

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
April 27, 2020
Virtual Commissioners' Meeting, via Zoom

Present:

Jim DeTro, District 3 - JD, Chair, Board of Commissioners

Chris Branch, District 1 - CB, Vice Chair, Board of Commissioners

Andy Hover, District 2 - AH, Board of Commissioners

Lalena Johns - LJ, Clerk of the Board

"Speaker" - Kim Herriman, representing a group of demonstrators outside the building who support "opening" the county in regards to Covid-19. He states that he is employed by Sysco and is familiar with the Okanogan Valley and the restaurants there.

Members of the Public attending the Zoom session - Hover states part-way through the meeting that over 55 individuals had joined the discussion by early in the meeting.

These notes were taken by a County Watch volunteer via ZOOM. 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>.

Meeting Summary:

Kim Herriman(further referred to as **"Speaker"**) **demonstrators outside meeting:** Voices support for Okanogan County to lift its lockdown and allow businesses and individuals to make their own choices as to whether or not to comply with Governor Inslee's directives. The basis of this thinking is that people are responsible and will do the right thing. **Commissioner DeTro** fully supports the demands of this group and does not agree with Inslee's directives. He thinks people will do the right thing and should have their choice as to how to be safe, with involvement of Health Dept. He will not take any vaccine unless the liberals in Congress take it first. **Commissioner Hover** states businesses must be opened at some point, but that the rights of individuals to feel safe must be considered also. It may be each individual's choice, but when your choice affects other people, how will it affect everything overall? He believes a decision must be made by the county so that everything is clearly understood by May 4. **Commissioner Branch** states that it is imperative not to act too quickly in "opening" the county. Do not politicize the issue. The county should rely upon data from statewide and local health officers and any loosening of the directives must account for the possibility that data will show a worsening of the situation; in that case, there must be a back-up plan to put restrictions back into

place. However, the necessary data is not yet available due to lack of ability to test. It is more useful to have each type of business present their plans to prevent spread of the virus rather than to issue mandates. **Discussions:** definition of "existing" construction projects; 2 new grants from state; legalities surrounding video recordings of meetings.

10:00 - Pledge of Allegiance

Jim DeTro opens the meeting. It is noted that there is a group of demonstrators outside the building holding signs. An unidentified man representing that group is invited to speak:

Speaker: thanks for an opportunity to meet. We are here basically in support of your busy as commissioners, on the front line. We know your job isn't easy. We want you to see by the signs outside, etc. there is a whole lot of people in the state and especially in our county that support opening the count in a responsible way, a way that is safe, people able to get back to work and support their families, etc. The group represents a very diverse group of people - business, medical, people who work for businesses, and so forth. Quite a diverse group.

My expertise is with the restaurant community. Between Pateros and Oroville, 12 places are closed right now. They want to go back to work, visit family, etc. They want to get out and rejoin (*interference.*) I aspired how things are going on Spokane County - there is an uptick in calls for mental health, people nervous and scared - it's just a consequence of things shutting down.

Besides food service hospitals and clinics are suffering as well. At Mid-Valley hospital food service, I had to go through a strict protocol even to get in. The office was empty with no one there. The reason - procedural things like knee replacements can't be done there right now. It poses a health risk because people are unable to go to see physician physically. It reminds me of my daughter's step father. He was riding his bike and started feeling unwell His daughter advised him to see his doc (*interference*) He went in and took him to Wenatchee...cholesterol had backed up. It was life threatening. They treated him and he's fine now. Had he not been able to see doc, he could have died. That's why we need to reopen.

People can be responsible. We want to encourage you to give them the opportunity to open back up again. They can do it. We can do it. Please really think about opening up Okanogan county or letting the county have the opportunity to re-open. They want to show the rest of the state what they can do. They are regular citizens paying taxes (*interference.*)

JD - I was telling Andy this morning I watched a You Tube video yesterday, 2 doctors out of L.A.

Speaker - I saw it too.

JD - They compared covid-19 with H1N1 and other flu, and this paranoia - we have to stop it!

