



**WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**DUFUR TOWN HALL**

**AUGUST 8, 2023**

This meeting was held in person and on Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82604122515?pwd=akJ6dGdoS0pTck9XZHBoYjhJUUwzQT09>

**PRESENT:** Steve Kramer, Chair  
Scott Hege, Vice-Chair  
Phil Brady, County Commissioner

**STAFF:** Kathy Clark, Executive Assistant  
Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer  
Ali Postlewait, Administrative Services Director  
Molly Rogers, Youth Services Director

Chair Kramer opened the Town Hall at 6:05 p.m. with introductions from the Board and County Staff. Each Commissioner made a brief opening statement outlining their work and areas of interest.

Chair Kramer listed some of the committees/boards on which he serves such as AOC's Health & Human Services, Governance, Revenue & Veterans, Natural Resources, Transportation & Community Development, and Public Safety. He said he has worked and continues to work on mental health and public health issues including agreements with OHA and the 1115 Waiver which would allow us to keep folks at NORCOR on their insurance. He said he has been involved with the Wasco County Forest Collaborative since its inception 8 years ago; they have worked on 7 projects, treating over 30,000 acres. He reported that he recently had the opportunity to meet with the Secretary of Agriculture and Governor Kotek on 12-member panel from Oregon and Washington to talk about rural economic development and the Forest Collaborative. He announced that he will be touring projects in the county with Representative Cliff Bentz tomorrow.

Commissioner Brady said that through his work on various committees/boards he has been amazed at the legions of people doing the work in our communities. One of the boards on which he serves is for the Housing Authority which gets state and federal funding. One project in Hood River has been funded for 90 units. They are also working on a project in The Dalles at the old West Gate Market site; that project is not yet funded. They do have congressional directed spending to complete the planning phase of that project.

Commissioner Brady went on to say that Mid-Columbia Community Action Council has created temporary housing for those who are homeless. Those newly

WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

DUFUR TOWN HALL

AUGUST 8, 2023

PAGE 2

homeless are placed in the old Oregon Motor Hotel to help bridge the gap; it is intended for 6-month housing. That 90-unit site is being renovated with some of the units designed just for families. People housed there are under supervision to keep it safe. He reported that the Community Renewable Energy Association is looking for ways for communities to develop renewable energy. It's coming and as citizens we can choose how to direct it. He said Public Health is currently deciding if they should remain a district or come back to the County as a department. It has been a respectful process but it is moving slowly. In any case, the 22 different services being provided would continue.

Vice-Chair Hege said jobs is his focus. Wasco County is challenged by the lack of space to develop. The Dalles serves as the industrial business center of the county with necessary infrastructure to support growth. Dufur will decide for themselves what direction they want to take in regard to growth of business. In The Dalles, the Urban Growth Boundary is restricted by the Scenic Area Management Plan. Those requirements are exponentially more difficult to deal with. The original plan had some leeway for growth; but the plan has recently been updated with tougher constraints. All of the urban areas in the Scenic Area have to share 50 acres of potential expansion. He said he is working very hard to highlight how unreasonable that restriction is. The County appoints a Gorge Commissioner and just recently appointed a new commissioner who is a new resident of Wasco County and an attorney with land use experience. We are hopeful she can help us make progress.

Vice-Chair Hege said he would be interested to know what Dufur wants. It is currently an agricultural hub and housing provider. He said he knows there are some plans for expansion. Even if you are a city resident, you still access county services – if you have comments in that regard, the Board wants to hear from you. He asked if there is there a houseless problem in Dufur. Mayor Merle Keys replied not yet.

Vice-Chair Hege stated that he focuses a lot on federal policy issues as they relate to forest management. When there was timber harvesting, counties benefited from that in a 25% share of the receipts. In the mid-eighties, when it was robust, we received 2.5 million per year; some of that went to the schools but the most of it went to roads. Now it is \$50,000 to \$100,000. Our road department shrunk by half in staff and more than that in resources. It is a huge issue for which he continues to advocate. It is not unreasonable to have more forest management that would mitigate fire risk and produce revenue. Our forests have become incredibly overgrown – it is a tinderbox. He said he goes to Washington, D.C. once or twice a year to work with federal legislators to address this issue. With 53% of Oregon federally owned, it is significant, especially considering they do

WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

DUFUR TOWN HALL

AUGUST 8, 2023

PAGE 3

not pay taxes except in certain instances.

Chair Kramer said there is a percentage of stumpage that goes into retained receipts for future projects. The Collaborative is having their first sale. Thankfully the Boulder fire was put out quickly as it bordered the timber sale. However, Oregon Wild is taking them to court to stop the sale. The Collaborative has consensus with BARK who is the environmental representative. The sale represents 15 million board feet.

Mayor Keys asked why Oregon Wild does not want it harvested. Chair Kramer responded they would rather see it burn than on a log truck. There are some environmental organizations that are modifying that policy. The Collaborative does not harvest old growth so that when a fire comes through, those trees can be saved. There are 25 active forest collaboratives across the state.

Mayor Keys asked what stumpage is. Chair Kramer explained that is what you have left once you have logged and the stump is left behind.

