



WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION
AUGUST 10, 2017

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

Chair Runyon opened the session at 11:40 a.m.

Vice-Chair Kramer said that the South Wasco Park and Recreation District (SWPRD) has asked the Board of Commissioners to make a clear decision as to whether or not the County would be willing to co-sign for the Oregon Marine Board (OMB) grant; they have been invited to attend today's work session to for a more thorough discussion of the issues.

County Clerk Lisa Gambee, serving as the County's liaison to SWPRD, provided some background on the grant application process saying that OMB had encouraged the SWPRD application for the \$300,000 grant to be used to build a new boat ramp at the Pine Hollow Reservoir. She explained that two weeks prior to their final decision, OMB expressed concerns about the stability of SWPRD and advised the Board that they want SWPRD to have a sponsor co-sign the grant so that if there is a default during the 20-year life of the grant, OMB would be reimbursed for their investment. It was suggested that the County act as that sponsor. She noted that the County has spent years trying to get out of the business of being responsible for boat ramp maintenance. She went on to say that SWPRD understands the County's reluctance and wants the question put to

bed so that they can move on either with the grant or some alternative solution. She concluded by saying that Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is offering an additional \$94,000 of grant funding contingent on OMB funding.

SWPRD Chair Bill Brackman stated that he sees this more as the County acting as a guarantor as this is a grant, not a loan. He stated that if SWPRD is successful and continues to exist, there will not be an issue. If SWPRD ceases to exist, the land will revert back to Badger Irrigation District (BID) and Wasco County; they would then have to decide what to do. He said that the real question is can SWPRD, a non-taxing district, generate the funds to maintain both the north and south boat ramps.

Mr. Brackman went on to say that it costs around \$3,000 per year to maintain the south ramp; OMB covers approximately 60% of those costs. If the OMB program continues, the financial burden to SWPRD to maintain both ramps will be approximately \$2,400. He stated that OMB is supportive and wants the process to work, but they are anxious. They have an agreement template that will need to be modified to fit this situation.

One SWPRD member pointed out that SWPRD has already raised funds and has been paying for maintenance on the south boat ramp. Commissioner Hege asked if OMB might consider an arrangement where the County acted as guarantor for the first five years of the grant to give SWPRD some time to establish a record of successes. Mr. Brackman responded that it would certainly give SWPRD time to establish a budget; the question would have to be posed to OMB.

Mr. Stone pointed out that OMB is also coming from the perspective that they have been burned before when a similar group came up with a plan for the original boat ramp and then defaulted on maintenance. Commissioner Hege observed that as an official entity with an elected board, SWPRD is a lot more organized which demonstrates a more significant effort to provide structure and support for the facilities.

Mr. Brackman reminded everyone that BID owns the water and the land under the water; they realize that they have to allow the ramp but are a reluctant partner. The lease with BID gives SWPRD until October of 2019 to have a new boat ramp in place or remove the ramp altogether.

Further discussion ensued regarding the costs and requirements to repair, rebuild or remove the north boat ramp. Mr. Brackman reported that SWPRD has asked OMB if they would just provide oversight and the design for the ramp but they will not. Commissioner Hege stated that he has worked with OMB for decades and found them to be a great organization; his preference would be to work with them – it is by far the best path. He added that there must be a solution but the County does not want to be in the same position as we were before. Mr. Brackman said that OMB wants to do the project but feels they are not meeting their fiduciary responsibilities if they do not require a guarantee.

Ms. Veenker, recording secretary for SWPRD, pointed out that the Fire District is unfunded but has had good financial support from the community. Chair Runyon observed that when the Antelope City Council did not have enough elected members to form a quorum, the Board of Commissioners made appointments to ensure the Council's continuation; that would also occur should members of the SWPRD step down – others would be found to take their place.

Chair Runyon stated that he feels good about this deal, better than any of the other options. He went on to say that Mr. Stone is trying to keep us from going backwards, but the ramp is an important economic driver. An SWPRD member pointed out that of the 199 recreational bodies of water in Oregon, Pine Hollow Reservoir is the 38th busiest. Mr. Stone agreed that the ramp is important but the maintenance is a big deal; the County was sending a crew out there twice a month throughout the season to perform maintenance. He added that the County had granted land to the Fire District in exchange for their agreement to maintain the ramps but they have since discontinued their participation in the maintenance. He said that he could support the idea of a shorter term guarantee and a depreciating value of the ramp so that if there were to be a default, the County would not have to repay the full grant. Chair Runyon pointed out that at the OMB meeting for the grant application, he clearly heard OMB say that five-years was not enough.

