

MINUTES
UMATILLA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Administrative Meeting of June 14, 2022
10:00 a.m., Umatilla County Courthouse, Room 130
Pendleton, Oregon

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Commissioners present: Chair John Shafer, Vice-Chair Dan Dorran (attending virtually), and Commissioner George Murdock

County Counsel: Doug Olsen

Guests: Bink Ramos, Echo; Tami Walborn, Echo.

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Chair Shafer called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. He reminded all this is a public forum and there is a call-in option provided. When addressing the board, please state your name and if you are representing someone else. The meeting is being video and audio recorded and minutes will be taken. Also, meetings are now live-streaming.

Business Items:

1. ARPA Funding – City of Echo. Commissioner Dorran presented. He gave background: Over a year ago, the MURC (Mid-Umatilla River Coalition) was formed. Over the last 20 months, time has been spent trying to get funds for mitigation, from the I-84 bridge to about Nolin. Many meetings were held and many applications were in process. In the meantime, jump to the last six weeks, Bink Ramos, who holds property near the City of Echo at the state highway bridge there, began losing significant land. This year it was accelerated with spring runoffs. Mr. Ramos began losing from 10 feet to 60 feet of his hayfield as it sloughed off into the Umatilla River and down to other property owners (Sathers and further). Also at that time, a gravel bar split the river. Then, this year the river became dominant on Mr. Ramos’ side. At the last critical meeting, he generously talked about salvage and saving the property – homes of Sather and also historic sites – St. Peters Church and cultural places for the Tribes. In the last 2½ weeks, representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers with the city in imminent danger, gave approval to start rocking walls in front of those endangered properties. It’s been a regulatory and statutory nightmare to get to this point and is unfortunate now with imminent emergency to armor the banks. An emergency permit was approved to proceed by Federal agencies, Corps of Engineers, Division of State Lands and other agencies. However, no funding has been made available from any of them. The only place there is funding is from Umatilla County through ARPA funds. Through discussions, some funds have been identified for this imminent danger solution. The next big issue is removal of debris with water being forced into more properties (city’s and another).

Commissioner Murdock advised he had toured the site, noting the path of the river has shifted dramatically – can anything be done about that? Commissioner Dorran responded the only solution would be to bring the channel close to prior to flood/runoff, but will have to be done under another permit considering fish migration before any changes can be made.

Commissioner Dorran also noted historic homes were built in early 1900s and the river has been changing from that time on. The Tribes are losing artifacts with each runoff/sloughing of the banks. Chair Shafer advised he had spoken with Dave Slaght, Echo City Administrator, and also toured the river – noting numerous big chunks of ground continue sloughing off with the high water.

Commissioner Dorran thanked Mr. Ramos (in attendance) for his positive involvement in this difficult issue of losing his land to the high water.

Bink Ramos, Echo, came to the podium and thanked the Commissioners for their efforts about this, although he and others are not near the resolution. The in-stream issue will persist and get worse – anywhere the water is slowed down, additional sediment and deposits occur – it is in the center versus right or left. It will take the Corps of Engineers to wake up and allow some sort of stabilization or channel control. The problem is getting bigger and bigger.

Last year a proposal was entertained, whereby about \$75,000 was received from NRCS for a system to redirect the river bank. Opening the head of the channel at the bar slightly, then force river back towards the center. He said he had offered up to \$30,000 set aside to put towards this activity. However, a minor disagreement about the root barbs, and the resolution fell through. The Corps and Division of State Lands rejected the project. At this point, bad issues happened and now we are here. As mentioned earlier, permitting is required from several different agencies to try to mitigate damage – for historical sites, homes, property – it all needs to be addressed. The county has the power to push agencies to get things done. Last year was low runoff and was the ideal situation to address and fix the water problem, but it didn't happen. Fish are important, but what is proposed wouldn't have been a problem for fish. These types of things happen up stream that impact all down below.

He appreciates what is happening on the river is serious. He urges the Board to continue to push with the US government and State of Oregon. They are kicking the can down the road and it has led to this situation.

Chair Shafer commented, two years ago, this issue was identified and now it has come to be what Mr. Ramos and other predicted. Mr. Ramos added he has grown up on the river over 40 years. His family has protected the property, the trees, and the fish. Without being able to do something over the years, approximately 70,000 yards of topsoil is washed down the river causing havoc downstream to fish spawning grounds. Who will be held accountable? He also pointed out that trees are important too. Some were 100 years old – they come down with high runoff and erosion.

In response to Commissioner Murdock's question about the bridge, Commissioner Dorran advised ODOT inspected the bridge, and it is okay. Commissioner Murdock felt there is, however, potential the bridge could be in danger.

Mr. Ramos noted the river is running around 5,000 cfs on the city side of the bridge and lower portion and severe eroding has occurred in the last two days. On his side of the river, it looks pretty good. Commissioner Dorran noted ODOT will look at the bridge mid-week – it is its issue, although he is concerned with debris collecting at the bridge.

Chair Shafer noted trees on a property farther downriver were tilting a couple days ago. Commissioner Dorran added that he was advised earlier in the day by Dave Slaughter about six trees were lost by that morning -- gone downriver.

Tami Walborn, for sister, Kaci Christianson (who was connected through her phone), 75489 Leisure Ave, Echo. She's wondering – what about a short-term plan? Commissioner Dorran: right now, the plan is trying to save the homes – that is today's meeting emergency purpose. The county is not an applicant on the permits. Kyle Waggoner (Umatilla County Soil & Water Conservation Service) is on contract with the county. He's helping landowners and the City to apply for permits. The only plan is to try to get permits moving as fast as possible through the federal level. State issues for the most part have been addressed – the State DSL is, thankfully, working with the County. The City and property owners have an emergency permit to work on the immediate issue. And, Chair Safer added, the previous plan will be a basis to move forward (request for

modification for barbs and rootballs). Commissioner Dorran added that plan will be adequate, but it will have to be modified moving forward. Mr. Waggoner is the contact/liaison with all agencies on the permitting and applications.

Commissioner Murdock: where is the other property (in addition to Mr. Ramos' property)? Commissioner Dorran advised it is outside Echo limits; it is in the county jurisdiction. Commissioner Murdock noted for this action, he can vote. However, his family property is affected by high water near Echo. They have lost property from 35 feet down to 17 feet. He may have a conflict down the road and will declare it.

Property adjacent to the City is sustaining damage as a result of the volume of water in the river. The runoff is eroding the western bank of the river quickly and is impacting houses and utilities. The City has obtained permission to conduct emergency in-water work to prevent further erosion and potential loss of homes. They have obtained a rock source and will be contracting for the emergency work. The City is requesting funding assistance from the County. The City previously requested funding for flood mitigation from the ARPA funding. The funds have been received and the matter is before the Board for immediate funding. **Commissioner Dorran moved to approve reimbursement to the City of Echo for up to \$400,000 for flood mitigation from ARPA funding. Seconded by Commissioner Murdock. Carried, 3-0.**

Chair Shafer thanked Mr. Ramos and Ms. Walborn in the room and Kari Christianson (on the phone) for participating and their comments. The county will continue pushing for this important activity. Mr. Ramos noted he will keep his voice heard as well. He invited the Commissioners and others to come to the property any time. Thank you!

Regarding the MURC, Commissioner Dorran is a strong cheerleader and there are also a lot of families in that area who are very involved and will continue to be.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Melinda Slatt

Executive Secretary, Umatilla County Board of Commissioners