



WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TOWN HALL
MAY 27, 2015

PRESENT: Scott Hege, Commission Chair
Rod Runyon, County Commissioner
Steve Kramer, County Commissioner

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

At 5:30 p.m. Maupin Mayor Frank Kay opened the Town Hall and introduced the Board of Commissioners to the group.

Chair Hege welcomed the attendees and said that the Commissioners represent all of the areas outside of the cities and they try to get out to various parts of the County to make that connection. He introduced Administrative Officer Tyler Stone and Executive Assistant Kathy White.

Commissioner Runyon suggested that each Commissioner outline some of the committees on which they serve.

Commissioner Kramer said that he serves on the Household Hazardous Waste Committee and is happy to report that with the addition of Kathie Richey as the representative from Maupin the Committee is complete; the group includes representatives from three counties and six cities.

Commissioner Kramer went on to say that he serves on:

- The Wolf Depredation Committee – Wolf OR25 is now in Klamath County
- The North Central Public Health District Board of Health

- The Early Learning Council – Took the place of the Commission system
- The Forest Collaborative – looking at fuel reductions
- WyEast RC&D – a big piece for the farming community

Commissioner Runyon said that he just came from Salem where he attended a meeting of the Oregon Consortium – a workforce group that has a lot to do with training people for jobs in rural areas. He said that he is the Governor's appointee to the Consortium. He explained that it was a large statewide board and is now going to be regional; Commissioner Kramer will be taking that on.

Commissioner Runyon went on to say that he serves:

- As Governor's appointee to Regional Solutions Advisory Board
- Broadband Committee
- Attends SWA
- As Chair of Mid-Columbia Housing – there is a project in the Maupin area now.
- On MCEDD Loan Advisory Board – they help business who have not been able to secure a traditional loan. They helped the Maupin Market.
- MCCOG Board – they have AAA and Senior Services. MCCOG serves five counties with programs that the counties would not otherwise be able to afford.
- Board of NORCOR which serves 4 counties.
- AOC – Public Lands Committee, Legislative Committee and Veterans Committee

He concluded by saying that when he goes to Salem he tries to meet with our State representatives on issues that come from the citizens. He encouraged people to contact their Commissioners.

Chair Hege agreed saying that he often has people say that they don't want to bother their Commissioner; that is what the Commissioners are here to do – listen to the citizens. He said that he serves on some of the same committees/boards as the others but some that he serves on uniquely are:

- Mid-Columbia Center for Living – mental health services
- QLife – Fiber network organization in The Dalles area and they are currently working on a project in the Maupin area; working with others to see if they can

provide some broadband services here.

- Lower Deschutes Management Group/“Working” Group – this group makes most of the decisions about the management of operations on the Lower Deschutes River. Right now the BLM is talking about changing their fee structure from \$2 per day weekdays and \$8 per day weekends to \$5 per day every day. He said that he wants to hear from the local residents to make sure that they have input.

Chair Hege opened the floor for questions.

Ron Walp asked what the Board’s concerns are regarding oil products being hauled along the Deschutes River. He asked if there is an emergency plan in case of an accident. He reported that there was an article in the Oregonian that there are 29 incidents a month throughout the US. He stated that he guides there – railroad has replaced wooden ties with cement and are using longer pieces of steel. He said he has also seen some survey work being done. Last summer was the first time he had seen tanker cars.

Commissioner Runyon replied that he and Chair Hege had attended a meeting with Union Pacific in Hood River last month. He said that Union Pacific is very concerned with this corridor. He said that the County does not have a lot to say as interstate commerce is controlled by the federal government. He said that if he receives input from local residents he sends them to the decision makers. He said that his impression is that Union Pacific is doing all that they can to be safe.

Mr. Walp asked if there is an emergency plan. Commissioner Runyon responded that Union Pacific did talk about that. They offer a training school – free of charge – for fire departments. Local volunteer fire personnel can attend those schools. He said that one thing he took away from the meeting was that they have employees that live along these lines with their families – they are concerned with their welfare as well.

A Maupin City Councilman added that the City of Maupin has an emergency action plan that needed to be updated. He said that the County has a good plan so the City has dovetailed into that. He said that the County’s Emergency Manager Kristy Beachamp does a great job.

Chair Hege said that the Lower Deschutes Group has also talked about this issue. He noted that Union Pacific sent their CEO and Chairman of their Board to the Hood

River meeting. He said that he thinks part of the reason is that Mosier has been very vocal with their frustrations over time and have gotten through to Union Pacific. He told the group to not be shy about asking to meet with railroad officials.

The Councilman said that they did have one exercise here a few years ago where they brought in the bags of foam to catch the oil and talked about storing those supplies in Maupin but he does not think that ever happened. He reported that it took almost a full day to get the equipment strung across the river and even with that, the process only traps between 10 and 15% of the oil.

Carroll White said that he thinks they built a couple of catch basins where eventually any oil that spills would settle.

Mr. Walp asked about the Limmeroth Ranch which is becoming public land. Commissioner Runyon said that in 2013 the ODFW hosted a tour of the Ranch. He said that he had been able to attend part of that tour. He said that they had made a presentation at a public meeting asking for a letter of support for the acquisition. He said that no one came out in opposition of the purchase and since that time, until recently, he has heard nothing pro or con regarding the purchase.

