

**Okanogan Board of Health**  
**Tuesday, October 12th, 2021, 1:30 PM**

*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 (majority via Zoom):**

Lori Jones, BOH Director  
Dr. James Wallace (JW), Health Officer  
Patricia Stanton (PS), board member  
Marianne Williams (MW), board member  
Dave Hilton (DH), BOH, Environmental Health  
Susan Christopher (SC), Okanogan County resident  
Chrystal Hawley, County Clerk's office  
Tony Hawley, Sheriff  
Chris Branch (CB), Commissioner, board member  
Jim Detro (JD), Commissioner, board member  
Isabelle Spohn (IS), Okanogan County resident, member County Watch  
Heather Findlay, Okanogan County resident  
Angela McCown, Okanogan County resident

*Time stamps refer to a Zoom recording on the County Watch website.*

***Summary of Important Discussions:*** *In public comment session, attention drawn to Coroner's running out of space for bodies and lack of mask-wearing at county meetings despite Covid's toll on county staff; Health Officer Wallace says county slowly improving its Covid numbers though it still has among highest rates in the country, admits to fallout from vaccine requirement but says shots are up, Coroner and Sheriff's Deputy will benefit from a renovated facility; Environmental Health report: Officer, Hilton, reluctant to approve short plat because house lacks septic permit and was built the year these were required, agrees to verification of tank and drain field; storage shed broken into; AH asks Hilton to write a cistern ordinance.*

**- Public Comments**

5:18 - IS (Summary): Yesterday Coroner Rodriguez at the 10 a.m. Commissioners' meeting said there was a crisis (later qualified as a "concern") regarding space to store bodies. He stated two bodies were even stored in a garage. More people are dying at home due to numbers of Covid patients in hospitals, thus burdening his office to establish cause of death. Couldn't the BOH and Commissioners discuss what might be done that has not yet been tried, in order to limit the impacts of Covid upon our county? Just within the county facilities, improvements could be made. For example, no one from Central Services, the Sheriff's office, or Coroner's attending that meeting wore masks, even when not using mikes. No commissioners wore them even when just listening. Is a meeting in a public indoor setting with seven county personnel not wearing masks in compliance with the governor's mandate? This morning Cmr. Branch had to remind people that mikes should be disinfected between speakers. Department heads like the Auditor (with 40% reduction in staff) and the Planning Director (now operating with a skeleton crew) have had to make decisions on their own to temporarily close office doors to protect their employees. (8:42) When I called Public

Health to see if people entering the county courthouse were required to wear masks, the person answering didn't know. Public Works told me mask wearing was up to the individual visiting their building. Could there please be a unified, consistent county policy regarding masks in county facilities? I don't think our county is helpless in this situation.

(12:15) MW gives the financial update. All going fine. They have received a %100 reimbursable wellness grant to provide activities for employees. Some talk of hourly attorney rates for a contract they signed.

17:18 - Community Health update.

JW: We have one of highest Covid rates in the country now, still a surge from the Delta variant, 900 newcases per 100,000, slowly declining over past 2 wks. (18:42) Some increases among the decreases, we're following neighboring counties. We peaked at 1250, not isolated outbreaks but community spread, often picking up cases with people being screened, or testing folks been exposed. Testing capacity is limited. Some are beneath the radar of testing... but we need better adherence, and continue to see high number of cases in hospitals. (21:21) (They) are currently overwhelmed. (We're seeing) challenges to transfer to Wenatchee or Spokane, both Covid and non Covid. The Hospital in Spokane is not able to accept patients needing to be intubated. Idaho is overrun... Seeing more and more getting vaccinated, All vaccines are effective for Delta and more severe complications; some breakthrough cases but more cases from non-vaccinated people... We need to keep infected students from coming to school. Community, not schools, keeps schools open. I'm working in the garage because my 2 yr. old has a fever. The more leadership, the more channels we can open up: masking indoors, masking outdoors when closer than 6 ft, not attending large gatherings, and adhering to isolation and quarantine measures. The communications team has done a really good job... (26:21)... The more we can support them in their work, I think, the faster we'll drive these rates down... ditch some of these cumbersome preventive strategies and open up.

