

Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting October 11, 2021 AM session

CB—Chris Branch, BOCC chair, District 1
AH – Andy Hover, BOCC vice-chair, District 2
JD – Jim DeTro, BOCC member, District 3
LJ—Lalena Johns- Clerk to the Commissioners
MC – Mike Wordan -Sheriff Dept communications manager
DR – Dave Rodriguez – County Coroner
CH – Cari Hall - County Auditor
LM – Leah McCormick – County Treasurer
LG – Larry Gilman – County Assessor

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.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 https://www.okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners_proceedings.php

The time stamps refer to the times on the AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date. Click [here](#) to go to video.

Summary of significant discussion: Management of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and projects-suggestion that county could hire an outside firm to do the work; Funding for Methow Watershed Council (MWC); Request from Sheriff's Dept and Coroner for new building – Coroner describes challenging conditions he is currently working in especially with regard to lack of adequate sanitary space to store bodies; BOCC passes resolution to use bond to pay for purchase of a building for Superior and Juvenile court; Treasurer requests resolution to use Admin. leave for two employees who were forced to take days off due to Covid - related office closure; Assessor updates BOCC on changes in budgeting and levy fund certification process.

2:50 – CB and AH have conversation about deadlines for ARPA reporting. CB has a request in to ARPA folks to verify using ARPA funds to purchase old Forest Service building for Superior Court and Juvenile court. Short conversation about the building. AH wants to reserve some time to review proposed ARPA projects and consider hiring someone to manage the ARPA process. More conversation about using ARPA funds to purchase property to use for court. Discussion about defining infrastructure.

16:30 – JD mentions that he got quarterly report from OBHC and they lost 23 people. CB clarifies that he is talking about people who refused to get vaccinated. JD says that the Confluence hospital in Wenatchee lost 35 people.

18:40 – CB asks if AH knows of anyone who may want to manage the ARPA funds for the county. Discussion about how long the job may last – around 3-4 years.

20:00 – AH asks LJ to postpone interviews for the FAC to 3:30 due to large number of comments for upcoming public hearing.

21:55 – AH mentions a constituent who has a fall cattle grazing permit which is on land that has been burned out. He spoke with state and federal agencies and problem is not resolved yet. Discussion about how to approach this issue.

26:38 – more brief conversation about ARPA and alternatives to traditional fencing for cattle ranging. Virtual fencing, etc. Conversation turns to how much it costs to feed a cow.

31:20 – BOCC goes into executive session to discuss union negotiations.

43:50 – BOCC returns from Exec. Session. AH reports that LTAC had it's final meeting to determine what gets funding. Lists some items that got funding. Short conversation about other funding items for LTAC.

47:15 – Discussion about Methow Watershed Council (MWC) funding. MWC asked for \$20K per year. Discussion about details of this issue. AH suggests that they could be partially funded by grants with the county could do the rest. BOCC agrees to fund at a level NTE \$20K with the stipulation that the MWC try to find other funding for certain projects. AH mentions a project that Chelan County is involved with that could be a model for OK County to use. He has a meeting with DOE and Chelan County to discuss further.

1:00:20 – MW reports on condition of Public Works building on Railroad Ave. that is used to store communications equipment. Photos show condition of building is very poor. Equip needs to be protected to extend life and readiness. It's time to replace this building. The coroner has a nearby building which is also in poor condition. MW invited Coroner here to explain his needs with the goal of possibly getting approval for a new building that would work for both of them.

1:03:15- Coroner gives details on how he has fixed up a 20' x 20' space (cleaned up and painted and installed lights) inside an old building to use as a morgue. The roof isn't falling in yet but it is in rough shape. He explains that it is not a morgue in any official sense of the word, but rather a place to store bodies. Due to this effort he is now able to take tissue donations which have increased significantly since last year. He goes on to explain that the county and state are experiencing a concern about the ability to store bodies. This is because more people are dying at home and not in hospitals. As of this morning, the county's body storage capacity is full. Precht's Funeral Home has 2 bodies stored in a garage. There are only 3 available spaces right now for bodies in the whole county. This weekend alone we had 4 deaths with bodies to deal with. It's too close for comfort. There is a push in WA state to standardize and require certifications for facilities and individuals. Currently if someone came to the Okanogan County facility to certify, as soon as they saw the pack rats running around the certification would be

denied. We are in a much better situation than when he started, but we need to do much better. There is no running water, heat or ventilation, and given that facilities will eventually have to meet minimum standards it makes sense to build one that will meet the criteria. This is an opportunity to construct a building that would satisfy needs of both the communications and coroner. Another issue counties are experiencing is that there are not enough pathologists to do autopsies. If we had a facility that would be adequate for that, he would not have to drive bodies to Everett for autopsies as is currently the case. BOCC discusses whether ARPA funds could be used for construction of such a building. Possibly for the coroner's portion, but maybe not the communications equipment storage section.

