



WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION
JUNE 8, 2017

PRESENT: Scott Hege, County Commissioner
Steve Kramer, County Commissioner
Rod Runyon, Commission Chair
STAFF: Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer
Kathy White, Executive Assistant

The Work Session began at 11:20 a.m. Vice-Chair Kramer explained that he has asked for scheduled work sessions to provide Board members the opportunity to share information about current issues and activities that individual Commissioners are working on or involved with.

Commissioner Hege asked for further explanation. Vice-Chair Kramer said that for example, it would be good to share information regarding House Bill 2004 which would protect low-income tenants from eviction when they file complaints about needed repairs. Chair Runyon stated that NORCOR issues would be another good example. Vice-Chair Kramer went on to say that each Commissioner may discuss issues and activities with Mr. Stone who will in turn try to share that information with the other Commissioners but that is not an efficient or effective way to share the information necessary for the Board to be well-informed.

Chair Runyon said that he would also welcome the opportunity to talk about current local events; right now there is a City of The Dalles issue that could impact the County Board. He said that he thinks sharing of information is a good idea and it can only occur in publicly noticed meetings.

Vice-Chair Kramer asked if there had been any further discussion about Gilliam County withdrawing from North Central Public Health District. Commissioner Hege replied that it had not been mentioned again at NCPHD meetings. He

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added that there is a possibility that NCPHD will be getting more funding from the CCO.

Vice-Chair Kramer noted that he attended the CCO meeting last month and plans to go again; he is interested in promoting home health care. He added that he will be talking at the Community Development meeting Monday to present an overview of what is going on with the Work Force group. He said that he does not interact with the business community as much as Commissioner Hege but does sit on East Cascades Workforce Investment Board; input from Commissioner Hege would be valuable.

Commissioner Hege played a voice mail from Mayor Lawrence in which the Mayor indicated that he has brought a request to the City Council to disperse the remaining \$2,500 in Immediate Opportunity funds to the Civic to help pay off a debt.

Further discussion ensued regarding the process for distributing those funds and what other organizations may have projects to which those funds might be applied. Commissioner Hege added that the City and County can anticipate receiving additional initial fees funds from the third Google Enterprise Zone; it is possible that some of those funds will be applied as Immediate Opportunity funds as well. He observed that there are varying opinions as to how those funds should be distributed – some believe that they should go to all the taxing districts just as regular taxes are distributed; others believe that they should be used to fund projects based on a prioritized list.

Vice-Chair Kramer pointed out that the Civic may be perceived as a potential conflict of interest for Mayor Lawrence. Commissioner Hege commented that at the least, he has a bias where the Civic is concerned. The Board concluded that this would be best moved to the June 21st session for discussion and a decision.

Chair Runyon stated that on June 13 at 9 a.m. the Gorge Commission will meet at the Readiness Center; the UPRR appeal will be first on the agenda. Senior Planner Dustin Nilsen stated that he would be there along with Mr. Stone, Planning Director Angie Brewer, County Counsel Kristen Campbell and any members of the Board who want to attend.

Mr. Stone said that Vice-Chair Kramer had followed up on a complaint that had come in regarding safety issues on Steel Road. He had convened a meeting to address the complaints; the meeting included Mr. Stone, Vice-Chair Kramer, representatives from Waste Connections and the Landfill and Public Works Director Arthur Smith. The citizen's major complaint was about garbage truck

traffic on Steele Road.

Mr. Stone went on to say that he drafted a response that outlined what we have already done – more than 300 signs, striping, etc. – and what we may be willing to do. He said that another issue raised is the weight of the garbage trucks as they cross a bridge located on Steele Road; that bridge has been reduced to one lane until it can be reinforced to safely handle 2-lane truck traffic. He said that we have agreed to review statistics and enhance patrols on Steele Road.

Mr. Stone stated that the Sheriff reviewed records going back to 2001 and found no incidents on Steele Road. Enhanced patrols have reported that the professional drivers are being very safe and driving within the speed limit. Vice-Chair Kramer added that brand new drivers are issued GPS for monitoring.

Mr. Stone went on to say that once the signing and bridge reinforcement is completed, we will request a State traffic study to evaluate the speed limits on Steele Road. Vice-Chair Kramer said that there has been no response to the letter.

Commissioner Hege said he thought there was another traffic issue. Vice-Chair Kramer responded that South County AA – a straight stretch from Dodson to the South Ramp is the piece in question; we are waiting for a State survey – they set the speed.