Mr. Stone said he would like to see the modified agreement. Mr. Brackman asked who would be making that contact with OMB. Commissioner Hege stated that he has set up a call with them for tomorrow afternoon. Mr. Brackman pointed out the importance of getting in on the first round of the grant process as funding dwindles to smaller projects as the biennial passes. Commissioner Hege asked if ODFW has a deadline. Mr. Brackman replied that we have already passed their

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deadline, but ODFW is trying to be flexible and hold the funding until the final decision from OMB.

Ms. White pointed out that the Board meets in regular session on August 16th and then is not scheduled to meet again until September 6th which is the day after OMB has stated they need to hear from the County regarding their willingness to co-sign the grant. She said that if the Board is not ready to make a decision by the 16th, a Special Session will need to be called in order to make the OMB deadline.

Finance Director Mike Middleton reported to the Board that due to the year-end close out for revenues which will not occur until the end of August, he will be delaying his financial report until the September 6th Session. He stated that he will be unavailable for the August 16th Session and therefore, Public Works Director Arthur Smith will be presenting the Vacation Policy to the Board at that time.

Mr. Stone announced that at the last meeting of the Mid-Columbia Council of Governments (MCCOG) Board directed Interim Executive Director David Meriwether to find suitable homes for MCCOG administered programs. Vice-Chair Kramer, Chair of the MCCOG Board of Directors, stated that Mr. Meriwether has two weeks to do that outreach and report back with more detailed information.

Mr. Stone continued by saying that the County has been working on the issue of Building Codes, a MCCOG administered program, for over two years and has opened discussions with the City of The Dalles regarding a one-stop shop for planning related services that could be housed at a joint location. He said that he wants to make sure that the Board of County Commissioners is still in support of that idea before he pursues it any further; in two weeks, the MCCOG Board will want to know who is interested.

Vice-Chair Kramer observed that the County cannot take on Building Codes without a partnership with the City of The Dalles. Commissioner Hege added that the program should be self-sustaining through permit revenues and suggested that there may be a way to bring Hood River into the partnership which has the potential to create more efficiency.

Further discussion ensued regarding possible homes for the other MCCOG

administered programs.

Chair Runyon raised the issue of the MCCOG debt to Building Codes. Mr. Stone replied that MCCOG could sell their building and use the proceeds to retire the debt, or if Building Codes came to the County, the County would repay the debt to Building Codes and own the building. Commissioner Hege stated that he trusts Mr. Stone and Vice-Chair Kramer to work through the issue and bring a recommendation to the Board.

Planning Director Angie Brewer said that it is important that the Board be clear about their direction; there will be good years and bad years for Building Codes. Commissioner Hege replied that that is why it is important to have reserves. Mr. Stone added that there would also be an IGA with the City of The Dalles which would assign them responsibility for half of the program funding.

Commissioner Hege asked how the structure would look for the staffing. Ms. Brewer replied that they have started to explore that; there would be at least two additional County employees and she would have to offload some of her responsibilities in order to oversee an additional program. Commissioner Hege said that he just wants to make sure that all the agencies find good homes; if something comes to the County, he wants to make sure it is done well. Ms. Brewer observed that if the program goes back to the State, it will not be a one-stop shop. Mr. Stone concluded by saying that although it may not be a win for the County as an organization, a City/County partnership would be a win for the community.

Ms. Brewer reported that when she returned to the office from her extended leave, many of her staff came to her to say that they were being recruited by cities; the vast majority want to remain here but have living expenses and are being offered higher wages. She reported that County Human Resources Manager Nichole Biechler contacted the City of Hood River and found that we are paying 10-20% less for the same positions. She stated that we have a good team and we should try to retain them; we need to be competitive if we want to recruit and retain quality staff.

Commissioner Hege commented that we recently completed a market survey. Mr. Stone responded that it has been more than a year and the market for planning positions has changed significantly in that time. He asked if the Board

wants to do a mid-term bump for planning staff based on the new data; it would move staff up to the next highest pay band. He noted that it will be another year before the entire matrix is adjusted to the market.

Further discussion ensued as to the costs of the proposed increases and the risks associated with losing planning staff. Commissioner Hege stated that he does not want to see this snowball. Commissioner Kramer suggested that we look at increasing planning fees; those using those services need to pay for them.

Mr. Stone stated that anyone can request a market evaluation. He added that there has also been discussions about Information Services positions to pay a base rate and a premium for specialized positions. Commissioner Hege stated that we need to be competitive and retain our good employees. Ms. Brewer pointed out that her department is currently overhauling several plans, once those big projects are complete, we can consider what we need to retain in the way of staff size.

