where they've been. Who they've talked to?

LJones—We talk to the whole household first. Ask where they work, who they've been in close contact with during the infectious period.

CB—What about element of enforcement?

LJones—Health officers *can* fine people who aren't isolating.

CB—I'm adverse to hard core enforcement. Public Health can educate. We are advisers about how to reopen safely. Not enforcers.

LJones—We want businesses to open safely and there's a lot of businesses who can. Small Mom and Pop business—there's no reason why they can't open safely.

AH—There's the argument between essential vs. non-essential.

LJones—Okanogan County needs to show we can open safely. We need a commitment from business owners to do that.

CB—That's what we're looking for to send to the governor. That's what most counties' commissioners are saying is onerous.

LJones—We're compiling data so we can make the case to move to Phase II. Our county is so isolated. There are so few cases. We can make the case.

AH—I've got an isolation question. Is it like house arrest?

LJones—No.

AH—If I'm isolating in my house, can I walk down the road?

LJones—If you're isolating, you agree you won't infect others. It means you'll stay home. It's OK to do yard work, but not go to a public place.

CB—If the public knew the details of how the virus spreads via droplets, then they could see why the rules are good. If you understand how it spreads, half the battle is won.

LJones—In the 1930s, with measles, Public Health would put a "Quarantine" sign on your door. People have lost a sense of being a citizen. We have to protect our parents, etc. We have 2 covid patients in their 30s with low lung capacity.

JD—People have called me to say the governor is like a Nazi.

LJones—Everything we've done has been aboveboard.

CB—Governors all over the country are doing this.

JD—The governor wants to continue the lockdown until after the election.

CB—This reminds me that we don't know the names of those killed. It means much less if we don't know the people who are dying.

JD—There are just as many flu deaths.

LJones—I disagree.

JD—They kill 1,00,000 babies per year at Planned Parenthood.

LJones—Public Health has been asked for advice. The county needs to go through Public Health to get the variance.

JD—Is the governor going to bring the National Guard into the county?

AH—The context was that the National Guard will help with contact tracing. I listened to the conversation. We have no reason to believe the National Guard will come into Okanogan County.

?—Contact tracing is mostly by phone. Even if the National Guard is doing it, they won't be here.

AH—In comments they were talking about it as martial law, but that's not what the governor said.

LJones—Qwest Field was a place for isolation. Now it's disassembled. If we've got first responders, we can guarantee somewhere else.

CB—As responsible elected officials, we need to help stop rumors. I'm tired of hearing about Communism and martial law. Lots of conspiracies are proved wrong and we need to say so collectively.

LJones—It's about the moral basis of democracy—our respect and responsibilities to others. My job is to keep the entire public safe.

CB—We have a better chance of going forward doing it Laurie Jones' way.

LJones—I'm happy to answer your questions.

CB—We need to remember that one size doesn't fit all.

LJones—The new cases we've had didn't originate here.

CB—How many cases on the reservation?

LJones—All but two have recovered.

CB—Why make the difference?

AH—Because of sovereign rights.

CB—Here's why I asked—my district is most reservation. To start separating those things when convenient and not separating when it's not convenient is a bad thing.

LJ—In closing, we're working towards a safe reopening for businesses. The Board of Health will discuss it at tomorrow's meeting. It would be nice to have letters to support from the sheriff and some mayors.

CB—I think you've got our back.

JD—Will the meeting be via Zoom or in-person tomorrow?

LJones—Dr. McCarthy will be in person. With social distancing, we can put a maximum of 8 people in the room.

CB—I have issues about the Methow Valley. The tourism council is saying across the state that Okanogan County has opened up. They got this in their minds because we didn't extend the order. That's caused some businesses to open.

AH—Did Pierce, King and Snohomish Counties pass resolutions re: motels?

LJones—I don't know.

Long discussion regarding outsiders coming into Okanogan County.

AH—Right now we're in Phase I. Car dealers can open, all businesses can open with curbside pick-up.

CB—On the website, it's hard to tell what's in which phase.

AH—I'm having a hard time reconciling the phases and business impact.

LJones—I think there's a lot more cases than have been tested. Public Health has been the bad guy. But look at measles, polio, etc. Things are a lot better than they used to be.

CB—I think it's a message thing. The way we collect numbers may not reflect reality. Here's the message we should give the people coming over:

- Avoid public restrooms.
- Now that you're here, motels, etc are not open. Here are some ways to protect yourself....

CB—If you understand why, then it's easier to convince people to do things.

LJones—And this is a new disease. We don't know why some get real sick and others don't.

LJones—If I'm a business owner, I want to open safely—employees wear a mask, etc.

JD—The Surgeon General said not to wear a mask.

LJones—I disagree.

CB—I saw a guy sneeze in Home Depot and thought about droplets.

JD—A friend of mine went to Montana to see his mom and they were able to go to a restaurant. Now he says he feels like he’s driving back into Communist Russia.

CB—It’s stressful, all right.

LJones—My grandfather fought in WWI and we’re not asking people to do as much as they did.

Businesses can open. We’re not going to make people wear a mask.

RHD—Comment to Lauri. Here at the Economic Alliance, we’ll write a letter. What’s the deadline?

LJones—Have it in by tomorrow, please.

RHD—We’ve posted a pdf for each business to know what’s required to open up. It’s on our Facebook page.

CB—Make sure it’s clear what phase we’re in.

LJ—In conclusion, we’re not political. We’re just doing our jobs.