Chair Hege said that the ranch is 10,000 acres off the Deschutes and is in a family trust; the family has decided to sell the land which has been on the market for a while. He observed that there is a lot of government ownership in the area and ODFW has plans for the property. He stated that it is not very productive farmland but ODFW will continue to allow it to be grazed, will continue to pay property taxes on it and will allow public access to it. He said that they will be coming to the Board in June to talk about it. He said that there will also be people there who would like for the Board to withdraw support. He explained that it is not being purchased with State money but it is money that the State has control over. He said that the Board is also concerned about taking land off the tax rolls.

Mayor Kay asked what Mr. Walp's interests are regarding the land. Mr. Walp replied that his is a big game hunter and it is a great piece of land for that.

Mayor Kay noted that the Trust for Public Lands is putting up the money for the purchase. The owners have not had any legitimate offers and are willing sellers; they like that it will be accessible to the public and that grazing will be allowed. He added that ODFW will also protect this wild and scenic asset. He said he sees it as a win for

everyone.

Chair Hege said that there were two public hearings for the purchase. He stated that he had attended parts of both and there was no opposition at either. He noted that the Farm Bureau does not like government-owned land and does not want to see any more.

Tammara Webber said that sometime different trusts can work together – for instance there is the Columbia Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy. Mayor Kay said that he believes those two trusts are working together with The Trust for Public Lands acting as the lead for this purchase.

A City Councilman said that last week there was a meeting that included the BLM and fishing guides; one of the major complaints was that every time they have a meeting suggestions that come out of the meeting are never acted on. He asked Chair Hege if he gets input from the guide community.

Chair Hege said that he does and was disappointed that he could not attend that meeting. He said that it is supposed to be an annual meeting and he hopes that it will continue. He said that there was a big issue about marijuana at the meeting. The Councilman said that the guides wanted to know about enforcement. He said that there was also talk about riparian damage at the free landing sites and they are considering closing them which will force people to go where there is a charge.

Chair Hege said he would like to see BLM acquire that land – either by purchase or lease – so that there would not be a put-in fee. He said that the Tribes can be fairly protective. He observed that he has found it to be a challenging group in which he is the only local government representative – it is made up of federal agency representatives and tribal representatives. He said he tries to make a case for the local economy.

Commissioner Runyon pointed out that citizens do not have to attend a town hall to ask a question. He said that if someone sees them at any time they can approach and ask a question or they can call – phone numbers are on the County website.

A citizen asked about the road maintenance issue. Commissioner Kramer replied that the County will receive a federal band-aid for roads this year and will set that aside for special projects. He reported that they are in the final stages of getting the 18 miles of County roads that are located in the City of The Dalles turned over to the City. He said

that hopefully with the one-year extension of the SRS money, the federal government will have time to arrive a solution for the roads funding issue. He said that the County continues to work at the local level and noted that Administrative Officer Tyler Stone along with Public Works Director Arthur Smith have done some good work on that.

Chair Hege added that there had been a road district plan but through the public hearings process the Board clearly heard the public when they said they did not want the district. He said that at the State level there is a transportation bill that is floundering due to politics around a clean fuel tax. He said that he hopes they will be able to work something out by the end of the session. He stated that the Public Works Director has a different perspective with roads and thinks he can do more with less – it may no longer be the \$1.6 million gap they thought it was.

Commissioner Runyon said that to him it came down to the fact that the largest population center was not going to pay anything outside of a reduction in funding for their other districts but the areas outside The Dalles would pay significantly. He said that the work was not wasted – the research that came out of that year-long process is still being used to do work and access funding.

Ms. Webber said that in this area there are affordable housing issues and asked if the programs Commissioner Runyon mentioned are for owner occupied housing or for rentals.

Commissioner Runyon replied that there is some of each. He said that the current project is owner occupied. He said that housing is the number one issue around the State for Regional Solutions. He said that MCEDD is also working on that issue.

Chair Hege said he thought they had gotten \$2 million for housing projects. Commissioner Runyon replied that \$500,000 was put toward broadband projects and the rest for housing; the money is not just for Wasco County but is available to Wasco County.

Bob Larsell, Juniper Flats, said that he sees the Limmeroth land acquisition as a total loss of tax income. He said that if anything can be done to put that land into private hands, it should be done. He said that those who are opposed to the purchase should help buy it.

Chair Hege said that the loss of taxes was the Board's first concern but ODFW will continue to pay property taxes. He noted that the County was just declared in a

drought emergency and asked where the water comes from on the flats. Mr. Larsell replied that he has two wells. He asked if the taxes will be paid at the same rate he pays. Chair Hege replied that he has been told that they will be. Commissioner Runyon said that the meeting with regarding the Limmeroth purchase will be advertised.

Dave Peters from Mid-Columbia Housing said that the project in Maupin is owner occupied which a program requirement in Oregon. He said that they do upgrades for electrical systems, plumbing, roofs, windows, doors, foundations, heat and air, etc. He added that sometime the costs are shared with the PUD.

Ms. Webber asked if the Board needs to be more than three with all the work they do. Commissioner Kramer replied that they have great support staff. Chair Hege added that it is usually fun – they all enjoy what they do.

The Town Hall was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

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