Need to be positive rather than negative. The main doctor, main speaker says - think of the image you are doing, how domestic violence, suicide, crime rate is going rampant. If you molest a child that will stick with them for the rest of their life. Cites the data on the Fawn Ck fire (*a fire in the Methow started by lightning, in which a huge Blackburn wound up being many times as large as*

the fire.) We are in a situation that is way, way past..... I will be 72. I have chronic lung disease, just had worst case of pneumonia in all my life. I should probably be tested, But I'm here cause I won't run scared anymore. I will take every precaution, but won't live in a bubble either. That's the end of my discussion. I am all for....when our resolution expires, I don't want it to see it extended, don't want a new one....I want to put out a resolution to businesses that if you don't want to open, you don't have to. Make every precaution - that is your decision

If the Governor sets the L&I guys loose rescinding licenses, etc. ...If they go bankrupt, ask them what use is a business license worth then anyway?

AH - The one thing I notice is that the 3 of us sit here and are paid by the tax payers to represent the gov't. Difficult time for us. I've been getting e-mails all weekend saying do not open, then there are e-mails saying our businesses will fail if you don't. We have already seen 3 sets of commissioners trying to make resolutions and the gov some bad and.... It would be best if we can understand what the governor's metrics are, and get direct info directly from him to us. We are the representatives of the people. The people come to us...the metrics on his address didn't have details. Wildfires are easier to deal with than this. For example, if the fire gets to there, we need to evacuate; if it get to here, we will do this. That's what the people of Okanogan County need. They wonder how long does it go on? etc.

Tomorrow we will hopefully get some health care folks in here and ask questions - cases are going up; how many folks in ICU? get the actual data. etc. We represent. everyone. We need to collect every bit of info possible. You saw 3 sets of BOCC members (*in 3 North East Counties last Friday*), and the Gov said you are to going to do.....

Speaker - Which group is telling you the truth?

AH - I don't think it's the truth. Every single person has the same rights . So that means someone's right to be afraid is no less than someone else's business to operate.

Speaker - Which group is most accurate? At first, they said hundred of thousands will die - but it has come down. My son-in-law is a doctor, knows a lot more about medicine than I do... he says everything that is a virus, when exposed to the sun, dies in 2 seconds. That's why you see in summer time the rate goes down. He says this is a fast-acting one, but still a virus. The You Tube you referred to, we are talking hundreds....you could ask , which is the best? The thing is that this group (*the one he represents today*) says if you want to stay in place, do that. If you want to wear a mask, do that. I was at grocery store the other day - I got markers - some folks got too close and I put up my hands and said, " Please." They backed right up. Another guy came up and didn't realize. We said, "These folks are next. Not confrontational at all. They want to respect others, practice distancing. I am 65 and have Type 2 diabetes. I try to be as responsible as I can. If you are concerned, stay inside. People will help.

AH - I understand..... It is people's voice now to do what you want. But when it boils right down to it, people say if I die, I die. I never went through that, but watched my grandpa deal with it . If you can't breathe, you will call 911. There are people having a hard time with businesses.

I'm not discounting that (*interference*) I think sometimes this gets lost - it's your choice, but when your choice affects other people, how will it affect everything over all? These are the things we must consider.

JD - A doctor said this is the first time in history we have been quarantining the healthy people. Quarantining the healthy people affects their immune system.

Speaker - Jim and I are old enough to remember polio, chicken pox. The medical community worked hard, came up with vaccines; but even though they had the vaccines they continued to be affected until it could be made into an immunization shot. We had a lock-down society, encouraged people who had the diseases.... (*Interference*).... People who grew up in the USA and they would like it to be fundamentally changed.

They are using this virus as an opportunity to further political positions. When the #2 Representative says, "This is an opportunity, let's not let it go by....."

JD - When they do develop a vaccine, I'm not taking it. My recommend is that "he" takes it first, then all the liberals in Congress take it....

CB - Well, we did get into the politics, didn't we?

Speaker - I apologize.

JD - It's inevitable because the other side is doing it and we have to answer

CB - I will not politicize. We now have another increase. We've been basing our thinking on the statistics being flat. I've had input on this - if we could do more testing, we could do the "dial in" thing - even on the cruise of a ship, you can speed up the motor and if something is wrong you can slow it down, etc. ... This is the type of thing we need in place.

If we are having conversations with the Governor (we have been doing it on a weekly basis. Every county in E WA have had an ability to speak, and all of them seem to want to open economy but need protections in place, but none of them want to just open, wide open.

