

Okanogan Board of Health
Tuesday, February 8th, 2022, 1:30 PM

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Present:

Lori Jones (LJ), BOH Director
Dr. James Wallace (JW), Health Officer
Dave Hilton (DH), BOH, Environmental Health
Chris Branch (CB), Commissioner, board member
Jim Detro (JD), Commissioner, Board Chairman
Andy Hover (AH), Commissioner, board member
Chuck Zimmerman (CZ), Health District Attorney
Jessica Kousma, Okanogan resident
John McReynolds, North Valley Hospital
Kate Sharon
Patricia Stanton, Board of Health
Isabelle Spohn, Methow Valley resident
_____ Osborne, local clinic
_____ McCue

This meeting was not recorded..

Summary of Important Discussions: *In Public Comment, quarantine of Covid-positive employee reflects need for broad prevention policy; Board passes amendment to regulation for on-site septic systems allowing an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach concerning permit validity of existing systems on land being subdivided, attorney CZ and Environmental Health director DH will discuss adopting the State Environmental Policy (SEPA) review process; Huge peak of Omicron early February but numbers coming down, testing up, CB questions censorship and LJ intends to review their social media policy; Better lighting of Public Health parking lot requested after thefts of tools and windshield wipers plus attempted removal of catalytic converter; Regional Health District has new epidemiologist.*

Public Comment period - IS: During a Commissioners' meeting, a Department Head complained that an asymptomatic employee had been required to go home after testing positive for Covid, and that she couldn't get her department's work done without enough employees. We all know that asymptomatic people can transmit Covid; so my comment is that by allowing Covid-positive employees to remain at work we risk having even more absenteeism, with even less work accomplished.

Amending on-site sewer regulations - AH asks if there must be a public hearing, CZ says he hasn't found any requirement for this. DH: We hadn't done a SEPA review. Normally we approve (things) that remove risk. Now, since we're removing regulations, that increases risk. CZ: The Health District should have it's own SEPA regulations... Who's the district official (in charge of SEPA)? DH: In the past it's always been the Planning director. CB: I'd thought this process would be exempt. It is establishing rules... If we do a SEPA checklist and have an environmental impact, what are the procedures? DH: It's a regulation, no exemption. JD: It's personal opinion. CZ

questions why SEPA would be used in a small jurisdiction, says the district first must pass a resolution to adopt this process; this issue wasn't brought to his attention: These things come up as part of other processes... **CB:** SEPA wouldn't make any difference, nothing to go by to do it. **JD:** There is a problem with people spending up to \$10,000 (and being told they can't proceed with their plans), The situation gives way too much oversight and power to people. This is a common sense (amendment) that would help the citizens of the County. *AH says they'd have to figure out a mitigation process if septic abnormalities were found, agrees with DH that (existing systems on properties being subdivided) are not categorically exempt. They read code exemptions that would seem to apply, DH says:* There are exemptions to the exemptions. **CB:** ...Are you changing any SEPA section rules? That's where I hang my hat...

CZ agrees the amendment makes no change if there's no subdivision request; otherwise there's a SEPA process associated with short plat or parcel division: We're in an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" situation... If in the course of a subdivision (*the septic*) is determined (*defective*), then you have to replace it... Who's going to be upset with the Health District for adopting this regulation? ...It comes down to whoever owns the property being happy or unhappy they have to replace their on-site system. The amendment resolution is passed unanimously. **CZ** nevertheless pursues the issue of the SEPA checklist, suggesting the discussion include DH as well as the Planning director. **CB** says some don't understand when their systems must be permitted: If you have a short plat it must be permitted already. **CZ:** (*Deputy Prosecutor*) Gecas says there will be sections removed from County Code and citizens will be directed to the Health District. The Planning Director is involved also... Now on the website there's a lot of unnecessary information on septic. The new regulation (130.010) states "Sewage disposal/on-site sewage system permits are required by the Health District... New owners must obtain a site analysis with County Planning Dept. before going to the Health District." **CB** says County Code dates from the '70s, needs re-vision. Public Health was, until 1983, a department of the county. **CB** wants things easier for landowners who, in turning work over to a surveyor, are often not informed of the legal process. Regarding the Health Dept./Health District issue, says: The Legislature changes and takes control of things, contributing to the sense that (the counties) can't take care of business. We need to say "Leave us alone, don't take over. It's also the standpoint of WSAC (State association of counties). Brief reference to the Hearing Examiner, charged with permit decision appeals, by **CB:** If we get everything straight, maybe no one will appeal." **CZ** urges board members to add "district" to "Okanogan Public Health" so the name becomes "Okanogan (Public) Health District", indicating it's a separate entity from the County.

Health Official's Update - **JW:** ...Omicron was up last meeting, now it has peaked. (*As expected*) it was more contagious, and presented more break-through cases and re-infections, with worse impacts on individuals not vaccinated, but fewer hospitalizations... We're doing more testing than ever before but still not enough. Though infrastructure for reporting has improved it's hard to maintain accuracy. Health systems are collaborating, sharing resources, but still having staff shortages and transferring difficulties. *He says schools are doing a good job. The numbers, after rising from 75 (per 100,000) in December to 323 in January, and at some point attaining 2,800, the fastest rise ever in a 14-day period: are down to 1,248. He warns against "lightening up" on prevention too early, urges consistency across businesses and schools, says HR departments have received guidelines. A caller asks if tests are available in retail, JW says they're sold within hours or minutes. LJ has received 6,000 which will go out to the public.* **CB:** We've had lots of feedback—some people feel they're being censored. Is that good or bad? Is it better to have conversations take place? We all (*inaudible*) a lot of people who believe things contrary... **LJ:** The only thing we're putting out is numbers and mass vaccination information. We will review our social media policies. Haven't had the opportunity to do that. As a public service we're probably one of the most followed. *JD quotes the Idaho governor whose constituents are the least vaccinated and the least masked "because they don't trust government."* The caller asks what treatments are available, **JW**

says anti-virals and steroid medications; all those that are recommended and approved, are being used locally.

Parking Lot Security - For the third time DH has lost tools from his pick-up, AH recommends installing conex boxes with double padlocks that bolt cutters can't get around. On Michael (Harr)'s truck the windshield wipers were stolen and someone attempted to cut out the catalytic converter of a Hyundai. This, after not long ago holes were drilled in two fuel reservoirs. AH says some lighting has been installed in the parking lot but LJ says they don't light up Public Health area. CB says Forest Service and Community Action park up at Virginia Granger for safety. AH will ask Maintenance for more lighting. JD says new lights in the band shell at Omak's City Park cleared out the people camped there. Public Works parking lot is fenced and locked and not experiencing problems; though it's not convenient, others could use it. Conex boxes for three trucks would cost \$2,700, no decision made.

Regional Epidemiologist Elizabeth Uberroth introduces herself. She has degrees in Philosophy, Literature and Genetics, and has worked for the FDA on Covid vaccine safety studies. She is from Canada, now lives in Wenatchee. LJ counts on her help in "convoluted process" of tracking Covid deaths outside of the county. EU: I studied the descendants of The Bounty for my PhD on light and eye disease. There are lots of windows here, good light.

Meeting adjourned.