

Okanogan County Board of Health Meeting June 14, 2022 PM

Officials Present

Jim DeTro - BOCC, BOH chair
Chris Branch - BOCC Vice-chair, BOH member
Andy Hover - BOCC Chair, BOH member
Patricia Stanton - City of Okanogan Rep
MairanneWilliams, ARNP - Board Member
James Wright - Board member
(One Vacancy - Board member)
Megan Barton - Mid-Valley Hospital
Dave Hilton - BOH, Director, Okanogan County Environmental Health
Lauri Jones - BOH, Director, Okanogan County Community Health
Jill Gates- Public Health/BOH Clerk/secretary
Dr. James Wallace - Health Officer

Others present (remotely)

Quail Orr: Tribe. Candidate for BOH vacancy.
Joshua Farnsworth - Tribe
“Find the Right Passion” - did not respond with name
Isabelle Spohn - Okanogan County Watch
John Schapman
Unknown caller

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 issues: *Winding up mass vaccinations now - (March/April \$20,000 Public Health rental fee to Okanogan and American Legion rather than Fairground.); proposed solutions to Public Health staff shortage, 5% cost of living raise approved; Mid-Valley Hospital currently offers over \$100,000 per year for a Charge Nurse; Update on new Covid strains, NCW infection/hospitalization/vaccination data, and extent of immunity by infection; infection by newer strains does not offer much protection. Each new strain is more contagious, not necessarily more severe. Heath officer update: Update on other diseases: uptick in Syphilis, TB, updates on Avian influenza, Monkey Pox, Wildfire season; workforce development; Health District charter changes in face of new law; Community Health concerns: long covid concerns. Environmental Health update: New construction active, but slowing a bit due to economics;*
Adjourned 2:26 PM.

Note: (Please be advised that there is no BOH recording available this week, and thus there are no time stamps or references to the clock in these notes.)

Meeting begins: Intros, Minutes approved.

Financial Report

Mass vaccinations -We are about wrapping that up. Okanogan sponsored the events in March and April at Legion Park. We used the Legion Building from American Legion, but the park was part of it. *(Public Health later clarified these figures at request of County Watch: due to Fairground staff double-booking Fairgrounds, Public Health had to change the already - scheduled vaccination events to Legion Park, paying \$20,000 in rent to Okanogan County and American Legion.) Until then, the County had received \$500,000 over one year from Public Health for mass vaccinations at Fairgrounds.*

Financial Committee: Trying to find out how we can retain staff. On our pay scale, people are frozen at step 5. We agreed to give 5% cost of living across the board and until we can reach out how we can sustain and offer other increases that other agencies and public health boards are providing.

Proposed Solutions to staff shortage:

AH. - It's like in the Assessor's office - you start on Level 1, take a test, then move up. Lauri was wanting to offer 10 steps. But we decided to look at the cost of living to see if it's a better idea . Also the 5% would have a retention bonus.

LJ - Recommendation was not to do this *(not sure if this means the 10 steps.)* It's highly illegal. Cannot go retro or offer bonuses on past work, only move forward.

AH - Everyone knows it's harder to get anyone to work now. Private sector greatly exceeds what we can provide financially.

CB - (Gives example of the situation elsewhere.)

LJ - Mid-valley was offering a \$20,000 sign-on bonus for surgical nurses, etc. and other sign-ons for other personnel.

MW - What is starting level for OR nurse at Mid-Valley?

MB- Starting \$30.23 to over \$49.00/ hour.

LJ - Public Health had an OR nurse who worked for years, and the sign-on was very attractive.

AH - We aren't even up to \$60,000

MB - We have union wages, by step.

LJ - So a 20-year nurse? Charge nurse or floor nurse? *(MB goes to check)*

AH - Thru ARPA fund, Pub health has \$200,000 for 5 years. Because so much is grant-funded, are there chunks you can.... It's complicated.

LJ - We are working on this.

MW - What did AH ask?

AH - The way the county is doing ARPA funds now, anything public health does can be charged against the allocation. Labor is the easiest - but with public health, there is so much billing to other grants, it's sometimes only a piece of a certain cost of labor...

LJ - It's a challenge that those bills haven't been billed out to other grants. Other thing is sustainability, so even this we are doing ARPA funds with the exception of \$30,000, we want to make sure we are able to sustain any sort of future wage increase.

MB - After checking, at Mid-Valley Hospital, an average RN for 20 years - \$50.72/hour. Charge nurse - increase this by 7%.

AH - \$100,000-odd bucks per year.

Resolution: 2022-05 increased public health employees cost of living raise Approved.

Applications for open Board of Health position: "Both applicants had diversity."

Quail Orr - Tribe

Rachael Levi - Methow Valley

Recommendation : Have them interviewed by a committee. Both would bring a depth to the Board.

AH - Proposes that BOCC members not be on that panel because we are the ones that appoint them. Makes it cleaner.

LJ - Suggests that a Public Health staff (myself) plus a Board Member be on the committee. Jim Wright approved as committee member. Jim and Lauri will come up with the interview questions.

Dr. Wallace - Update by Health Officer

Work Force: Wants to make a pitch for resources to sustain our work force and make Public Health more attractive. Want to compliment the 5% wage. Was at a Public Health conference last week. It had this topic on the agenda. Good examples of people doing good work, but across the state they (Public Health employees) are not paid as well as other opportunities. Much \$\$

through Public Health may help us close that gap even more. Look forward to seeing how we can use these resources to make Public Health more attractive.

