

Okanogan County of Government

May 11, 2020

Location: 303 2nd Ave S, Suite A, Okanogan, WA 98840 (TranGO Office)

Present: Soo Ing-Moody, Town of Twisp, Mayor – OCOG Chairperson
Carlene Anders, City of Pateros, Mayor – OCOG Vice-Chairperson
Josh Thomson, Okanogan County Engineer – OCOG Treasurer
Kelly Scalf, TranGO CEO/General Manager - OCOG Secretary
Jackie Gleason, TranGO, Clerk of the Board
Jon Neal, City of Oroville, Mayor
Tim Rieb, City of Brewster, Council Member
Misty Ruiz, City of Brewster, Clerk/Treasurer
Chris Branch, Okanogan County Commissioner
Dennis Brown, City of Tonasket, Mayor
Sally Ranzau, Town of Winthrop, Mayor
Jon Culp, City of Okanogan, Mayor
Barry Freel, City of Omak, Council Member
Paul Budrow, Town of Twisp, Chief of Police
Laurie Jones, Okanogan County Public Health Department, Community Health Director
Tony Hawley, Okanogan County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff
Maurice Goodall, Okanogan County Department of Emergency Management, Director
Doug Cox, WSDOT Regional Coordinator
George Mazur, WSDOT, Senior Planner
Gabe Philips, WSDOT, Coordinator
Maxwell Nelson, WSDOT, Transportation Planning Specialist

Call to Order

Chairman Ing-Moody called the meeting to order at 4:39 pm.

Welcome/Role Call

Chairman Ing-Moody welcomed everyone to the meeting; role call was taken.

Approval of the Agenda

Additions: None

Deletions: None

Minutes

Motion:

Vice-Chairman Anders moved to approve the February 10, 2020 minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Council Member Ranzau and passed unanimously.

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Update: Chairman's Report

Chairman Ing-Moody reported that the annual meeting with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) went well. She explained that an annual report for 2019 was developed showing the accomplishments by OCOG in the 2017-2019 biennium. Regional Coordinator Cox shared that they went over requirements and timelines and that it was a great meeting. He thanked us for working so hard and being viable as a small RTPO. Chairman Ing-Moody and Secretary Scalf will be attending the MPO/RTPO/WSDOT Coordinating Committee Meeting on Tuesday, May 12th.

Update: Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Thomson reported that as of April 30, 2020 we have spent approximately \$4,400 on Administrative costs and he expects an invoice from SCJ Alliance for Phase II of the Backroads Study to come in soon for approximately \$6,300.

Update: Secretary Report

Secretary Scalf reported that she was working on getting the OCOG website hosting changed over from SCJ Alliance. Also, that the UPWP will need to be changed to reflect that charge needing to be reimbursed back to OCTA.

Update: Okanogan County Report

Council Member Branch deferred to Treasurer Thomson for an update. Thomson reported that all solid waste transfer stations will be running on their normal schedules, employees will be wearing the proper personal protective equipment and plexiglass has been installed. County road crews are working in full force on chip sealing and other road projects. Thomson shared his concern over declining transportation funding; it appears to be down approximately 50%.

Update: Washington State Department of Transportation

Senior Planner Mazur mentioned the concern of the potential loss of revenue. Mazur shared that a grant application process has just opened up and funds are available both through the state and federal governments.

Road work has begun and will continue through August of 2020 on Highway 153 and a portion of SR20 in the Methow and a portion east of Tonasket to Waconda Pass.

Coordinator Philips reported that as of July 1, 2021 the state biennium budget will be reduced by at least \$500,000. Philips added that he appreciates the hard work of the small RTPO's.

Action: Regional Transportation Improvement Program Plan (RTIP)

Treasurer Thomson explained that the RTIP is a compilation of all of the Transportation Improvement Programs of each of the municipalities in Okanogan County. OCOG is required to provide this

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information once a year to WSDOT. The RTIP being considered is for 2019 and the RTIP for 2020 is due in October.

Motion:

Council Member Branch moved to approve the Regional Transportation Improvement Plan as presented. The motion was seconded by Council Member Neal and passed unanimously.

