



BOARD OF YAKIMA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Meeting

Work Session

Monday, April 3, 2023, at 9:00 am

BOCC Conference Room, Room 232, 128 N 2nd Street, Yakima, WA 98901 or Zoom

4/3/2023 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting Called to Order at 9:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Chair LaDon Linde, Commissioner Amanda McKinney, Commissioner Kyle Curtis, Legal Counsel Don Anderson, Clerk of the Board Julie Lawrence, Deputy Clerk of the Board Erin Franklin, Public Services Director Lisa Freund, Yakima Valley Tourism President/CEO John Cooper, Human Services Director Esther Magasis, Code Enforcement Manager John Walkenhauer, Sheriff Bob Udell, County Prosecutor Joe Brusica, Water Resources Strategic Manager Joel Freudenthal, County Auditor Charles Ross, Recording Manager Jennifer Richter, GIS Director Mike Martian, Financial Services Director Craig Warner, and guests.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No Public Comment Received.

3. PUBLIC SERVICES (15 Minutes)

Lisa Freund presented a request for the Board Chair to sign a letter of support for the Washington State Department of Health's grant application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Program. This \$1 million grant would help continue education and outreach in the Lower Valley GWMA about elevated nitrate levels, and would also include an air quality component. The Board gave their approval for this request.

4. YAKIMA VALLEY TOURISM (30 Minutes)

John Cooper provided some background information on the function of the Yakima Valley Tourism Board, and an overview of its current status via the 2022 Annual Report. He highlighted the Yakima Convention & Event Center, sporting events, marketing & promotion (especially for leisure travel), and increased traffic in information centers. He also discussed some new opportunities and initiatives the Tourism Board is looking into for the future. In summary, he stated that of the 39 counties in Washington State, Yakima County is always in the top ten in terms of visitor spending. The Commissioners thanked John and his team for all their hard work, and expressed their excitement over the positive updates. In response to John's question, the Commissioners noted that they would be having more meetings in the near future in preparation for an agritourism code update in June.

5. ENCAMPMENT POLICY DISCUSSION (60 Minutes)

The Commissioners invited County Prosecutor Joe Brusica and Sheriff Bob Udell to speak to the enforcement side of the encampment policy discussion. Mr. Brusica stated that there isn't a lot that can be done in civil court, and even less in criminal court. Some of this is due to legislation and risk of lawsuits, and some is due to lack of adequate resources and staff to cover higher caseloads (including both arrests and filing charges). Sheriff Udell noted that Sergeant Fowler with the Yakima Police Department has had good success in forming relationships with illegal campers and convincing them to go to homeless shelters. Esther Magasis confirmed that her department has worked with him before. The Sheriff observed that getting people to move (rather than arresting them) is very possible, and having an officer on hand is wise in case of unpredictable drug-induced behavior. In his experience, people are usually willing to go to a shelter, or if they want to continue using drugs, they might find somewhere else to go. Mr. Brusica noted that the County would have to work to avoid any lawsuits for loss of personal belongings if they relocated people; he also noted the potential for increased 3rd Degree Assault charges if people

react violently to an officer. He and Commissioner McKinney discussed the dichotomy between the concept that “we perpetuate what we tolerate” vs. having to also be realistic about what the County can actually accomplish with its current resources. In response to Joel Freudenthal’s question about illegal campers who have been threatening to outreach workers, Mr. Brusic answered that a response by law enforcement would be an option at that time, but there is still a continued need for discretion because law and justice departments have a limited capacity for what they can handle.

In response to Commissioner Linde’s question about the usefulness of a designated deputy from the Sheriff’s Office in a role similar to Sergeant Fowler’s, John Walkenhauer weighed in that while Code Enforcement has been able to accomplish a lot without law enforcement, it could definitely help, especially when the Greenway and other areas of Yakima have such a reputation for being unsafe. Code Enforcement officers are already somewhat “deputized” for certain matters, but they cannot detain or arrest, and issuing civil infractions would be a waste in these situations. He noted that unfortunately, many people have had numerous chances to make a change, and oftentimes don’t want to, so laws need to be enforced somehow (e.g. “for day use only”, “no camping”, “no fires”, etc.). The idea that “no one is above the law” doesn’t hold up when illegal campers aren’t being held accountable for the environmental issues they are causing, including water, fire, and other safety concerns; Commissioner McKinney concurred.

