



WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION

SEPTEMBER 29, 2021

This meeting was held on Zoom

<https://wascocounty-org.zoom.us/j/3957734524>

or call in to [1-253-215-8782](tel:1-253-215-8782) Meeting ID: 3957734524#

PRESENT: Scott Hege, Chair  
Kathy Schwartz, Vice-Chair  
Steve Kramer, County Commissioner

STAFF: Kathy Clark, Executive Assistant  
Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer

Chair Hege opened the session at 3:00 p.m. He reviewed a list of possible Work Session topics:

- Shaniko City Council
- East Cascade Work Force
- Codes Enforcement
- Fee Schedule – Guiding Policy
- Housekeeping Items

SHANIKO CITY COUNCIL

Wasco County Clerk Lisa Gambée explained that all members of the Shaniko City Council have resigned their positions leaving no governing body. The last resignation, from the Shaniko Mayor, was submitted yesterday under advice of City Counsel. Under statute, the County Commission is empowered to appoint three members to the council in order to have a quorum. The appointed council members would then appoint the remaining members of the Council including a City Recorder and Mayor. All positions would go on the ballot at next year's general election.

Ms. Gambée went on to report that she posted notices in Shaniko yesterday afternoon and provided qualification forms to be completed and submitted to the Board's Executive Assistant no later than 4 p.m., Tuesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>. Those forms will be reviewed by the Clerk's office to ensure that applicants meet the

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minimum requirements of office such as age and residency. The forms will then be forwarded to the County Commissioners for consideration and possible appointment at the October 6, 2021 Regular Session. She noted that some former council members have brought claims against the City of Shaniko which may present a conflict of interest for holding office.

Vice-Chair Schwartz asked why the Mayor needed to resign. Ms. Gambee explained that if the Mayor remained in office, the Board could not appoint – the City would have to pay for a special election which they cannot afford.

Chair Hege asked what would happen if we do not get applications. Ms. Gambee replied that she does not know; less than three would not provide the necessary quorum. They may have to look at disincorporation but that would have to go to a vote of the citizens.

Vice-Chair Schwartz asked if there has been any electronic notification. Ms. Gambee replied that she is not aware of any list although she has already taken a few calls. She said she is following the same process as the City does for elections.

EAST CASCADE WORK FORCE

Commissioner Kramer said that he has a request from the Executive Director of the East Cascade Work Force to add Wasco County's logo to a letter seeking a program investment from the State. He went on to explain that he is the Vice-President of a 10-county Board; there are 9 Boards throughout the state and they have all come together for this request. The work force programs support the talent needs of employers, and maximize and align investments in the career goals of individuals to fuel a thriving economy. These programs have not received any funding through CARES or ARPA and have lost both state and federal funding. They seek action by the legislature at the short session in 2022 and are requesting \$50 million which would be applied to training resources and broaden work with community colleges.

**\*\*\*The Board was in consensus to add the Wasco County logo to the Request for Action letter being submitted to the Oregon Legislature on behalf of the Work Force groups.\*\*\***

MID-COLUMBIA CENTER FOR LIVING

Mr. Stone reported that he attended a MCCFL Work Session today and wants to bring the Board up to speed. He stated that MCCFL is without an Executive Director, an HR Director and is contracting for IT services. They also have over 40

staff positions open. MCCFL is our local mental health authority as well as for Sherman and Hood River Counties. We have a responsibility to make sure they are successful. He said that he was asked to take a look at the organization and has talked to some of the staff to get a better feel for the situation. There have also been some discussions in the community around what mental health should look like for our citizens. We not only have an investment but we also have an obligation through the CDBG grant we sponsored. We have a vested interest in making this work.

Mr. Stone went on to say that we can probably help with administration and IT Services in the short term and potentially HR. At today's meeting the MCCFL Board generally responded that they can use all the help they can get. We have a strong team at Wasco County but would likely have to enhance our staff to support MCCFL. They currently have an Interim Director but he is a clinical manager and the organization could use an administrator. On the HR side, we may not have capacity right now but might find a long-term solution. IT would be a heavy lift and tax our staff resources. He said he wants to make sure he has the support of the Board of Commissioners before making any commitments. He said that he could probably keep it afloat for 6 months as the Executive Director but we would need much more – HR and IT support. They could continue to contract that out but it is a significant cost – we can do a better job for a lower cost.

Chair Hege, also MCCFL Board Chair, said that this is MCCFL's responsibility and there may be some opportunities but this is an interesting solution. He said that he hopes they come back in 2 weeks to discuss it further. Right now, they are trying to stabilize the organization. Today's work session was good and they had someone out of the valley with a lot of experiencing helping.