Presentation/Discussion: SCJ Alliance - Backroads Study – Maptionnaire Tool

Hans Shepherd, Planner for SCJ Alliance gave a brief demonstration of the Maptionnaire Tool to be used to identify key places related to the Backroads Study. Shepard stated that this tool is being released for the use of OCOG members for now. Members are asked to give their feedback to Shepherd by May 31, 2020, he will then assess the progress and see if more time is needed.

Discussion: COVID-19 Council Member Roundtable – A Briefing from each Member on the Biggest Impact, Need, and How They are Responding to the Emergency in their Jurisdictions/Agencies

Each member jurisdiction/agency represented at this meeting was given a chance to report on the effects, concerns and issues of COVID-19 they are experiencing:

Brewster – Tim Rieb, Council Member and Misty Ruiz, Clerk Treasurer – Concerns over a reduction of approximately \$36,000 in sales tax revenues for the 1st quarter of 2020, parks are now fully open, and they will be discussing whether the swimming pool will open this summer.

OCTA – Kelly Scalf, General Manager – Concerned with safety of passengers and staff; continually striving to keep the environment safe in a small office with many people, concerned about the public's complacency regarding the virus.

Okanogan – Jon Culp, Mayor – Concerned with approximately a 40% decline in sales tax in March and April, he and his staff have prioritized city functions determining the essential services, the park staff is back to work and parks are open, with warnings of COVID-19 posted. He believes patience, tenacity, and safety first is best. People are tired, and he is concerned about small businesses. He finished with, "this Mayor wears a mask".

Okanogan County – Chris Branch, County Commissioner – He shared that during a recent Department Head meeting conducted through Zoom, the meeting was hijacked by citizens and they were unable to continue in a positive manner and closed the meeting. He stated that we need a plan that works for Okanogan County. He reported that they (the Commissioners) have been asked to join in to other areas efforts, however he believes that we need to have our own ideas with local control and local support.

Okanogan County – Josh Thomson, County Engineer – Concerned about the reduction in fuel tax.

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Omak – Barry Freel, Council Member – Small business owners are tired and fed up with being closed. He pointed out that at any given time during normal times the downtown businesses have only a hand-full of customers at a time, unlike the big box stores that are allowed to be open. He stated that the COVID-19 cases in Okanogan County are low compared to other states and counties; he doesn't want downtown Omak to die.

Oroville – Jon Neal, Mayor – He feels that Oroville is fortunate to have a large percentage of their businesses considered essential. He is concerned about the City RV Park being closed because the revenue generated is used to fund parks. He feels we need to identify steps to work toward opening the county back up.

Pateros – Carlene Anders, Mayor – Pateros is tourist based, so with no traffic it is having a huge impact. She reported that City Hall is closed to the public until 05/31 at this point, public works has been staying separate, but will be back in full force as of 05/19. Long Term Recovery and Methow Valley Recovery have been working together on mask delivery and other issues. She noted that people seem to be split by either being very fearful or just ready to have things move forward and open up.

Tonasket – Dennis Brown, Mayor – He feels that we need to work together, small businesses are hurting but overall Tonasket is doing well. They are trying to keep staff safe by distancing, parks are closed but staff is working.

Winthrop – Sally Ranzau, Mayor – Even though the annual 49er's event was cancelled, a group of about 20 horses and their supporters had a parade down main street despite of the cancellation. She is concerned about the effects of the North Cascades Highway opening on 05/12, some businesses are opening up regardless of their status, some residents don't want the pass to open. She stated that it would be good if the County Commissioners reconsidered renewing the restrictions on nightly rentals. The local RV Park is open and full, people are not following the stay at home order. Winthrop has been using advertising dollars to tell people they are not open; she suggested the County do more to communicate that the county is not open.

Twisp – Soo Ing-Moody, Mayor – Twisp is seeing some of the same issues as Winthrop and is concerned about how the North Cascade Highway reopen will impact them. Several restaurants and other businesses are providing take-out. She is concerned about how an influx of outdoor recreationalists will impact the County's Search and Rescue services. The Town is working with businesses, the chamber of commerce, and TwispWorks to come up with ideas to assist businesses prepare for a re-opening. She discussed the CARES Act funding from the State that will be coming out soon, and how it can be used by municipalities to help small businesses. She feels that keeping people safe is a priority as well as sending a consistent message about what is being done in the county toward re-opening businesses.

