

LEWIS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (BOCC)

Business Meeting minutes

March 19, 2024

Present: Commissioner Brummer, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Commissioner Brummer called the meeting to order at 10 a.m., determined a quorum and then proceeded with the flag salute.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Striedinger lambasted the county for delays opening the homeless shelter. She also said she'd like to know why five individuals have been ousted from the current Salvation Army shelter.

Andrea Suarez voiced a need for sober recovery and higher-barrier transition shelters.

BID OPENING

Rieva Lester opened bids for the 2024-25 newspaper of record. Rieva said the county received bids from **The East County Journal** (\$4.10 per 1.20 column inch, with a sample bid price of \$34.85) and **The Chronicle** (\$4.80 per 1.20 column inch, with a sample bid price of \$37.92).

CONSENT ITEMS

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve minutes from the March 12, 2024, Business Meeting as well as Resolution 24-079. Commissioner Swope seconded.

Resolution 24-079: Approval of warrants/claims against the various county departments.

Chief accountant Grace Jimenez, representing the Auditor's Office, said warrants 882,255 through 882,325 and 882,332 through 882,598 and direct disbursements 12741, 12749 and 12796 through 12802 were issued in March for payments against the county totaling \$2,664,232.07. She said payroll / tax deposit warrant numbered 796,139 and automatic deposits 65,822 through 66,410 also were approved for payments totaling \$1,306,578.75. Grace noted a skip in sequence for warrants 882,235 through 882,254 and 882,326 through 882,331, which were issued on behalf of Special Purpose Districts.

Motion passed 3-0.

DELIBERATION ITEMS

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve Resolutions 24-080 through 24-087. Commissioner Swope seconded.

Resolution 24-080: Approve a contract with Candace Sanders for Court Facilitator services for family court cases.

Superior Court Accounting Specialist Stacey Werner discussed the resolution. Stacey said the resolution approves a contract with Candace Sanders to provide court facilitator services to pro se litigants in family law cases.

Resolution 24-081: Appoint one individual to a regular-member position and four individuals to alternate-member positions on the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB).

Veterans Specialist Heidi Palmer discussed the resolution. Ken "Gunny" Norwood said the resolution would appoint Anthony Rogers as a regular VAB member and Patrick Swanson, Candace Johnson, Tina Koehn and Tabitha Hopp as alternate members.

Resolution 24-082: Approve Consolidated Contract #CLH31017 Amendment #17 between the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and Lewis County.

Public Health and Social Services Director Meja Handlen discussed the resolution. Meja said the resolution approves amendments to Consolidated Contract #CLH31017 with the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), increasing funding and amending statements of work regarding the Office of Drinking Water Group B programs, the Office of Immunization and the WIC Nutrition program.

Resolution 24-083: Approve an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Centralia and Lewis County for management of Stage 1 and Stage 2 for the Westside Connector - Phase I Improvement Project.

Public Works Director Josh Metcalf discussed the resolution. Josh said Stage 1 includes the Galvin to Vista area. He said the city of Centralia is covering 80 percent of the costs and that the county will cover 20 percent.

Resolution 24-084: List the bids received and contractor selected for the Lewis County Material Purchase Haywire Road Rehabilitation.

Public Works Director Josh Metcalf discussed the resolution. Josh said the county received one bid. Josh said Good Crushing of Toledo was the lone bidder at \$113,863.75.

Resolution 24-085: List the bids received and contractor selected for the Lewis County 2024 Rock Proposal.

Public Works Director Josh Metcalf discussed the resolution. Josh said the county received two responses and that Sterling Breen was the low bidder at \$361,992.40.

Resolution 24-086: The proposed vacation of an undeveloped right of way, being a continuation of undeveloped Huntington Avenue N in Packwood.

Public Works Director Josh Metcalf discussed the resolution. Josh said the resolution directs the County Engineer to evaluate the request.

Resolution 24-087: Approve a collective bargaining agreement between Lewis County and Teamsters Sheriff's Support Services from March 19, 2024, through December 31, 2025.

HR Deputy Director Daleyn Coleman discussed the resolution. Daleyn reviewed key points of the CBA and noted it would go into effect immediately.