Commissioners Linde and McKinney discussed the many facets of compassion: compassion for people dealing with mental illness and drug addiction, compassion for the families of those people who don’t know how to help them, compassion for property owners who can’t get trespassers removed from their land, compassion for business owners who have people camping on their doorsteps and sidewalks, compassion for people who are afraid to utilize areas like the Greenway because of safety concerns, compassion for the environment being destroyed by illegal camping, etc. Commissioner McKinney added that it is not compassionate to allow people to continue in unhealthy lifestyles that hurt themselves and others, and expressed the need to make homelessness uncomfortable in Yakima County so that people will finally agree to get the help that they need. Commissioner Linde noted that drug possession laws might be fixed in the future, due to former addicts testifying before the legislature about the necessity of legal consequences in order to bring about lasting change.

Commissioner McKinney raised the question of whether Mental Health Sales Tax funds could be used to fund a designated deputy position. Esther weighed in that YPD had previously returned grant funding after realizing the immense challenge of trying track how each individual case is connected to mental health and/or addiction. She noted that working with Designated Crisis Responders (DCR’s) might be a more fundable option, since any interactions would be mental health responses by default.

As next steps to ensure that policy implementation is meaningful and effective, the Board asked Sheriff Udell to reach out to Sergeant Fowler to see if he would be willing to come to a Work Session to share more about his role; Commissioner Linde also asked that John Walkenhauer be present at that meeting. Esther requested a meeting with Human Services, Code Enforcement, Mr. Brusic, Sheriff Udell, and potentially DOC Director Jeremy Welch to discuss the interactions and overlap in their departments under the new encampment policy; Commissioner Curtis agreed to help facilitate this meeting. Lisa Freund suggested that the Board also speak with Financial Services Director Craig Warner and Corporate Counsel Don Anderson about guidelines for the use of MHST funds, requirements to have social services agencies in attendance with Code Enforcement personnel when dealing with encampments, and projected storage costs for personal property as defined in the encampment policy. In response to Commission Curtis’ request to move forward with this policy as soon as possible, Julie Lawrence suggested following up at the April 14th Work Session due to Commissioner schedules; the Board concurred.

6. AUDITOR (45 Minutes)

The Board met with Charles Ross and Jennifer Richter about potentially bringing back passport services to the Yakima County Auditor’s Office. Charles outlined the requirements to become a passport agency again, detailed past client volume and revenue, and estimated future annual revenue. He also discussed the community need, despite it not being a service required by law. He then walked the Board through the implementation process, noting that his office has 8 previously-certified agents still employed, 4 of whom are bilingual; Jennifer Richter has looked into training to get staff recertified. At least one employee would need to be hired and designated for passport services as a start. Workstation supplies, web-based scheduling software (service will be by appointment only to avoid overload), and other passport services supplies would need to be purchased and set up.

The proposal would be to utilize the current GIS office space and move Mike Martian and the GIS team to alternate unused space in the Assessor’s Office. Facilities Director Brian Griff would be able to give the Board a better estimate of how long remodeling and moving offices would take, also taking into account a few other departments considering swapping spaces for the sake of efficiency and public access. Craig Warner would be able to provide further insight on budget and funding for this project. The Board agreed to move forward with taking steps to restore passport services to Yakima County.

7. COMMISSIONER UPDATES/ GENERAL DISCUSSION

The Commissioners gave updates on individual committee/board assignments for the week of March 27, 2023- March 31, 2023.

Commissioner Linde noted the correspondence the Board had received from West Valley School District Superintendent Peter Finch regarding the proposed Wiley City Sewer project. Commissioner McKinney confirmed that she would follow up. The Board briefly discussed how this project might benefit the community.

Commissioner McKinney shared about her legislative meetings in Washington, D.C.

8. NEW BUSINESS

No New Business.

9. ADJOURN

Commissioner Curtis MOTION: To Adjourn

Commissioner McKinney SECOND

Motion Passes to Adjourn. Meeting Adjourned at 11:26 a.m.

All work sessions are recorded and will be available to view on the BOCC website at <https://www.yakimacounty.us/AgendaCenter/Board-of-Commissioners-2>.

APPROVED DATE
DATE/Minutes

APR 25 2023

BOARD OF YAKIMA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

LaDon Linde, Chair

Amanda McKinney, Commissioner

Kyle Curtis, Commissioner
*Constituting the Board of County Commissioners
for Yakima County, Washington*