Human Resources Manager Nichole Biechler observed that the Board had added \$2,500 to the Museum budget in order to increase hours for the Museum Director and/or add an assistant position. She pointed out that the Museum Director position is not on the salary matrix and we will be evaluating the position through HR Answers. However, even our lowest paid employee makes more than the Museum Director; if they increase his hours and his wages, they may not be able to afford him. She said she would like to job shadow the Director to get a better sense of exactly what his job encompasses.

Mr. Stone commented that we really need to turn to Museum over to the City of The Dalles. Commissioner Hege agreed.

Ms. Biechler went on to say that the Museum Director's annual review and increase is due in July. The Museum could ask for an increase in his wages; we might base that increase on the Museum revenue. Mr. Stone pointed out that the compensation policy says that increases are made with "available" funds.

Finance Director Mike Middleton said that the Museum Director should not be placed on the matrix; 2.5% is the standard step increase and that is what we should do for the Director. He said that another alternative is to make the

position salaried so that wages are not tied to hours.

Commissioner Hege asked who will make the final decision on the increase. Mr. Middleton said that technically that would go to Mr. Stone. Commissioner Hege suggested that Mr. Stone could delegate that to Mr. Middleton. Mr. Middleton said that arrangement would be fine; he is working with them and attending their Board meetings.

Commissioner Hege noted that this process is not true for other staff. Mr. Middleton agreed but observed that this is outside the norm; even if a Director wants to do something outside the norm, they have to bring it to the Board of Commissioners. Ms. Biechler added that we have a couple of positions that have board oversight; their Board makes a recommendation and we act based on that recommendation. Commissioner Hege said that we need someone to be the point person for this.

Ms. Biechler reported that she had taken the issue of Commissioners and the Administrative Officer being allowed to carry concealed weapons within the Courthouse to the Judges and they will not agree to allow that. Commissioner Hege asked who makes the decision. Ms. Biechler replied that the presiding Judge makes the final decision. Mr. Stone added that the Sheriff is also opposed to the idea.

Commissioner Hege pointed out that the Courts do not own the building; the County owns the building. He said that it apparently does not matter how we feel as it is being dictated to us.

Ms. Biechler said that they feel that the panic button system is adequate to provide for safety. She said that the button needs to be held down for five seconds in order to be activated. Commissioner Hege pointed out that there has been no training for use of the panic buttons. Ms. Biechler responded that the Safety Committee has discussed that point.

Chair Runyon said that he is not comfortable with the Facilities Manager dictating whether or not the Commissioners get extra keys; Commissioners should be able to request that. He said at the very least, the Board should be involved in that decision. Commissioner Hege said that access to meeting rooms should be easier. Mr. Stone responded that the Facilities Manager is not wrong to protect the key pool; we hope to get card readers.

Chair Runyon said that he needs to be able to get through doors when he enters the building after hours; Commissioners need to be able to get into their normal spaces. He said he wants to be involved in this conversation.

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Some discussion ensued around air quality in the Assessment and Taxation office and the Public Works building. Mr. Nilsen said that CO₂ in the Public Works building is more of an issue than the fumes from the nearby creosote. He said it was comforting to have the scientists on site to explain the statistics and answer questions. He said that although the new formula has decreased the odor, it is still sometimes noticeable; that is driven by atmospheric conditions.

Commissioner Hege observed that at the Management Team meeting, Ms. Biechler had mentioned low morale. He asked how she knows. Ms. Biechler replied that employees talk to her. She said that what she is hearing is that the leadership team is moving forward but not communicating well with staff.

Mr. Stone asked exactly what we are talking about and if the problem is widespread. Ms. Biechler replied that she is building rapport with staff and the communication piece is the big struggle. She said that some departments are really good about it and others are not.

Chair Runyon stated that he has heard from the Road Department that morale is up. Ms. Biechler said that she has been out there nearly every day for the last two weeks and things are getting better.


Further discussion ensued regarding ways for the Board to be more approachable. It was suggested that attending occasional staff meetings might be a good approach. Chair Runyon said that he wants to be an observer at those meetings, only participating by invitation.

The session adjourned at 12:47 p.m.

Wasco County
Board of Commissioners


Rod L. Runyon, Board Chair


Steven D. Kramer, Board Vice-Chair


Scott C. Hege, County Commissioner