

**Board of Okanogan County Commissioners**  
**Tuesday, September 28th, 2021, 1:30 p.m.**

*"These notes were taken by a County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized. Note taker comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://countywatch.org> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see the Okanogan County Commissioners' website at <https://www.okanogancounty.org>."*

**Present:**

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2  
Jim Detro (JD), BOCC District 3  
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1  
Lanie Johns (LJ), County Clerk  
Isabelle Spohn (IS), Methow resident  
Raven (R), Methow resident  
Larry Gilman (LG), Assessor  
Dan Higbee (DH), Building  
Dave Rodriguez (DR), Coroner  
Larry Hudson (LH), Noxious Weeds  
Tony Hawley (TH), Sheriff  
Mike Worden (MW), Chief Deputy Officer, Communications  
Josh Thomson (JT), Public Works  
Leah McCormack (LM), Treasurer  
Kayla Wells (KW), WSU Extension  
Karen Beatty (KB), Central Services

*.Time stamps refer to the time on the wall clock. See AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date at [https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live\\_streaming\\_of\\_meetings.php](https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php). (Much of the meeting this meeting was inaudible as many of the speakers were too far from the microphones.)*

***Summary of Important Discussions:*** *Citizens ask questions about re-scheduling planning meetings so more people can attend, deadlines for written comment on Comp. Plan, not enough policing to prevent fires and too much policing of residents on National Forest land, and letting cattle who graze on burned lands bring in invasive weeds; purchase of Forest Service building imminent, funds to come from a bond and from ARPA, will be used for Superior Court, Juvenile Court and County Clerk; property value increased 30% in two years; coroner really, really busy, Covid takes its toll on county staff; posts still vacant in Noxious Weeds, Dispatch and Corrections, among others; Communications hoping for approval of mitigation grants; New shops envisioned for Winthrop and Tonasket; Extension Office progresses on County needs assessment; employees to start anti-phishing training; Courthouse to receive a touch-up, AH muses on fish acces to the dam.*

1:30 p.m. - Public Comment Period:

*IS questions holding Planning Commission public hearings at a time when people are at work. IS: Secondly, there's no deadline for written public comment on the Comprehensive Plan... Also, will written comments be received after hearing has been held? I understand that there's no public*

hearing by the the BOCC; they will deliberate on all the public hearings and written comments to date. AH: maybe I can talk to Pete and we can adjust the time... CB I received the emails with the questions. Pete may be replying to them so I don't want to get in the way...

1:35- R: This is regarding management of post fire land here on the Okanogan Ntl. Forest. There are a few concerns I'd like to present as well as a few ideas, also questions about how you may or may not have interacted with the Forest Service in the past. I live near Eight Mile, was evacuated 25 days because my neighbor started a fire... I and other local residents were pretty shocked and appalled at the level of policing. In the past I've asked the Forest Service to do more actively policing... One summer in August I doused nine unattended campfires myself. That should be their job. They say there don't have the manpower but (with) the last fire I see that they do have (enough), it's just not being managed in the proper way. Also I've noticed continued ranching on (*closed*) land. (*They said closures were to prevent*) introduction of invasive weeds to the recently-burned lands. So, why do we have cattle...introducing lots of invasive weeds? Also, the public is being locked out of the forest that we own, we're taxpayers, this is our land, and that there are large scale logging operations... In the meantime we've been threatened with massive fines. I heard I could be fined \$10,000 for running in my neighborhood because I live in National Forest...Absurd... I've asked Head Ranger Chris Furr about accountability, when are they opening the forest, why are cattle still ranging where there's no forage, why are they logging old growth trees off the Twisp River, logging up the Chewuk... Answers from Chris Furr have been prompt but evasive...not transparent. I propose a citizen oversight board for the Forest Service. Members could go with crews, see what's happening on the land. Why cattle are allowed and not us?... How many board feet of logs are being removed? Another idea is re-allocating policing funds (toward) proactive policing to prevent wildfire in August.

AH: Cattle ranging got extensions because much of their fall ranges were burned. I'm sure they'll be moved off in time. Commissioners have been trying to help one rancher look for emergency grazing. (*He explains their need to support cattle raising as part of Methow's agriculture, how they keep ranchers from turning out their cattle where wolves are present. He cites hikers and bikers ignoring wildfire precautions*). R: I understand, but the fire is out. AH: I can confer with Chris Furr to see what they're actually doing right now. (R brings up question of logging statistics. AH replies that revenues go to Montana office and are re-allocated. Says there is usually only one federal officer to do policing. He invites R. to call him for further discussion. (*End of public comment period.*))

1:54 - CB asks LJ about emails from someone asking for a change in the Campbell vs. Gwynn interpretation (limiting building permits). AH: When it's black and white, it's black and white. (They discuss inconsistency of cattle grazing and forest closure. A special voucher is approved.2:01 - Purchase of Forest Service building - AH: A year ago Superior Court said with Covid it's necessary to keep people away from each other... It's going to (*offer more space*) to the Court, and to Juvenile Detention, we won't have to ship kids out, and we can use ARPA (American Rescue Plan) funding. They had temporarily put a halt to jury trials. There are 24,000 sq. ft. plus parking. The County Clerk will also be there. Leases in the building worth \$3,600 a month will help with utility costs. JD: It also fills the gap of money voted by the citizens for the Juvenile Department.