DR – Suggests that new building could house Coroner's vehicles. BOCC engages in discussion about need to support these departments and how it relates to Covid 19.

MW and BOCC discuss having an initial estimate done on what it would cost to build something that would satisfy needs. Once numbers are available, they could move forward with design and budgeting for construction. JD asks about buying surplus refrigerated trailers to store bodies. This leads to a discussion about Chelan County paying \$80K for a refrigerated trailers and how expensive that is. AH asks about a scenario where OK county builds a state-of-the-art autopsy facility and other counties bring their bodies here. DR – says that other counties believe that we are too far away. Grant and Kittitas county are going ahead with building their own facilities and want us to bring our bodies to them. Problem is still the lack of pathologists. There used to be a couple from the Seattle area, but they stopped doing that when Covid hit. There is one pathologist left who will travel, and he will only go to Moses Lake. DR – states that he is not requesting a state-of-the-art morgue today, but rather just an adequate storage space for bodies. It would be nice if it could be modified in the future to include an autopsy suite. CB asks if water and sewer is available to the building site. Answer is yes. Not currently hooked up, but available.

1:23:20 MW – We are talking with Skamania, Skagit counties to have a phone system network. Will add San Juan county soon. This will be an interlocal agreement that will be on the consent agenda tomorrow.

1:26:20 - Bond Resolutions. Auditor CH, Treasurer LM arrive in case BOCC has any questions about the paperwork for the Bond process. BOCC reviews a resolution declaring intent to reimburse capital expenditure fund with money from a bond. AH makes motion to approve resolution, voted and approved. LM brought engagement letter. Asks if BOCC wants to see it. CB says yes. LM explains what the purpose of the engagement letter is. CB notes that the engagement letter is non-binding and can be cancelled at any time.

1:33:00- AH mentions the need to write a plan regarding ARPA money. CB states that there are three roles that people play in managing ARPA funds. They seem very similar. AH asks about contracting out to have someone manage the grant applications and the projects that result. It requires someone with skills and familiarity with the process. CH – suggests contacting neighboring counties to see if they are doing something similar. CB talks about the roles that are required to participate in ARPA funding, and questions whether he is the best person for that. He has been doing it just to get the process going, but suggests that someone else in the financial department would be better for that in the long term. Discussion about how clumsy the computer program is that was set up for ARPA.

1:48:40 LM – mentions that Treasurers office had to shut down for 2.5 days due to Covid. Asks BOCC to approve resolution use Administrative Leave to pay non-Covid employees who had to miss work due to no fault of their own. (Rather than making them use sick leave).

CH – says State Auditor’s Assn has been quiet on ARPA funding. CB says his feeling is that there will be a fair amount of latitude as to what funds can be used for.

AH – moves to approve resolution approving paid Admin Leave for Treasurers office employees. Seconded, voted and passed.

1:54:00 - Assessor Larry Gilman (LG) arrives with assistant to discuss timelines for meeting deadlines on budget and levy requirements. AH asks about dates for certifying tax levy rates.

CB – thanks LG for detailed information he provided.

LG – requested meeting to update the process. Law has changed (in our favor). Big change is that the deadline has been changed in state law to the first Monday in December to certify levy requests for all Jr. Taxing Districts. This year that falls on Dec 6th. This would include EMS districts. Jr. Taxing Districts need to have their budget requests done by Nov 30th in order for BOCC to be able to approve by the first Monday in December. Other remaining county budget requests (basically current expense and roads) need to be certified by Dec 15th with information received by first Monday in December. Lengthy discussion follows about specifics of required public hearings, scheduling, etc.

2:25:00 – AM portion of BOCC meeting concludes.