I made an oath to defend the constitution. I carry one around in my briefcase and if you want to open it up and look at it, we all have different interpretations.

I have a list of businesses. I think we should get suggestions from everyone. There are the suggestions that are being made to the governor today. Those case are being made by local officials to the Governor. Construction has been opened - let's continue to make suggestions. If we are following guidelines, we are setting an example.

But what we know about Okanogan County statistics, that is just coming out. Right now, it's random and not statistically valid; I think we'd find even more cases if it were.. Some folks have already had it, but this isn't reported. (*Interference.*) They experienced it in a big way, but they didn't call Health Dept.

Opening business is strategic. We need to do it with data and conversations with Gov's office, etc. I don't feel I can't just open without some kind of metrics, etc. like the gov officer does. You are in touch with the restaurant business. That type of stuff and type of monitoring, etc. needs to be brought up.

Speaker: We have on our website directions as to how to open responsibly, etc. Go to cysco.com. At least my restaurants have access (*bad transmission.*) People are not aware of the death we had in Okanogan County, but the lady in her 40's, I know the family , and according to them this person became ill and went and tried to be tested at least once, and could not get testing done on her conditions.

AH - As of last night, we got 500 test kits. Our health officers did an excellent job trying to get them. Won't speak for them, but if our statistics are viable, if we have only tested (x%?) of the population, it's incumbent upon the hospitals to test people who want it. I know that we run out of supplies, but I believe anyone should be able to just go and get a test. Can we do that now? No. We don't have 43,000 test kits. Hopefully we keep getting more.

Speaker - You are exactly right. I know people in my own family that have severe conditions as far back as December (*Interference*). ...they suffered from this, but they can't go in for testing of antibodies.

AH - Yes, I think anyone that thinks they need to be tested, they should be. If the doc says no, that is a problem.barring not enough test kits. If the doc is worried about the number of test kits....today, we have, I think, 55 participants in this meeting, which is the most I've ever seen I a regular meeting that is not a hearing. It's good people are looking at this,

Speaker- the people I talked with are concerned about their neighbors.*interrupted*....

AH - Could we get back to restaurants?

CB - Yes, the Health Dept has the responsibility to control good practice in restaurants. One thing I'd like to do is at least find ourself one more health official in OK Cty - take that one step further, we need another pubic health worker, which we always have. We have opened construction for the existing projects - our officials are older guys and we have to pull them into the system to do this. We will need to be pushing for that with all these \$\$ that come in.

Speaker- Maybe you should reach out to some of the retirees and ask them to help out? Help them to open responsibly. They used to work in those fields.

CB - that could work, but we are faced with the fact that those are the people who are vulnerable. That's why we have 2 officials that are out. But when the resources are offered to us by the state, we need the answers handy - and that should be that we need more resources for our Health Dept. I don't see how they are even operating now.... They are working day and night. We need this info ready when the Gov's office comes to us.

Speaker - I can speak for all restaurants up and down the valley, and none of them would not work with the Health Dept. This is a perfect opportunity for gov't and private industry to work hand in hand.

CB - So do you have ideas of where we might have groups of people who could focus on each business area In that plan? if we will convince people, we have to have some sort of monitoring sytem. There are those who are responsible, and a few who are not. Those who are not could let the virus slip through our hands, and we could revert to something even worse.

Speaker - There is no system that can guarantee 100%. Way back when people first came to the Okanogan Valley, they were putting families at risk. Are there knuckle heads out there? Sure. If you are going to have Life and liberty, that means you will have knuckleheads out there. How will you prevent people from attacking police officers in NYC? It is our responsibility to report the knuckleheads and do something. This is a free country.

CB - They had the cavalry, too. It got bad.

AH - We have a lot of sectors of business that are closed, and I'm not sure why....gyms, etc...hairdressers, restaurants except for take-out, everything non-essential, small shops for us...we need something in our pocket. How does this plan work with different sectors? Auto dealers?Gyms?

Speaker - This weekend, where I live, whether grocery stores, etc. - they did a good job of coming up with their own ways of practicing. I know from talking with restaurant owners, distancing... would not be too hard to tape off seats. You will get the social distancing. Maybe you can't sit at the movie with your family... in the old days, there were ushers who monitored. We could do that. They could check for social distancing. There are people who wouldn't go because they are not comfortable. Maybe we could follow up with Health Dept and they could monitor, make suggestions, compliment people who are distancing, etc. Every place I've been into I've seen that.