Covid - Is in fact increasing : 3 weeks ago - 5 new cases, now 11 new cases. Across the state peaked at 550 per 100,000 in 14 days. Okanogan County is at 266 per 14 days and still going up. Challenge of slow case ascertainment. Under-reporting of home test, and others with mild cases who don't get tested. County hospitals - 0-3 patients at a time. Not as high as Omicron or Delta. NCW - 9 individuals (*in hospital?*) 7.5 new admissions per 7 days. So 3-5 new admissions per day across NCW,

Vaccinations are still the best re hospitalization and death. We see that infection immunity after having had Covid waned after 90 days. Other variants gave good protection, but the newer variants do not (*offer a lot of immunity .*)

50% vaccinated in Ok County.

65- years and over vaccinated about 73%

18- 34 86%. Over 95% have started. Mostly farmworkers.

77% of Hispanic is vaccinated . 240% of Black population vaccinated. Also because of farm workers. White - only 53%.

Trying to hit most vulnerable populations.

Eligibility - 5 years and over. Boosters same thing, as long as 4 months after primary vaccination. 50 years or over 50 eligible for 2nd booster dose. Soon, under 5 years will be permitted.

Strains: Omicron makes up 100% of our cases, but BA-2 , BA2. BA-4, BA-5....coming. Each one is more contagious, so overcomes the older sub-lineage. But no evident increase in severity. Covid still with us, increasing now, paying close attention to severity .

End of school year - recognizing hard work and dedication of all school employees did to keep the kids in school and healthy. Became a mental health challenge for students, school leaders, etc. We did a really good job rolling with the punches.

Continued collaboration of health partners for all measures & getting resources for isolation and quarantine for vulnerable populations.

Other Diseases:

***Syphilis** on upswing in state and county. Mothers and newborns - life-threatening.

***TB** - playing catch up , increasing, Tracking people down is a challenge, Staff doing a good job.

***Avian influenza.** Out there. Farmers doing very well in workin on this. No humans in WA state have even infected, only one across the USA

***Monkey Pox** - Working with providers in how to detect. None in NCW. Looks like chicken pox with easily detected differences.

***Wildfire season** - Working with partners in education and getting air purifiers. Home safe space, community safe places.

***Workforce development** - Watching on how our Dept - they are doing a really good job and can do a much better job with more resources.

Okanogan. County Health District Charter: *(Compliance with new state laws)*

LJ - Example from Chuck Zimmerman. To glean the most pertinent info: We have basically the name - recommendation that we go by one name. We could change envelopes, seal, - she thinks it's not necessary to make it clear we are a health District. Purpose is out of the RCWs. But board membership is changing, so becomes #1, 2, 3, 4of coulee BOCC are ex-officio so not numbered.

Position 4 - Someone who resides in the county and is a consumer of public health. That's the new position. Cannot be an elected official. **Position 5** - Jim's position (community stakeholder.) Cannot be elected.

Position 6 - Tribal rep. BOCC or BOH does not select. Haven't heard who it will be .

Position 7 - Marianne Williams - someone form medical community

Position 8 - Pat Stanton Official from cities or towns.

Stipends - 4, 5, 7, and 8 - Shall receive a stipend for each meeting they attend. \$100.00.

Positions 4-6 will be 2-year term.

Position 7 and 8: four year term.

Position 4-7 who accumulate 4 or more unexecuted absences may be removed by 2 County Commissioners (for unexcused absences.)

AH - Should be a quorum of the BOCC

CB - Questions BOCC being the ones (?)

MJ - Thinks that's a part of the new law.

CB - Wondering about the reasoning for that. But if it's in the law, it's in the law.

LJ - Everything else seems to be ok. I guess what we are asking - should we run these minor changes by the attorney? And then if anything that screams out at you, let Jim know.

CB - Cities and towns can contribute if they want.

Community Health Update

LJ - Dr. Wallace pretty much covered it. I'm concerned about long Covid. One of the most recent is that a year later, they are finding virus on slides so they do a cross - section and stain it.

Concerning, because with Chicken Pox (Varicella) you can develop shingles if you had it as a kid. They are doing a lot of research now. Kind of spooky when I saw a cross-section of the slides and saw the virus still there. Dr. Wallace?

JW - =Yes, have seen some articles. Hard to know what that virus will do in the tissue. Some are like chicken pox & Epstein Barr - comes up after Covid. Will probably stay in the system, but we have yet to understand what could happen. My patients - have physical symptom of long-standing fatigue, breathing problems, etc.....but also exhaustion because we don't know how to get rid of this. Being left with lingering symptoms makes it all the worse.

LJ - Other thing: I'm hoping, crossing fingers, that we also received a couple of applications for nurses, one from Montana. Husband being transferred. Working now in Libby and as adjunct faculty at U of Montana. We have a lot to offer besides wages.

Environmental Health Update

New places county-wide, pretty active but slowed down because of prices, parts, materials, etc. Rapidly approaching gravity systems will cost what a pressure system used to be. Water restrictions in WRIA 48, some in 49, having some effect upon development. Have relatively young late 20's, 30's pursuing licenses as contractors. Those are retiring/quitting. I knew them as kids, now they are 25 or 30.

CB - Nominated out of WSAC board for State Health Advisory Board and appointed. (State) First official meeting in September. He would be the representative of the counties.

Adjourned: 2:26 PM.