Motion passed 3-0.

HEARING

Ordinance 1354: Add Chapter 8.80 Lewis County Code to regulate Sterile Needle and Syringe Exchanges operating in Lewis County and make violations of the chapter a civil infraction or a misdemeanor.

Commissioner Brummer introduced the hearing.

Robert Bradley gave the staff report. Robert discussed efforts to draft a legally defensible ordinance designed for harm reduction.

Commissioner Brummer asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Pollock said she is in favor of portions of the prohibition on safe injection sites and the required setbacks from schools, parks and libraries. She asked how restricting mobile services in rural areas would decrease the transmission of bloodborne diseases in rural areas.

Commissioner Pollock and Lewis County Health Officer Dr. Joe Willey shared concerns about eliminating services in rural areas.

Commissioner Swope said the effort is to move to brick-and-mortar sites to focus on services rather than needles.

Dr. Willey said there is no evidence that needle exchange programs increase drug use.

Commissioner Pollock cited RCWs that allow for needle exchange programs, including those for minors.

Candy Warren asked who is trying to get the contract and how much the contract is for. Robert clarified that the proposed ordinance doesn't fund the needle exchange service and that Lewis County has no contract for the service.

Ray Chapman-Wilson asked if a provider would be criminally prosecuted if they did not meet the one-to-one exchange ratio or didn't write someone's name down. Ray asked the best-guest costs and how the county would control those. Robert said the government can issue regulations without providing funding.

Lisa Striedinger questioned the intent of the ordinance and why mobile services would be limited. Commissioner Swope said it's designed to require harm reduction services.

An audience member asked what the reporting criteria would be. He also asked if the one-to-one exchange ratio would be a hinderance. Robert Bradley said the county does not fund needle exchanges. He said he is not privy to reporting requirements between those entities and their funding source. Commissioner Swope said Gather Church's bylaws indicate the group has a one-to-one exchange requirement.

An audience member asked about language in the proposed ordinance addresses safe injection sites. Robert said the ordinance does not allow for safe injection sites.

Nate Judd asked if there is any research that shows that eliminating mobile services is beneficial. Commissioner Swope said he has had numerous in-person discussions, which provides a clearer picture than peer-reviewed studies.

Commissioner Pollock said there are studies that show that the number of HIV cases skyrocketed when needle exchange programs were discontinued and then plummeted when the needle exchange programs returned.

Commissioner Swope said there has been no change in bloodborne diseases locally since Gather Church started its program.

An audience member asked who provides oversight of other drug paraphernalia being provided. Robert said the proposed policy does not allow for the exchange of other drug paraphernalia. He said those providing the services can seek funding.

An audience member asked if a safe injection site currently is offered locally and whether organizations have sought approval to offer one. Robert said the ordinance does not allow for safe injection sites.

An audience member asked the size comparisons of Lewis County vs. cities Commissioner Swope discussed, such as Seattle and Sacramento.

An audience member asked if Commissioner Swope recognized him, noting that he had not seen Commissioner Swope at the homeless camp where he lived. Commissioner Swope said he'd been to the homeless camp at Blakeslee Junction a number of times.

An audience member asked if needle exchange providers engage in conversations about recovery proactively or reactively. Robert said there is only one organization providing the services locally and that the entity has provided treatment and treatment referrals.

Commissioner Brummer then closed the question-and-answer portion of the hearing.

Robert Bradley asked that his previous comments be adopted into the record.

Commissioner Brummer asked if anyone wanted to speak for or against the resolution.

Dr. Richard Stride said he feels needle exchange programs must be handled responsibly.

Mindy Greenwood said she feels harm-reduction services are beneficial but that they require regulations.

Lisa Striedinger-Hubbard said many peer-reviewed papers support needle exchange programs.

Patty Howard said overdose increases are linked to Fentanyl, not needle exchanges. Patty said no one starts using drugs because someone gave them a syringe and that no one stops using drugs because someone didn't. Patty clarified that the information Commissioner Swope had cited earlier in the meeting was from handouts provided when Gather Church first started offering its services. She noted that the group's requirements have evolved over time, based on feedback from state partners and others.

Brooke Reder read a letter from Dr. Lily Lo into the record.