PS: There's lots of mandates around the country, people getting vaccinated or losing their jobs. Many folks are quitting, including health care (*workers*). Anything like that anticipated here?

JW: In talking with health care partners, there's an anticipation of 1-5% not complying...

JD: In a report David (*Gecas*) said, don't quote this number, 23 people from OBHC either elected to walk off or chose forced firing... The Wenatchee World reported about 30 at Central Valley Hospital...

PS: ...Any reduction is going to be critical. My daughter works at Mid Valley...

JW: Our primary limitations are staffing, have always been staffing. There are more beds at Mid Valley and North and Central than can be adequately staffed. While we'll see further decrease in capacity it will be minimized, some (*staff*) are sick with Covid. Difficult decisions people are making...

MW: Comments on situation on Coroner and bodies?

JW: Chelan county purchased a refrigerated truck for that region. (*The coroner*) says there are people, not just with Covid, who can't get to a hospital or don't want to; he's seeing people pass away in greater numbers than we usually see. We must increase our capacity to care for folks after...

JD: DR came with (*the Sheriff Communications Deputy*) because they saw a need for the purchase of a building. (*Or, rather, renovation of their current locale. There is an opportunity for the bundling of building projects since a bond is being issued.*) That's why he came, other than presenting the need from a health risk standpoint...

36:45 - CB adds that 8.2M is also coming from the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds, 25% to go for health infrastructure (premium pay for workers affected by Covid) with another fund for broadband. The commissioners have "lots of projects".

JD: It's going to be an educational process for public. Most don't realize a lot of rescue vehicles are stored in a building that's falling down around the equipment. There's fluorescent paint saying don't park here, the roof could collapse. We're trying to spend prudently, same with the coroner

who is scrambling to find placement. He had one spot available...

(42:29) AH: (*Bonding reimbursement*) would come out of the Current Expense budget. (*Inaudible, paper shuffling.*) We're combining two facilities (*in an old shop near the railroad tracks*), a big shell for storing search and rescue equipment, with running water, that's good for tissue donation, and, if needed, autopsy suites, need to be prepared for that...

LJ : Apparently they didn't share my plan with you. I talked with both of them. (*Sardonic laughter.*) But we can talk another time.

CB: That presentation was (*inaudible*)...Next door the Historical Society stores a lot of their stuff... It's mostly maintenance, we have new shops so it's kind of the leftovers.

45:32 - AH: We're now getting the cost from the architect to redesign... It's a steel building, not lot of insulation, and (*will have*) a place for coroner.

47:25 - Short plat proposal - (*Property belongs to JD's mother in law. He will abstain on the vote.*)

DH : Short plat has been proposed on Green Acres Road. Cmr. Detro's home is farther down. The proposal is to cut this home site out in some configuration. The issue is, we don't have septic permit record. The home was built in 1974 which was the timeline when (*permit*) regulations went into effect... This home did not show up prior to regulation's being put into effect. To the best of my information, law requires that the septic system serving that home requires a permit...

This day and age (*you would need*) a completely new system.

SC : I believe system's been in since 1974... Never been problem, been pumped twice. I may be old fashioned but why fix what's not broke ?

JD : The PUD easement was reported July 9 so it was done a month or so before. Secondly, it's not a failed system... I know Dave's doing his job but the arial photo he's depending on just had a 1974 date on it. You can't prove it's a 1974 photo. We can assume it was put in before the July 1st deadline. They have power, water and septic in 1974.

DH : The date is critical. (*The Assessor's office*) said it could be from 1973. Could be late summer or early fall.

JR : You can't prove the date so Sue shouldn't have to prove the date either.