**\*\*\*The Board was in consensus for Mr. Stone to continue to pursue solutions for MCCFL.\*\*\***

#### CODES ENFORCEMENT

Chair Hege reported that he got another call today regarding an issue with codes violations. Our Codes Enforcement Officer has transferred to Planning and we have a vacancy. However, this discussion is about how heavy handed we want to be. There is usually a complainant and a violator who needs to do work. Sometimes this takes years and there is a lot of frustration.

Mr. Stone stated that we can place a lien on the home of a non-compliant owner and then we would clean it up but the Board has not wanted to be in that role. We

have focused efforts on voluntary compliance. We do have some that are perpetual problems but have had success with voluntary compliance.

Chair Hege agreed and added that there has to be a point at which enough is enough. When do we take action? He said he is taking calls from frustrated citizens who have been in the process for 10 years or more.

Vice-Chair Schwartz commented that it is a complicated issue. It is almost like a social service as some do not have the means or physical capacity to address the problem. In other cases it is a matter of one person seeing it as junk and another seeing it as treasure.

Chair Hege said we owe it to our citizens to take on the challenge. Vice-Chair Schwartz asked if our Codes Enforcement position is full-time. Mr. Stone replied that it is but it is currently vacant.

Chair Hege added that Interim Planning Director Kelly Howsley-Glover is working on a redesign of the program and so the position is not yet posted.

Commissioner Kramer stated that in the meantime, we need to move forward on a case by case basis. Those that have been ongoing for 10 years need to be firmly dealt with and we need to put resources behind that effort. It is a problem throughout the county and there is no excuse for it. With all the programs out there, we should be able to work with our partners to resolve these situations. We need to bring the discussion of citations back and move it forward.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said that we need to enforce our codes manual and ordinance.

#### FEE SCHEDULE GUIDING POLICY

Mr. Stone explained that the County has an annual process for amending the Fee Schedule. We go department by department to review for relevancy and increase/decrease and eliminate fees as a result. What was presented to the Board at the last Regular Session is the updated Fee Schedule. The only thing that was different is that we placed a floor of 3% on the fees to respond to the criticism that we have in the past asked for large increases that are hard to swallow rather than incremental increases on a regular basis. Another piece that our departments look at is to ask if the fee is adequate the cost of service. Electrical codes fees do not cover costs by 30-40%; Scenic Area planning reviews are massive compared to regular reviews. UPRR was massive and needed to be in line with the amount of work that was needed to do that. The vast majority of our fees are already

subsidized by General Fund dollars. We do not want to lose ground; we want to maintain. The current update is the fee increases that the directors advised and for those that they did not change, we applied the 3% floor. The one that stands out is the Scenic Area fees which the Board directed that we increase to better cover costs.

Chair Hege commented that CPI or 3%, from the standpoint of a guiding policy, we should have the same base and then the question becomes if you need more, you justify that additional increase; if the increase is less or non-existent, why. For instance, some fees are dictated by State statute. CPI makes sense and we can look at it – our costs go up every year.

Vice-Chair Schwartz stated that she thinks it is appropriate for fees to increase but it should be standard. If they want to go higher, they can justify that. Perhaps they can compare to neighboring counties. Mr. Stone observed that that is exactly what we did this year – the floor was 3% and if they needed to go higher they did so.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said that she thinks they should all use 3%. Mr. Stone said that 3% is a good middle ground number. Vice-Chair Schwartz noted that 3% is about what annual inflation is. She said she would like to see that be standard. The idea that we have not raised a fee since 2014 is not good justification. She said that we can make a decision on each fee, but it makes sense to standardize and then justify not increasing or increasing further. That would give departments some discretion.

Chair Hege said that he would prefer using the CPI because it will move; 3% could be too high or too low in any given year. We can start with the CPI and adjust from there. Vice-Chair Schwartz said that CPI would be acceptable.

Mr. Stone said that we can use CPI West for next year.

Chair Hege said that what is standing out this year is the Scenic Area fees. Vice-Chair Schwartz said that she does not recall that we were going to raise the fees. She said that she remembers saying that we would track data to present to DLCD to get more state funding but not that we would be raising the fees.

Chair Hege replied that we said both. Vice-Chair Schwartz said while that is possible, she did not expect to have such a great rate increase. We did get \$5,000 a year from DLCD. Mr. Stone commented that \$5,000 will cover 1 scenic area review. Chair Hege commented that he thought the Scenic Area increases a bit steep; however, we do not have to do the Scenic Area planning – having those not

living in the scenic area subsidize is also not equitable. He said he would like to try to make ends meet.