2:09 - **Heads of Department Reports:** Assessor - LG: There's been a 1.2% per month increase in property value county-wide. The county has averaged \$45 M in new construction. This year it's \$82 M in assessed value. There have only been 30 appeals. The law has changed to evaluate every year instead of every 2 years. The last two years it's gone up 30% on average in the entire area. (AH notes that it's difficult to fill their two vacant Methow truck driver positions when a worker's salary won't pay for a house there.) AH: In fact we don't have a lot of mid-income

housing.

Building dept. - DH: Cass passed Building Inspector exam!

Coroner - DR: We've been really really busy. A big rise in natural deaths. More deaths in the county, more at-home Covid deaths. CB: We should get Maurice (*Emergency Management*) and Lauri (*Health*) next time to talk about this. AH: We should put the Coroner at the bottom of the list (*laughter*). That's a pretty grim deal... DR: A lot of our departments are operating with reduced staff... The Prosecutor's office is being really challenged right now... Grim things going on.

2:23 - Noxious Weeds - LH: We're done with the contracts we expected for this year. We're still understaffed at this point.

Prosecutor's office - (*Report largely inaudible.*) AH: The civil side of the Prosecutor's Office is not very big but they're the ones that have to answer everybody's questions. It's really good that departments are starting to use the Chief Civil Deputy.

Sheriff's office - (*Largely inaudible*) TH: Had a meeting on first response... We can get someone for suicide help, a call service... (*Getting*) a grant to get (*something that wraps the legs*), we're upgrading audio-visual capacity, there's a need for staff in corrections. CB: I appreciate your effort to work in partnership with Behavioral Health Card.

2:35 - Communications - MW: Two open positions. We're waiting for the transfer switch. Two mitigation grant applications out. (*Inaudible, something about Tunk Mt.*), pursuing another (*inaudible*) on Jackass Butte, (*Regarding building purchase*) Someday a dispatch facility will be necessary, incident with a staff person exposed to Covid. (*AH talks about lack of space; add on to this building or add on to the juvenile facility—doesn't want to demolish, would rather re-purpose. CB encourages departments to voice their dreams in terms of building projects.*)

2:41 - Public Works - JT: I've noticed a lot of cost increases on pretty much everything, and everything takes a long time to get delivered. Ordered some (*trellis?*) last November and still not here. Thinking of building two shops in Winthrop and Tonasket. We've been talking about it for a few years; building prices are reasonable.

2:45 - Treasurer's office - LM: First, something that's going to excite you all—in thirty days the second half of property taxes is due... You'll all get that money... Secondly, usually we have 150 to 200 names on the foreclosures list. This year there are 42. We've really been working hard getting people to pay. The third thing: Bonding. A 15, 20 or 30-year bond may be accessible by the end of the year (*for Forest Service Building purchase*). Now our bond rating at Standard and Poor's is A-. That's really pretty good.

2:49 - AH: It costs \$51,000/year per million dollars of bond. Are there other projects that lend themselves to bonding? CB: We can bundle them. JD: We're in a good position with an A- rating, thanks to being fiscally responsible. LM: With ARPA money and all that, it's probably to our advantage to do something we haven't done in a long time.

WSU Extension - KW: We've been working (*on the County needs assessment*) for almost two years. They (*volunteers*) are currently working through the data.

2:55 - Central Services - KB: With the security breach this year WA Counties' Risk Pool is

making available a training platform for a the users in the county to detect malicious emails/phishing. We'll start in the next couple of months--it's a 15 min./month training. CB: I had that training with another job and it was really good. They put out a false email and I fell for it...

Corrections - MW: We need to work on the Courthouse trim around the top and clock tower; in the next month we'll inspect it and get it repaired. A new custodian is starting Friday. At the Corrections facility Covid is starting some issues. It's been tough, people working overtime on days off. With resurgence in (*Covid*) numbers, people are letting protocols slip. For two opening positions we're tapping into Workforce. We reached out to Grant County about their process of needs assessment for their new corrections facility. (*AH says he doesn't see building in near term but that 8% of sales tax does go to public safety.*)

AH: I sent out an email to schedule appointments to see us about budgets. We'll have a new, streamlined public hearing, maybe by December 4th.

LJ: Two positions vacant for the Fair Advisory Committee. Two people have sent letters of interest.

3:18 - (Emergency Management) - AH: Have LJ (*make sure*) emergencies have expiration dates. There are a lot of purchasing requirements that go out the window in a state of emergency. (*CB agrees on need to define that, and what happens with evacuations that cities need to know.*)

3:21 - Salmon Recovery - AH: The Salmon Board's executive director asked if we'd put levels on the agenda. I said we need to know if rate payers were responsible for the process, and it's upper tribes in BC. Colville Tribes were in favor of (*salmon*) reaching the dam but not in favor of helping them artificially over the falls. (*At Enloe Dam?*) JR: They blew enough money (*with the \$30,000 study*) to get half way through to their goal. AH: My personal position is that if they're not going to re-power it, breaching of that dam would be okay as long as there were no financial effects to the PUD or the rate payers. The conversation came up because there's a meeting this fall for an official position—what the long term goals for power are in the County.

3:28 - Meeting adjourned.