*****The Board was in consensus to leave the process of market evaluation and salary increases up to staff.*****

Ms. Brewer stated that she is looking for ways to remove the kinks from the codes compliance process – right now, some cases go on for years; she would like to reduce that to weeks. She asked what the Board's philosophy is regarding anonymous complaints.

Chair Runyon said that he does not have a problem with confidential complaints as he understands the reluctance to report violations for fear of retaliation, but he does not want anonymous complaints. He observed that some people would use the anonymity to harass their neighbors.

Ms. Brewer stated that the problem with confidential complaints is that the Court can request the information and the Planning Department is required to then reveal the complainant's name. She said that circumstance deters people from coming forward with legitimate concerns. She stated that an anonymous complaint allows the Planning Department to open a case independently; right now, we are exclusively driven by signed complaints.

Vice-Chair Kramer stated that public safety and public health should be our

primary concern; if someone is unwilling to sign their name but we can see that there is an issue, then we need to respond. Commissioner Hege agreed, saying that anonymous complaints are essential otherwise, we might not hear about significant violations. He commented that citizens used to be able to submit complaints without signing their name. Ms. Brewer responded that as a result of a court case, they have to require a name on written complaints; without a signature, people can say that staff is filling out the form and targeting them. She said that if we accept anonymous complaints by phone, staff can keep it anonymous because they won't know who is making the complaint.

Ms. Brewer went on to say that staff has spent a lot of time and incurred legal expense to pursue violations only to have their recommendations changed at a hearing; it makes it feel like a lot of resources have been wasted. She referenced the recent 420 Fest violation hearing where no fines were assessed as an example. She said that the goal is to help citizens be in compliance, but that has to be balanced with the expenditure of County resources – it should not be a years-long process.

Further discussion ensued regarding possible solutions. Vice-Chair Kramer suggested the issuance of citations for violations. Mr. Stone suggested that we might look at billing applicants for legal costs incurred through their application process. Vice-Chair Kramer agreed, saying that would be an appropriate user fee. Chair Runyon added that we should definitely be looking at equity.

Commissioner Hege noted that fees are only covering a fraction of actual costs. He said that he hopes we will learn from the 420 Fest experience and that their decision was based on what was presented at the hearing; had other information been available, the decision might have been different. Ms. Brewer observed that Planning Staff walk a fine line and try not to let their personal opinion enter into their staff recommendation.

Commissioner Hege stated that the Planning staff should know best how to remove the kinks. Ms. Brewer said that what she is hearing is that the Board would like as much information as possible and that staff can work to streamline the process. She noted that there will be three codes compliance cases coming to the Board in the next month or two.

Commissioner Hege commented that additional funds have come to the County

through the initial fee for the third Google Enterprise Zone; those funds were divided between the City of The Dalles and Wasco County. He suggested that the money might be distributed similarly to how Immediate Opportunity Funds were distributed. Further discussion ensued regarding possible uses for the funds such as SWPRD and the Planning Department salary increases. No conclusion was drawn.

Mr. Stone reported that the County will be filing a motion to be dismissed from the suit filed against NORCOR and Wasco County regarding the detention of people in violation of ICE laws. Chair Runyon noted that County Counsel will be in touch with NORCOR Counsel to help inform our decisions.

Mr. Stone reported that a Sheriff's Department employee has filed a BOLI complaint regarding our hiring/promotion practices. He stated that in a recent promotion process, veteran's preference was not factored in. He added that in this case, the application of the veteran's preference would not have altered the outcome.

Ms. White reminded the Board of their recent decision to not participate on the Deschutes Rim Clinic capital campaign committee due to the fact that it is a private business. She stated that she has since learned that they are actually a public taxing district and felt she needed to bring that information to the Board in case it alters their position. The consensus of the Board was that that fund raising is really not within their official scope; however, Board members are free to participate as private citizens.

Vice-Chair Kramer reported that there is a growing issue regarding the septic systems in Wasco County; cities no longer want to accept the waste being pumped from those systems. He stated that grounds are being saturated and the problem will need to be addressed. Ms. Brewer suggested that Tygh Valley should have a treatment system paid for by the waste haulers so they have a place to go. Further discussion ensued regarding various possible solutions.

Chair Runyon commented that he would like to have some guidance on how to handle instances where a citizen is taking up inordinate amounts of Board and staff time on the same topic even after all questions have been answered. Ms. White reported that County Counsel is at conference this week and plans to discuss that with colleagues.

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Further discussion ensued regarding the upcoming AOC Legislative Conference. Commissioner Hege noted that should Representative Huffman resign his seat to accept another position, the appointment will come to the District counties for a final decision on a replacement.

The session was adjourned at 3:26 p.m.

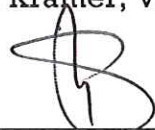
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