AH : If it was put in before July 1st would it be considered compliant ?

57 :33 - DH : It would be considered approved, non -compliant.

AH : This was mobile home ? Usually they put the tank in before the house.

DH : Sometimes they put the house in first because they don't have the elevation (before that).

JD : Here's another thing. ...I talked to a previous Health Dept. employer. When they first started with permits there was all kinds of confusion. It could have gotten lost, not filed properly. They couldn't find a parcel number...

DH : I can't prove it was put in before the reg, I can't prove it was put in after the reg. I'm being asked to sign off on something I have no knowledge of. *They discuss the PUD issuance of a miscellaneous permit « WPS » which doesn't specify if water, power or septic was permitted. CB asks if there is a verification process for current standards of septics for short plats and if there is an appeals process, CB's concern, given the number of appeals coming in, is treating everyone the same. AH says there is no evidence either way, and it would be incumbent on them to prove their case when dealing with « the interpretation of the law back then. » CB acertaines from DH that he is being appealed, says there should be an established precEDURE, and to check with an attorney. AH calls for opinions from the Board. PS says she would certify but agrees with CB about the appearance of fairness.*

1 :14 :34 - AH : Maybe on June 10th 1974 the rules could have been being installed.

DH : ... The Assessor says the aerial view was late summer, early fall... The system probably needs a permit.

CB : What was the purpose of putting regulations in place ?

DH : To ensure adequate treatment of waste water.

AH : Is there a way to test and inspect ?

DH : I would say if they were able to do a test and say that the tank is in functional condition and

the drain field is in place. *CB suggests they get more clarification on the conflicting information. DH says verification puts him in the role of rejecting the short plat if nothing happens in five years. CB points to others in same situation and the need to inform them better about the rules and the risks they are taking. AH says it's enough if the tank in question passes the 1974 standards and that it presents no risks to the safety of the general public. (1:34:19) CB says creation of a plat is the opportunity to verify if all is up to standard. All agree on approval of appeal based on a test.*

CB : *(Advances a motion) We approve the system, subject to verification of functionality.*

DH When the tank is uncovered, it's going to be pumped out, checked at both ends. If that's accepted, than we can approve.

JD : I think that's fair. *Motion approved with JD abstaining as planned.*

1:47:00 - DH : Environmental Health update :

*DH reports his storage shed has being broken into, supposedly by drug users. He has seen them cruising the parking lot. They took some stainless steel test equipment. It's the second break-in. At a previous meeting lighting was discussed, an addition of lights facing both ways on the existing pole. AH suggests a portion of the Health Dept.'s ARPA \$1 M allocation go toward this.*

LJ : We've been asking for some basic maintenance. Rain gutters... They're an L&I nightmare.(Our landlords.)

1:50:40 - AH I would move to have DH to write a cistern ordinance for the county. In my neck of the woods we can't put out (inaudible) for people who have lots that they've bought. The only they could build a house right now... is get a cistern and purchase water. If we do it all over the place, I understand Dave's concerns about winter time, but people do it all the time... We don't have an ordinance that says you can build a house on a cistern because that's not an adequate source. PS : the reason they do that is because it's not consider a primary source of potable water. DH : It's not established under current regulations for residential use. *DH says if that develops they'll ultimately have to get approval for the county.* AH : All we need is ordinance that says, by health standards, they can build a house -- DH : I'll have to do some research. AH : Then it will be the Planning Dept.'s deal... CB : It'll be interesting to see what that looks like. People use cisterns now but it's probably not a legal source of water. AH sometimes people have cisterns and a well too but the well doesn't generate enough water.

DH : *(What about) duration of supply ? Give it some thought and send me.*

AH (in Methow) we have metering data, how much people use. There's a 360 gal. limit from a well. *They go into a 10 min. executive session to evaluate a complaint against a public employee.*

1:56:45 - End of public meeting.