

Morrow County Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes
June 9, 2022
Bartholomew Building Upper Conference Room
Heppner, OR 97836

Present In-Person

Chair Jim Doherty
Roberta Lutcher, Executive Assistant

Online

Commissioner Melissa Lindsay

Excused

Commissioner Don Russell

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance: 3:00 p.m.

Chair Doherty provided background on water quality. In our Comprehensive Plan the County is tasked with water quality. Working with State agencies to ensure that nothing ever interferes or adversely affects our water quality.

While attending a variety of meeting recently, Chair Doherty became very aware that everyone at the meetings looked just like him. He believes that many of the people most affected by the water issues may be minorities. Anna Pinyero from Public Health assisted Chair Doherty in going out to areas outside of the current mapping. Tested from Bombing Range Road to Tower Road, outside of the incorporated cities. The results were beyond alarming.

The State suggested including the Emergency Management Department. 68 of the 70 wells tested high enough to be concerning. The Health District asked why this has not been declared an emergency. Public Health and Emergency Management were brought on board, and that is why we are having a meeting today.

Paul Gray, Emergency Management Director, said that in order to get State funding help, we have to do an Emergency Declaration. Some of the wells were five (5) times more than the acceptable level. This can cause quite a few health issues. Pregnant women and infants up to six (6) months especially can be adversely affected by this.

Chair Doherty asked Mr. Gray if the Emergency Declaration for COVID and the wind storm not long ago, opened the doors to funding, procurement, and cost recovery. Mr. Gray said yes, the Emergency Declaration helps us get more support from the State and shortens the procurement process.

County Counsel explained that he has prepared examples of potential Orders. The time frame lasts through the end of this year.

Chair Doherty moved to approve the second version as prepared by County Counsel: An Order Declaring a Local State of Emergency In Morrow County Oregon Order No. OR-2022-7.

Commissioner Lindsay would like more discussion. Commissioner Lindsay would like to table for five minutes, but does not want to go on the record as opposing.

Commissioner Lindsay likes option 2. She is a fan of the Emergency Declaration. What do we gain by doing this today as opposed to waiting until the next regularly scheduled meeting? The safe drinking water of our constituents is #1. The other issues are #2.

Chair Doherty said it was not brought to the Board yesterday because of the need for appropriate notice. Chair Doherty was on a video meeting recently with 37 State Agencies who were leaning in to provide assistance. They are anxious to provide support.

Mr. Gray has bottled water arriving tomorrow and they are trying to get water distribution trailers brought in. Also trying to get State help on testing. This is for rural wells, not City water, in the Lower Umatilla Groundwater area. That is what we will get immediately if this is approved today.

Tim Seymore, Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Regional Coordinator for Eastern Oregon said OEM is pushing to support Morrow County in any way they can. By declaring a State of Emergency today, Morrow County is in essence saying this issue is a top priority and OEM needs to lean forward and support Morrow County. If the State of Emergency is not declared today, OEM will pump the brakes a little and wait for Morrow County's lead.

Shelley Wight, Oregon Department of Human Services-Office of Resilience and Emergency Management, Social Service Emergency Liaison said they are here as support. She works in the shelter, food, and water division and they are here to support any identified needs.

Commissioner Lindsay said she wants to retain local teamwork and not have the State step in. Is there any risk that we will give up that control? Paul said that in Emergency Management everything starts and ends at the local level. State and Federal resources are support to Morrow County.

Chair Doherty said he received a call from Governor Brown who said to let them know what they can do to help. She did not say they would come run our county.

Commissioner Lindsay asked Chair Doherty why he voted against the last two COVID Emergency Declarations. Chair Doherty said he was not sure the last Declarations rose to the level of a true emergency. He believes this is a true emergency.

Chair Doherty reviewed the comments in the online chat and responded to each.

Commissioner Lindsay seconded the motion for discussion.

Commissioner Lindsay said she is going to respect the opinions of the professionals in the room and support an action that could benefit the residents of the county in obtaining clean water.

Chair Doherty reviewed more online comments and responded.

Mr. Gray explained that this is not just about short-term about getting water distributed. This is also about getting testing with the help of the State and filter systems put into homes. This is long-term in the recovery aspect.

Commissioner Lindsay pointed out that we are not handing any control over to the State. It is doing the opposite.

Vote: Chair Doherty Aye. Commissioner Lindsay Aye. Commissioner Russell excused.

Adjourn 3:50 p.m.