Opening Highway 20

AH—I asked the DOT. They say they’re about a week out.

AH—I’ve got emails from logging operations. They are starting up and will be hauling logs.

AH—If the governor believes people should stay home, they need to control traffic on the west side. We don’t have the resources.

DG—Five counties have gotten variances. Do you really need to go three weeks without any cases?

CB—We’ll find out.

Executive Session this afternoon

CB—If it’s a complaint about Lauri Jones, she can ask for an executive session, but we should afford her the opportunity to respond.

?—If there’s a complaint against an employee, that person should be able to be there in a public session or an executive session.

DG—With a potential for litigation, there may be issues about attorney/client privilege.

JD—I talked to the person who lodged the complaint and he says maybe he’s going to hire an attorney.

AH—Maybe we should check on MRSC.ORG

DG—I’ll check out the situation.

Fair Grounds

AH—We need to discuss upcoming events at the Fair Grounds. Not willing to cancel the fair in September. There’s no contingency to move it. If we’re not in Phase IV by September 4, there’ll be a societal breakdown.

CB—We can say we’re going forward with the fair, but we’ll have to look at it again later on.

Department Heads meeting:

The courts discuss social distancing in the court room and hand sanitizer.

AH—We can get a \$250,000 reimbursable grant for Covid-related expenses. Maybe we can use some to improve the sheriff’s meeting room.

Leah McCormick, Treasurer—Our doors are locked, but we let people in if they knock. In the beginning we admitted one person at a time, but now we do two. They come in one door and leave by another.

Most all of the employees work their full shift every day. We have masks & sanitizers. Desks are *not* 6 feet apart, but we’re doing the best we can. We’ve asked people to mail their taxes instead of dropping it off in person. Now we’ve got a lot of mail to process.

Larry Gilman, County Assessor—We’re not sending out increases assessments in the middle of a pandemic. Our doors are locked but we make appointments 30 minutes apart. We’ll also see people

who knock on the door. Supplies are an issue. We've got 6 feet distance taped on the floor. We allow three people in at one time, two at the windows and one waiting.

?—Some employees are working different shifts so they're not all here at the same time. We have appointments and meet outside the office sometimes. We're on the phone a lot.

Josh Thompson, Roads—The road crews are at full strength. One office person works from home and all others are in the office. The fuel tax is a big part of the road budget so that might be a problem. If it's only 2 months, that's OK, but longer will be a problem. We're seeing how we can reduce costs.

Dan Higbee, Building Department—We're doing our plan. We decided Plexiglas wouldn't work at our counter because people spread the plans out. People are mailing their plans.

Dennis Ravidou, Administrator, Juvenile Facility Discusses a project installing new lights that's running late. Also discusses isolation and quarantine. There are no covid cases so far.

Pam Stevens, Okanogan County Veterans Services—We've been open the whole time, but we have fewer visitors because people are staying home. I've got sanitizer. Right now the office is just me but we recently interviewed people for a new position.

R Grim, District Court-District Court is open, but we're asking people not to go to our window unless it's an emergency. We're taking directions from Superior Court and not having any jury trials until July at the earliest.

Mike Warden, Communications—In the beginning, we don't have visitors at the Dispatch Center. Now we've lifted that but we're using the usual rules—don't touch us, etc.

Meeting is zoom-bombed and that's the end of the meeting.

Afternoon session

Planning Department Update

PP—I want to lay out the timeline for the Comprehensive Plan. I want to reach out of the communities—Yakamas, Futurewise, Methow Valley Citizens' Council, Farm Bureau, etc, to see what they think should be included.

PP—In the May meeting, we'll pull out everything that still needs addressing. In July, we'll look at the various alternatives including keeping the 2014 plan, adding lots of new stuff, shrinking it back down and using the Methow Citizens' plan. In August, we'll take final comments. In September and October, the EIS. In November final approval from the BOCC.

PP—I talked to Rocklyn Culp from Winthrop. The town would love to have Sa Teekh Wa Park belong to Winthrop.

AH—What's the process to do a government to government transfer.

PP—The WRIA meeting went better than the first meeting she attended. The facilitator was good and they got through a lot of approvals. The next step is for the consultant to draft a plan.

PP—I'd like to recognize one of our outstanding employees for her work during Covid. She worked at the office every day, making sure everything got done. She really stepped up. I'd like to give her a certificate of appreciation. She's Pam Wilson.

BOCC passes a motion to give Ms. Wilson the certificate.

PP—Vouchers for Tonasket EMS. This is the last time the Planning Department will present them and then I'll turn them back over to Lanie and she'll deal with them.

PP & LJ discuss the vouchers and decide they have already been paid.

AH—RCW 36.34.130 tells us how to transfer Sa Teekh Wa Park to Winthrop.

JD—What's the acreage?

?—11 ½ acres.

JD—Assessed value?

AH—I'll talk to Larry Gilman (the Assessor) about this.

Executive Session RCW 42.30.110 (1)(f or g)—to receive and evaluate complaints brought against a public employee.

Laurie Jones is the employee under discussion

Motion to go to executive session for 20 minutes.

AH—Chris, we to amend the motion to invite Brian Pyper (RN, Public Health Nurse) to the executive session.

DG—Advises that either Public Health or the BOCC should be doing the executive session and it should be the one that does the hiring and firing.

After several extension, they're back in public session after 50 minutes.

Note taker ends notetaking.