Vice-Chair Schwartz pointed out that we agreed to do the Scenic Area planning.

Chair Hege said that it is similar to Building Codes but we have to make ends meet there.

Mr. Stone pointed out that another variable is that right now under the current Planning Department load, we need another planner. The Planning Department needs to figure out how to pay for that. You could trade a planner and have the Gorge Commission do the Scenic Area planning.

Chair Hege stated that it seems that our Planning Department Directors have done a good job of tracking costs and we cover about 40% of those costs. Scenic Area planning is expensive; perhaps Hood River needs to look at raising their fees.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said that it seems as though we are saying that if you live in the Scenic Area, too bad for you. Chair Hege responded that he believes it is not our responsibility. It makes sense for us to do it, but the Gorge Commission should be paying for it. We do not subsidize Building Codes which we do on behalf of the State.

Vice-Chair Schwartz stated that once we take it on, it becomes our responsibility. We did that for the citizens that live there. If someone lived there prior to the Scenic Area, they could not have anticipated the increased costs.

Commissioner Kramer said that is a good point. This was forced upon us and we are paying for the consequences. Citizens were also dropped into the middle of it. However, we need to collect those dollars.

Vice-Chair Schwartz asked if that needs to be collected from the citizens.

Commissioner Kramer replied that it does not need to be collected just from the citizens; these high fees are for those who are doing a substantial project. Mr. Stone concurred, saying that a lot of the work in the Scenic Area is not for a full review; but when someone buys a piece of property and is building a nice home, the full review is triggered and becomes expensive.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said a lot of this is just people putting up a barn. Chair Hege stated that the full review fees would not apply in those instances.

Chair Hege said that he would never subsidize Building Codes. We subsidize

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Planning to some extent. He said he really does not care where we get the money, but we need to make ends meet. We don't have to get it all from the citizens.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said that she does not believe we will be subsidizing the Scenic Area fees with the proposed rate increases.

Chair Hege said that the federal government or the Gorge Commission needs to pay for this but it should not be a burden to citizens living outside of the Scenic Area.

Vice-Chair Schwartz commented that not everyone benefits from every program that they pay for through taxes.

Mr. Stone said that we need to look at what the Gorge Commission charges for a planner for Klickitat County. Chair Hege said that they get funding directly from Klickitat County; he said he does not want planning to be free in the Scenic Area.

Chair Hege asked if there is agreement to have some consistency in the rate increases with explanations for any deviations. Vice-Chair Schwartz said she would like some recognition of statutory fees.

Mr. Stone said that he would apply the CPI West for next year but was not planning on creating a policy. Vice-Chair Schwartz said that a policy would be good for future Boards and Administrators.

Mr. Stone said that statute already provides policy guidance. Vice-Chair Schwartz replied that our policy would be within that policy.

Chair Hege asked Vice-Chair Schwartz to have a conversation with the Planning Director to put a finer point on the Scenic Area increases. Mr. Stone suggested that we look at the subsidy for planning outside of the Scenic Area and apply the same percentage to planning within the Scenic Area.

Vice-Chair Schwartz asked if the Board can reject individual fee increases. Mr. Stone replied that they can.

HOUSEKEEPING ITEMS

It was announced that the Burn Ban will be lifted on October 16, 2021.

Commissioner Kramer said that each of the Commissioners received a note from Mr. Gibson about conditions at Taylor Lake. Vice-Chair Schwartz stated that she had gotten in touch with Mr. Gibson and will be taking his concerns to the Mayor's

Homeless Initiative Committee.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said she had received a citizen complaint about protests taking place on County property located at 6<sup>th</sup> and Webber. Mr. Stone said he is working with the City Manager on that.

Ms. Clark reviewed the October 6<sup>th</sup> draft agenda with the Board, noting the need for good time management. Discussion ensued regarding COVID updates, it was concluded that we should move to an as-needed model rather than every meeting.

Ms. Clark explained that the tax numbers for the ODFW in lieu of taxes may not be ready for the packet. She asked if it would be acceptable to keep the item on the Consent Agenda as long as the Board had the numbers prior to approval and that the numbers be included in the record. The Board agreed to have the ODFW item remain on the Consent Agenda.

Discussion ensued regarding upcoming AOC events.

**CONSENSUS**

- **To add the Wasco County logo to the Request for Action letter being submitted to the Oregon Legislature on behalf of the Work Force groups.**
- **For Mr. Stone to continue to pursue solutions for MCCFL.**

Wasco County  
Board of Commissioners



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Scott C. Hege, Commission Chair



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Kathleen B. Schwartz, Vice-Chair



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Steven D. Kramer, County Commissioner