

## Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting November 28, 2022 PM session

AH - Andy Hover, BOCC Chair, District 2

CB - Chris Branch, BOCC vice-chair, District 1 JD- Jim DeTro, BOCC member, District 3

LJ- Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board

JT - Jenn Tate, Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC)

CH - Carrie Hall, Auditor

LM - Leah McCormick, Treasurer

AL - Albert Lin, Prosecutor

TL - Teagan Levine, assistant to AL

LH - Larry Hudson, Noxious Weed board coordinator

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/commissioner-and-board-of-health-meetings.html> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, click [here](#).

### Summary of Significant Discussion:

- *Year end report of OCTC. Increase in Lodging tax revenues due to more payments from short term rentals, discussion about how to increase tourism in Okanogan County.*
- *Review Prosecuting Attorney budget*
- *Noxious Weed board budget review, BOCC approves increase for noxious weed tax assessment.*
- *BOCC discusses possibility of hiring an administrator to handle day to day management of county business.*

The time stamps refer to the video that is published on the county's AV Capture site. To watch the video, click [here](#).

Okanogan County Tourism Council report:

**2:59:56** - Afternoon session begins. Year-end report from Jenn Tate of the Okanogan County Tourism Council. Several minutes are spent in small talk while tech issues are worked out.

**3:07:00** - Terry Lee, President of the OCTC. Reports that they have been doing a lot of work on brochures. Goal for next year is a Methow Trails map. Recently had annual membership meeting. Good turnout. Brent Nourse from Loup Loup ski hill was the guest speaker. Jenn will give you the marketing presentation.

**3:08:50** - Jenn Tate reviews the mission of the OCTC, funding largely comes from tax revenues, some for towns and cities, some grants. Tax revenues - had a couple of bumps in collection but are caught up. \$647,000 up through now. \$777,000 is the projected tax revenue for this year. That is about \$100K over last year. It was a good year for tourism - no major fires, smoke, covid, etc.

AH - looks up what the budget had predicted for 2022. \$560K was budgeted. It looks like we will be about \$200K over that.

JT - That will have an impact on what we can do.

One thing to note - Sun mountain lodge used to account for about 60% of the Lodging tax revenue, now it's about 29%. This is due to the AirBnB and VRBO remitting their lodging tax directly. It used to be up to the property owner, and many of them just didn't submit. Now it's submitted automatically by the short term rental platforms so we are collecting a lot more. We are looking at bringing the individual vacation rental folks into the tourism conversations. Most of the Okanogan County short term rentals are owned by individuals with some connection to the area rather than corporations like in Chelan County.

JT - We've had good social media engagement with very few trolls. Top engagements: wildlife, northern lights, mural that was uncovered in Omak. Instagram posts- trends more towards scenic beauty. We worked on pushing fire lookout posts and it was successful. Twitter - we don't use it much and don't know what is going to happen to it.

JD - "he's trying to make an honest media platform out of it instead of a bunch of liberal crap" (presumably referring to Elon Musk).

JD - compliments Jenn on the Okanogan Country ads.

Website stats: organic clicks are good. We don't focus on pay per click.

Fishing guide is updated this year but no additions or subtractions to fishing locations.

Hiking guide we added 4 hikes and removed 2 hikes.

Regional tourism - NCW counties would like more tourism that moves people around. Currently most tourists go to one place and stay there. Goal is to get them to spend time in different counties. Marketing can only do so much - we need more infrastructure and development of places that will draw tourists. Plain, Waterville, etc are really desperate for more tourism.

AH - asks about working with Canada and how they can increase tourism in parts of the county that aren't the Methow.

JT - Some areas like Concunully have established a brand as a sporting area. Brewster and Pateros have a good reputation with the salmon derby, jamboree, etc.

JT - It's a bit of a devils bargain. If you want to draw the Bellevue crowd you have to look more like REI. That may not appeal to folks in other parts of the county. Gamble Sands is doing a great job. They are booked solid and thinking of putting in another hotel.

CB - points out that it is important to deliver on your promise.

AH - talks about the need to have a lodge with high end amenities to attract the hunting and fishing visitors.

CB - talks about the visual impact of junkyards and sad looking towns. Those things are a deterrent to tourists. Mentions Methow Trails as an example of an effort that resulted in attracting tourists. It didn't just happen.

AH - points out that the Methow Trail system was a result of private landowners donating their property.

CB - talks about how to handle the amount of people you will end up with if you are very successful. How many is too many?

AH - Mentions the cars lined up along highway 20 for hiking trail access and opines that that is too much.

JT - Talks about a small roadside gas station/restaurant near Dry Falls that is a great example of the kind of small business that can succeed in rural areas. Also, disaster

tourism is a thing. We highlighted recent fire burn areas and people love it. They come here to see the aftermath of the big fires. Fire lookouts are very popular also. Entiat has some fire lookouts that are set up for overnight stays. They are booked out for years.