Derek Shaughnessy finished reading the letter from Dr. Lily Lo.

Chad Nickols spoke against the proposed ordinance. Chad praised the efforts of Gather Church to help him enter recovery.

Rebecca Staebler said needle exchange programs reduce the transmission of blood-borne diseases and plant the seeds of recovery.

Fred Ahrens said his group, the Morton Rifle and Pistol Club, is opposed to anything that enables drug use.

Officer Andy Caldwell spoke about the dangers discarded syringes pose to law enforcement and others. He said something has to change to increase accountability.

Gillian Davis outlined the harm-reduction work Gather Church does to assist those in need.

Candy Warren discussed her family member's substance abuse death as well as her familiarity with drug use due to her career in law enforcement. She noted that taxpayers are forced to foot the bill and that users often have no incentive to get well.

Debbie Aust said she supports the ordinance but that she thinks the east end of the county needs a mobile clinic.

Marc Guichard expressed concerns about prohibiting mobile services and criminalizing service providers.

Pastor Mark McHugh said he feels the Gather Church is being targeted. He said Gather is not peddling opportunities for people to get drugs. He said the Gather Church is decreasing the transmission of Hep C and other diseases. He said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) support syringe exchanges. He said Gather Church's efforts have saved taxpayers millions.

Todd Morris spoke against Ordinance 1354, highlighting the portion that prohibits former syringe program users from volunteering until two years after they work with the program.

Pastor Cole Meckle discussed the syringe exchange Gather Church oversees. He said there are good pieces in the proposed ordinance that would be beneficial, such as zoning restricting locations and requiring kits, but that the proposed ordinance doesn't address biohazards or other needs. He urged the commissioners to go back to the drawing board.

Ray Chapman-Wilson said poverty leads to drug abuse. Ray said Lewis County has one of the country's most successful syringe exchanges and that it saves lives. Ray said the proposed ordinance represents government overreach. He lambasted the criminalization of administrative tasks.

Teresa Ekdahl Johnson said harm reduction alone is not enough for drug users. She recommended a group approach.

Angela Iverson said the Public Health and Social Services Advisory Board is not in favor of syringe exchanges. She said Gather Church's needle exchange is not a ministry. Angela said the proposed ordinance provides the county an extra layer of protection.

Autumn Preach said she feels the ordinance is based in fear. She said the CDC supports syringe exchanges. Autumn said syringe exchanges do not increase drug use or crimes and that they do reduce the transmission of bloodborne disease.

Thomas Wolf said accountability and compassion helped lead him to sobriety. He said there are better ways to help drug users without giving out hundreds of needles. Thomas said the ordinance simply requires a brick and mortar site to provide treatment support.

Graziela Gonzalez discussed the purpose of the ordinance. She said she'd like to know how brick-and-mortar sites compare in effectiveness compared to mobile sites.

Kate Slaymaker spoke against the proposed ordinance. Kate discussed the need for evidence that the ordinance would improve conditions.

Commissioner Brummer closed the hearing.

Commissioner Swope made a motion to amend Ordinance 1354 to allow Gather Church to continue the mobile clinic on Tower Avenue through Dec. 31, 2025. Commissioner Brummer seconded.

Commissioner Pollock said she feels there are many amendments needed, including the ability to provide mobile services.

Motion passed 3-0.

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to table Ordinance 1354 until at or after 10 a.m. March 26, 2024. Commissioner Swope seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

PRESS CONFERENCE

No questions.

ADJOURNMENT

The BOCC Business Meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m., with the next Business Meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. Tuesday, March 26, 2024, in the Commissioners' Hearing Room (Room 223).

Minutes from the BOCC Business Meeting are not verbatim. The weekly Business Meeting streams live on YouTube (search for "LewisCountyWa" on YouTube or go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/LewisCountyWa/featured>).

Video footage also is available at no charge at <https://lewiscountywa.gov/offices/commissioners/bocc-meetings/>.



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LEWIS COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Scott J. Brummer, Chair

ATTEST:

Rieva Lester, Clerk of the Board

Lindsey R. Pollock, DVM, Vice Chair

Sean D. Swope, Commissioner