

LEWIS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (BOCC)

Business Meeting minutes

March 26, 2024

Present: Commissioner Brummer, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Commissioner Brummer called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m., determined a quorum and then proceeded with the flag salute.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rochelle Wagner discussed Chad Nikols' March 19 testimony, in which he said Gather Church's services saved his life. She urged the commissioners to consider testimony like Chad's when deciding the fate of proposed Ordinance 1354.

Cein Caldwell spoke against allowing needle exchange programs in Lewis County. Cein said thousands of dirty needles are left littered about the county.

Centralia Police Chief Stacy Denham said needle exchanges started in an effort to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS. Chief Denham said he isn't necessarily against exchanges but that there must be guidelines and accountability.

Dr. Richard Stride said if needle exchanges are allowed, they must be accompanied by services to get people off drugs. He said parameters, accountability and guidelines are needed.

Ray Chapman-Wilson discussed his family's battles with addiction and the benefits of low-barrier treatment. He said he is opposed to the proposed ordinance. He said the county already has access to the information about Gather Church's protocols. Ray said the county will be forced to pay for the oversight of the rules and that the ordinance will criminalize health care workers.

Kathryn Meckle said the proposed ordinance restricts access to services. She said the ordinance is unnecessary and restricts help for those who need it most.

Jenna Taylor said she objects changes to the proposed ordinance regarding identification. She said changes also allow Gather Church to keep operating as is. Jenna pointed out typographical errors in the ordinance. She urged the commissioners to pass the ordinance as it was originally proposed.

Erin Volz said she is opposed to needle exchanges and supports the proposed ordinance.

Ericka Marshall discussed a patient who overdosed twice the previous week – the first time he was brought back by Gather Church and then saved later in the day by Centralia police. Ericka said saving lives is the ultimate goal.

Greg Rohr said he supports the proposed ordinance. Greg said citizens need to address harm reduction to their families first and put harm reduction for others second. Greg discussed the need for expectations and accountability.

Beth Rohr said she supports the proposed ordinance. She applauded the efforts to rely on in-person outreach instead of peer-reviewed studies to help form the ordinance. She said she supports the mandatory treatment and setback requirements.

Pastor Cole Meckle said he's not opposed to the ordinance, but that the guiderails need to be well-thought-out. Cole said Gather Church provides on-site services and referrals to help addicts on the path to recovery. Cole said the criminalization of the health care activities is not legal and could make the county subject to lawsuits.

Jim Swan discussed his history of drug use. He said Commissioner Swope merely wants accountability. Jim said he supports the ordinance.

Kate McDougall said the ordinance needs more work before it's passed. She said parameters for needle exchanges are needed but that additional work is needed.

Tonja (no last name given) said a needle exchange program could have helped family members. She said the diseases – HIV and Hep C – are deadly and preventable. She said she is opposed to the ordinance.

Brooke Reder said most of the community has been affected by addiction. She said low-barrier services are needed. She said Gather Church loves people where they're at, which is what is needed.

Patty Howard said there seems to be several assumptions about Gather Church's efforts:

- That it hands out needles to individuals who don't have needles to turn in.
- That all discarded needles come from Gather Church.
- That Gather only cares about people who use drugs.
- That drug use is a choice.
- That recovery is easy.

Alliyah Perry discussed her upbringing, noting that she is the daughter and granddaughter of addicts, like those the existing syringe program helps. She said she is opposed to the ordinance.

NOTICE ITEM

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve Resolution 24-088. Commissioner Swope seconded.

Resolution 24-088: Publication of 2023 County Forces road construction projects and costs.

Public Works Director Josh Metcalf discussed the resolution.

Motion passed 3-0.

CONSENT ITEMS

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve minutes from the April 2, 2024, Business Meeting as well as Resolution 24-089. Commissioner Swope seconded.

Resolution 24-089: Approval of warrants/claims against the various county departments.

Chief Deputy Graham Gowing, representing the Auditor's Office, said warrants 882,665 through 882,899 were issued in March for payments against the county totaling \$716,606.91. Grace noted a skip in sequence for warrants 882,599 through 882,664, which were issued on behalf of Special Purpose Districts.

Motion passed 3-0.

DELIBERATION ITEMS

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve Resolutions 24-090 through 24-092. Commissioner Swope seconded.

Resolution 24-090: Approve a Task Assignment pursuant to Interlocal Agreement No. 05-200 between Lewis County and Tacoma Power regarding work by county crews and authorize signatures thereon.

Public Works Director Josh Metcalf discussed the resolution. Josh said the agreement covers chip seal and striping work the county will perform in the summer. Josh said the agreement totals \$195,205.03 – which includes administrative fees totaling \$9,295.48.

Resolution 24-091: Approve Contract #E03-0199-23 Amendment A between Equity Institute and Lewis County.

Housing Coordinator Justia Madrigal discussed the resolution. Justia said decreases the overall budget by \$63 for a maximum consideration of \$735,575.

Resolution 24-092: Approve Contract #T01-0196-23 between The Salvation Army and Lewis County.

Housing Coordinator Justia Madrigal discussed the resolution. Justia said the agreement totals \$735,575.

Motion passed 3-0.

HEARING

Continuation of Hearing for Ordinance 1354: Add Chapter 8.80 to 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. (Continuation of hearing that was tabled March 19.)

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to recess the hearing until at or after 10 a.m. April 9.

Commissioner Pollock said she would like to dispense with additional ID, remove the portion of the ordinance that criminalizes health care and add amendments that would require “starter packs” for first-time visitors.

Robert Bradley reviewed Commissioner Pollock’s proposed changes and discussed a letter from the ACLU. He noted that Commissioner Pollock’s suggested changes would change the proposed ordinance substantially. He said he would draft a second version of the ordinance that would include Commissioner Pollock’s proposed changes.

Commissioner Swope cited elements he would like entered into the record, including:

- Gather Church’s bylaws.
- A peer-reviewed study that talks about overdose deaths.
- Stats provided by the Centralia Police Department.

Commissioner Swope discussed the need to focus on recovery services at needle exchange sites, emphasizing the drug treatment aspect.

Commissioner Brummer said the commissioners received roughly 50 comments about the ordinance, with 40 of them in favor of passing the ordinance.

Robert urged the commissioners to discuss the ACLU’s letter in executive session.

Commissioner Pollock noted that fentanyl is smoked or ingested, not used intravenously.

Commissioner Brummer said the ordinance is in the best interest of the people and that constituents are in support but that amendments are needed. He said it’s prudent to protect the taxpayers by carefully examining the ordinance.

Commissioner Brummer seconded Commissioner Pollock’s motion.

Commissioner Swope noted he would be out of the office April 9.

Commissioner Pollock amended her motion to state that the hearing would be recessed until at or after 10 a.m. April 16.

The motion to recess the hearing for Ordinance 1354 – as amended to recess it until at or after 10 a.m. April 16 – passed 2-1, with Commissioner Pollock and Commissioner Brummer voting in favor and Commissioner Swope opposed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Peter Lahmann invited the public to upcoming events. He also thanked Meja Handlen and Heidi Palmer for their efforts related to the Veterans Stand Down.

PRESS CONFERENCE

No questions.

ADJOURNMENT

The BOCC Business Meeting adjourned at 11:17 a.m., with the next Business Meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. Tuesday, April 2, 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/>.



ATTEST:


Rieva Lester, Clerk of the Board

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LEWIS COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Scott J. Brummer, Chair


Lindsey R. Pollock, DVM, Vice Chair


Sean D. Swope, Commissioner