Presentation concludes with a two minute promotional video.

**4:09:00**- Auditor, Treasurer, Prosecuting Atty and Teagan Levine present to discuss budget for prosecuting atty. Detailed discussion about changes to various line items in Prosecutor's budget.

**4:33:00** - Prosecuting Atty and assistant leave. BOCC continues talking about budget with Auditor and Treasurer (*it is unclear which department they are discussing*).

Prosecuting Atty and TL leave. Auditor and Treasurer stay to discuss budget details.

**5:00:30** - Larry Hudson (noxious weed board coordinator) arrives to discuss budget with BOCC. AH mentions that this is more than a simple budget discussion, as it includes a request to increase the weed tax. The purpose of the increase would be to add personnel to the staff. AH states need to justify the increase in taxes. Asks Larry if the job could be accomplished with fewer people.

Larry- is asking for one more seasonal employee. If we did not increase the assessment this year we would be OK, but would be very short in 2024. We need at least 25% of our budget to carry over each year in order to pay our bills before the April tax payments come in. Currently have 4 full time employees and 2 seasonal. I'm asking for one more seasonal. AH asks what the employees actually do.

AH asks about the public hearing that was held about the tax increase. Larry states that 3 people showed up, and all were opposed. They were not happy about the communications that were sent. The weed board sends out communications to land owners notifying them about the need to control their weeds. If they don't respond, then weed board takes care of it.

AH - if staff was not increased, how would that affect the job of locating weeds?

Larry - I would have to stop applying for grants that help landowners.

AH -asks how grants benefit landowners.

Larry - gives example of a grant with the Conservation Dist. That helped to pay for weed control on land that recently burned in wildfire. We also work with USFS and DNR to control high priority weeds, especially near private land.

CB asks if recent fires have had an impact on weeds.

Larry- yes, absolutely. They really increase after a fire. That's why we try to get those grants to help cover the costs.

CB- it's a state requirement for counties to control their weeds. We have that responsibility. What happens when we get way behind?

Larry - two options . Enforcement by sending letter and then do it ourselves if necessary. Other option is weed tickets. That is a civil infraction. We have three levels of citation. The penalty is determined by a judge. RCW allows for up to \$500 per day per parcel per type of weed. I have only used this option 1 time when we were threatened by a land owner.

CB - repeats that county has a responsibility to control weeds by law and don't want to get behind.

Larry - we do some things above what is required by law such as free consultations with land owners, and training for employees.

Current assessment is \$9.74 per parcel, plus \$0.01 per acre.

LM - asks if she can ask a question as a citizen. Does public works still do weed control? AH - only along county road right of way.

LM - so if I have 5 acres and I take care of my weeds, how do I deal with the overflow from nearby landowners who don't take care of their weeds. I am paying 9.74, and I pay for spraying my weeds. Now I am being asked to pay extra for the people who don't?

CB - relates history about town and county arguing about who is responsible for weeds.

AH - gives example of how the increase gives value.

Larry - states that for the largest landowners, their weed tax doesn't come close to covering the cost for their property, but it does ensure that their neighbors take care of their weeds. Everybody benefits.

Discussion about city landowners and how they impact weeds.

LM - this fund used to have a lot of grants. Now am I hearing that you may have to cut back on grants because you don't have enough staff?

Larry - explains that they need money up front because they don't get paid until the work is completed.

**5:31:45** - JD moves to accept the weed board proposed increase to \$12.74 per parcel + \$.02 per acre (private property) and \$.29 per acre for state lands. CB seconds the motion.

LM - reminds BOCC that it is important to do a press release to let public know about the increase. BOCC approves unanimously. JD moves to adopt resolution that will codify the increase. BOCC approves.

AH- talks about why they have public discussions about issues. It's so that there is a record of what they were thinking when they make their decisions.

**5:44:08** - Zoom gets Zoom bombed by a pornographic image. Zoom is terminated.

**5:45:50** - CB- brings up a subject that had been discussed in the past but got dropped. BOCC discusses the concept of having an administrative employee who is relatively high level and familiar with all the major issues the county is doing.

Mentions a scenario where all the county commissioners are replaced and nobody is familiar with the details. It's about continuity of government. AH - agrees, and states that he does a lot to save the county money but it is not because of ego. Implies that he would like to have someone else taking care of details such as managing the new building they purchased recently.

AH - asks CB to make a bullet point list of policy issues that need to be discussed.

CB - talks about how towns and how as they grow they usually evolve into having a City manager.

AH - it's important to have a person who doesn't fall under the public records act who can actually get things done.

**6:05:00** - meeting adjourned (4:35 pm).