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Update/Discussion: County Department Head Reports

Director Laurie Jones, Okanogan Public Health Department shared that Okanogan County may be eligible for a variance to the Governor's Phase II status due in part to: our population being less than 75,000, a low number of cases of the virus, acceptable number of hospital beds available and enough proper PPE. Jones reported that we have had 4 new cases of the virus. She compared the average death toll of the regular flu as being 61,000/year compared to approximately 80,000 deaths in just 4 months due to COVID-19. She reported that the virus is hitting all ages and in many different ways. She feels that if we were to do a full opening of Okanogan County it would be disastrous and would overburden the health care facilities. Ms. Jones hopes that by applying for the Phase II variance we can safely open businesses; good models and safety plans are coming out.

Sheriff Tony Hawley, Okanogan County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) reported that there is a lot of frustration, defiance and worry about businesses being able to survive. He's seeing very diversified public opinions, either people in favor of opening back up completely or in fear and staying home. Citizens are concerned about those that are desperate and what they may do; there are other concerns about COVID-19 that have nothing to do with the virus. The OCSO are receiving fewer calls, but the calls are for more violent crimes; domestic violence calls are up 30%.

Sheriff Hawley stated that most of the OSCO offices are now open to the public. There has been no COVID-19 in the jail, there is no alternative but to keep the facility clean and disinfected; no other facilities are available to house County inmates. Hawley shared that they are working on communications backup for dispatch for future use if needed.

The Council discussed the Canadian border and whether it was still closed. Council Member Neal understood that the border would be closed until 05/31/20 and then it will be reassessed; a call was made and confirmed that the border is still closed to the public at this time.

Director Maurice Goodall, Department of Emergency Management explained that the Department of Health is the lead agency on this emergency and meets with the state daily, agency leads meet on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (approximately 13 people) and updates are given each Monday and Friday at 11:00 a.m.

Director Goodall urged small businesses to reach out to the Economic Alliance for assistance.

Supplies are available gowns and masks are being donated, some supplies that were being provided at no cost are now being charged out at a percentage of the cost. Costs for housing in motels are being donated by the Department of Commerce, for those that are recovering and for first responders. There is a plan to use the Fairground Annex building if necessary, for isolation.

In regards to other issues in the county, Goodall reported that the Okanogan River is currently at 12.92 feet with flood stage being at 15 feet; the Chewach and Twisp Rivers are not forecasting flooding.

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Regarding fires, he reported that there is not much vegetation growth, but what is out here is already dry; and the North Cascades Highway is opening 05/11/20, so assume people will be coming.

Update: Identification of County-Wide Common Goals/Strategies for COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Chairman Ing-Moody summarized to the Council what she heard during the group share and asked for feedback:

- Safety first
- Consider public stressors including small business owners / employees who may be struggling
- Small Businesses – Consideration that opening businesses too soon may cause the need to reclose; need to develop viable plans toward re-opening
- Revenue reduction in local governments
- Course of action – Consider options of operating under “the new normal” concept
- Viable plan to move forward, with safety as the main consideration
- Working together with a common message
- Work to educate and communicate to the public; using enforcement as a last resort
- Consideration of drafting a letter to the county commissioners from OCOG and to all OCOG members emphasizing the duty to serve our citizens in a safe manner. It was agreed that individual letters do not serve a good collective purpose – due to lack of time, no action taken.

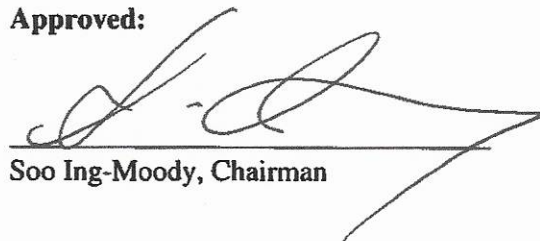
Roundtable Updates

There were no updates at this meeting.

Adjournment:

There being no further business to come before the Council, Chairman Ing-Moody adjourned the meeting at 6:47 pm.

Approved:



Soo Ing-Moody, Chairman

Attested:



Jackie Gleason, TranGO Clerk of the Board