Dufur Councilmember Steve Podvent said in Dufur water storage is inadequate to meet the need. The City has to restrict water use for the citizens so there is enough to fight a fire in town. Chair Kramer asked if the City is working with MCEDD. Mayor Keys answered they are working with them for grant money. It will be a couple of million dollars to build a new reservoir. Vice-Chair Hege asked if they have a project scoped. Mayor Keys said they paid to have that drawn up. They have shovel ready projects waiting to be funded.

Mr. Stone asked if the County had just given Dufur some property for the projects. Citizen Mike Glove confirmed saying that was to provide the required buffer; the County retained the mineral rights.

Chair Kramer asked the square footage needed for the reservoir. Mayor Keys said they need a 780,000 gallon reservoir. They have one that holds 400,000 gallons; there is a second one that is slowly failing. Mr. Podvent explained that they put a new roof on the one in town and need to build one on the outskirts of town.

Vice-Chair Hege asked if water or sewer is more critical. Mayor Keys replied that sewer is more critical as they can no longer drain into the creek. They are in talks to purchase property to help them move forward and are ready to break ground as soon as they can acquire the property. He said next will be water; they need to be able to store enough water to fight fires when it is dry.

Councilmember Barbara McKenzie added that they also need another well.

Chair Kramer asked if they could you put together a memo by tomorrow at 9 a.m. He said he could pass that along to Congressman Bentz who is the chairman of

WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

DUFUR TOWN HALL

AUGUST 8, 2023

PAGE 4

the subcommittee on water resources.

Councilmember McKenzie said she thought the 15-Mile underground water project was just pie in the sky. Chair Kramer explained it is a pilot project but it is in operation. Everyone involved cannot wait for it to go big. When completed, they will be able to take the spring runoff and charge the aquifer. When there is low flow or hot flow, the stream can be cooled and irrigation can occur from the aquifer.

Councilmember McKenzie asked there is a metering system. Chair Kramer confirmed, saying data will be collected.

Commissioner Brady asked if they have made progress with the filtration process. Chair Kramer said he will find out. Dufur citizen Tom Peters said he has heard that they resolved those issues.

Mr. Glove noted on Bakeoven the solar panels are not up; he asked if the Board knows anything about the farm? Commissioner Brady replied he talked to the manager; they are waiting on solar panels which are embargoed in San Diego. The government suspects the panels were built with slave labor so they have placed an embargo. Vice-Chair Hege added that the Chinese company has to provide documentation to prove employment; they have not been able to do so. It has been 9 months at least.

Councilman Podvent said he went by a solar farm and the panels were dirty which inhibits their production of power. He asked how the panels are maintained. Vice-Chair Hege replied that they are designed for limited maintenance; a lot have a system to melt snow. Mr. Peters added that once a year they hose them down under pressure. Vice-Chair Hege said it is to their advantage to make them productive as it impacts their revenue. Commissioner Brady reported there are some nuclear power facilities being constructed – one in Idaho now. They used to be too big, too expensive and too unique. They have standardized them and downsized them and they will be coming back.

Mr. Glove commented that Shaniko and Antelope seem to be more part of Jefferson County than Wasco County. They feel like they do not get services from the County. Chair Kramer said the County does pay attention and is dealing with the hard issues there. They have to reach out to us as well. Commissioner Brady observed that Shaniko has finance issues because they have not been managing their finances well.

Vice-Chair Hege pointed out that we have to take care of the whole county and move resources to the areas of greatest density. The County does hear the complaints. We have people assigned for the roads in that area – that is a big

WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

DUFUR TOWN HALL

AUGUST 8, 2023

PAGE 5

part of what we do. If you live in the remote areas, it is a challenge to go to the county seat and we have worked hard to make services available remotely. People can attend meetings virtually and a lot of what you used to have to drive for, you can do online. We cannot locate a satellite office in Antelope; however, our current sheriff wants to have a south county resident deputy.

Mr. Stone added that all of the residents in South County receive the same services as the north. Shaniko and Antelope are both incorporated cities, they have to take care of much of the services themselves. Commissioner Brady said one of the advantages of being a city is that the state will recognize you. Pine Hollow has a thousand or more people and they are not recognized.

Vice-Chair Hege observed that the local school district has a good track record of getting support from the community. He asked what they would tell The Dalles District. Mr. Peters replied that if you don't have the parents involved, you will not get buy in. It is the center of the Dufur community. Mayor Keys added that 60% of Dufur's population is families with children. Everybody loves sports and that is the big draw.

Commissioner Brady said in Dufur there seems to be a series of bonds rather than one big bond. Mayor Keys agreed that The Dalles has a huge investment to make and it is hard to get that all at once from the citizens. Chair Kramer added that they have also had a lot of generous donations to Dufur scholarship program.

Chair Kramer closed the Town Hall at 7:15 p.m. saying our phones are always on and doors are always open – we cannot help if we do not know.

Wasco County  
Board of Commissioners



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Steven D. Kramer, Commission Chair



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Scott C. Hege, Vice-Chair



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Philip L. Brady, County Commissioner