People like the group outside the building now want to have the opportunity to show what they can do. (*Speaking of the group he represents.*)

CB - Are there masks out there?

Unknown voice: No.

CB -Tony (Hawley, Sherif) says some of them are.

Speaker - masks are available. I go up and down the valley every week, and I don't wear a mask. I am careful about washing hands, etc. **effectiveness of masks is debatable.**

SILENCE

Speaker -there isn't much more I can say.

AH - thanks for coming.

JD - Thanks to everyone who showed up.

AH - We are trying to represent everyone and do the best job we can do for everyone. It is helpful when people come in and start talking about the actual semblance of a plan.

JD - I talked with Karen Skoog yesterday (*a Commissioner from Pend Oreille County*) who is working on a letter to circulate on behalf of E WA counties. Last time we did this, it was on the wolves and we had 19 counties sign on.

CB - Even the statistics are different with these counties, There are a lot of differences among the counties. We will need to look at the letter to see if it applies to OK county.

Speaker - (*to Hover*) Your Dad, Andy, was there when I made a call I shouldn't have made. You guys have to take tough calls. Sometimes you will get it right, sometimes you will miss a call Thanks for your deep love of the county, that you are out to represent everyone, and thanks for the fact that this group could meet with us. You are working hard.

CB- thanks for trying to keep this on a positive note. Makes it easier to hear you. Hope to talk with you tomorrow on a 1-1 basis if possible.

(*Chit - chat.*)

AH - Governor's change in building? (JD leaving, others leaving)

(*Noise, muffled conversation - a voice talking to someone apparently outside at demonstration or trying to enter building.*)

CB - We need more money for health officials, Nichole. (*Apparently to that person.*)

(*JD seems to have left to talk with group outside. Back and forth conversation.*)

JD - She said she was at "our end."

The meeting with the speaker representing the demonstrators outside has ended.

Discussion about what the Governor's directive is for continuing construction.

"Existing" projects is not defined. No answer is yet available, but Branch's inquiry about this definition will be responded to by the state (L&I?)

Summary of two new grants available from the state by Cari Hall, Auditor:

I'm here to talk about grants not expected that Secy of State is giving out. One is specific to Covid, the other to election security. We knew we would get the security grant. It was a surprise that we are getting two.

***Covid grant** - very specific agreement. One main thing - Must be in its own interest-bearing account. This \$\$ comes all up-front. What we don't spend, we send back. All counties are talking about how it can be spent

***Election Security Grant:** Bottom line: - it's about election and health/safety of workers, reducing the amount you touch ballots. Each county has different ideas, such as remodeling, etc. State recommends remodeling. Glass should come out of the securities grant.

Just wanted to inform you, also let you know my concern: It's all well and good to get grant funds, but you have ongoing maintenance costs to this great equipment that people are not thinking about. Unless there is less than \$25,000 per year, it would be a huge impact to budget. Never bring in new staff under a grant, because later their salary ends.

\$151,000 - One grant, must be spent by December 1. (*interference.*)

Security for elections - we have drop boxes, good staffing, but on election night the whole courthouse has to be open. Need to talk about how we can utilize this for security of courthouse, utilities.. Ways to do this....things like this we can talk about.)*Talking too rapidly to record. Talks about how/when to meet*

Discussion on videos of BOCC meetings:

AH - If we have meetings televised, do we have to record them?

LJ - Pubic hearings (*as distinguished from regular meetings*) require audio at least. For those required, they need to be kept forever. We are creating a record if we are doing a video.

AH - So a video has to be recorded (*stored?*)

LJ - If the law requires an audio for public hearing but we do video instead, we have to keep it.

AH - So videos of regular meetings can be done, but not required?

LJ - We are working on that now with Central Services.

(Note: the issue is important because if storage of videos of regular meetings is required, it is expensive. The county budget might not cover it. In a recent BOCC meeting, Cmr. Branch

pushed for setting aside the \$\$ from some fund because other counties are recording successfully, the county's microphones are not working right, and the system needs to be fixed anyway.)

!0:45 - Meeting adjourns.