

Oregon Commission for the Blind
Regular Meeting – February 4, 2022 - 1:00 pm
Approved Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Scott McCallum called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm via Zoom.com for a regular meeting of the Oregon Commission for the Blind. Members in attendance were:

Scott McCallum
Dr. Christi Closson
Michael Babcock
Nadeera Broome
Vivian Carlile-Smith
Lillian Goodman
Laurel Hudson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 3, 2021 (Action Item)

Chair McCallum requested a motion to approve the December 3, 2021, meeting minutes. Commissioner Laurel Hudson made a motion to accept the minutes, and Commissioner Christi Closson seconded. The motion passed.

AUDIENCE INTRODUCTION

Each member of the audience was asked to introduce themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was submitted.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Dacia Johnson presented the Executive Director report.

DONATIONS AND FINANCIAL REPORTS

The Agency's CFIO, Kat Martin, presented the Donations and Financial reports.

Bequest and Donations Fund Statement: The cash balance was \$364,028 as of December 31. As a costs savings measure to reduce our general fund obligation, the Legislature directed OCB to use a portion of donations to match the salary expense of one transition counselor. That obligation was carried forward to the new biennium and, after considering six months of activity, the remaining obligation on this special project is \$33,092, meaning our unobligated donations balance after this adjustment is \$330,936.

Financial Status Report: OCB's legislatively adopted budget (LAB) for 2021-23 is \$24,349,910, 69 positions, and 66.42 full-time equivalents (FTE).

Based upon six months of activity through December 2021, should constraints on our ability to provide direct services continue, a variance representing an underspend of 7.3% or \$1,782,660 of our Legislatively Approved Budget would exist.

We will be watching Federal Fund surpluses closely this biennium as the pandemic continues to impact our ability to operate in the community and provide direct services to blind Oregonians. With the Business Enterprise Program vending project in mind, which we were not able to operationalize in 2019-21, we still do not believe that we will need to adjust our limitation anytime soon.

There were no questions

COVID-19 EMERGENCY UPDATE

Due to the rapid increase of the Covid-19 Omicron variant, state government offices did not reopen January 3rd. We have continued to provide services remotely and by appointment, based on individual client needs. A new reopening date has not yet been determined.

Chair McCallum inquired if his suggestion at an earlier meeting of using motion-activated audio announcements to inform visitors of mask requirements. OCB's Business Manager Michael Wolff reported that the Portland office entrance is testing a device. Mounted in the vestibule, when the motion activated sensor is triggered, the announcement advises of the requirement to wear masks at all times in the building.

FEDERAL UPDATE

A federal funding Omnibus bill is in effect through February 18, but we understand Congress is working through the appropriation process to extend or pass a budget bill. The Biden Administration has not yet appointed a new Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner, so that post remains unfilled.

2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE

The Oregon Legislature is in Short Session. There are no substantive bills that affect us. There is a large budget bill that includes salary increases for the Agency. The Legislature is, by constitution, allowed to be in session for 35 days, and will close by March 7.

SWEP 2022

Today is our first deadline for student applications for the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP). We anticipate a robust Salem program, larger than during the pandemic years. Students apply to SWEP and, based on skill and experience level, are assigned to the Salem, Portland or Third tracks. We are in discussion with Portland State University and Oregon School of the Deaf for housing the program.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked how many employers have signed up to participate. Hale reported that there are several employers, some with multi-year experience, who are interested to participate this year.

Chair McCallum asked if the Agency anticipates difficulty filling the SWEP staff positions. Director Hale replied that the Agency currently is recruiting dorm supervisors (Salem and Portland), lead supports, so we would appreciate any referrals the commissioners can provide. Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked the Agency to provide information about the positions. We will forward a recruitment flyer to the commissioners following the meeting.

Director Johnson mentioned that we expect Alicia Michelson, our new Chief Financial Office Budget Analyst to join us during this session. As policy analyst for the Governor's office, Alicia will support development of the Governor's recommended budget.

Old Business

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM REPORT

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Report was shared with commissioners in advance. Director Morris was available to answer questions, but there were none.

NEW BUSINESS

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT FOR 2022-2025 Priorities

Executive Director Johnson introduced Barb Lloyd, facilitator for the day's strategic planning session.

Executive Director Johnson framed today's conversation by asking commissioners to review the Agency's current strategic priorities and to share their input and perspective. The facilitator will lead discussion to gather input so that we may solidify what the Agency should focus on for the next few years. Commissioners reviewed each priority, asked questions and made suggestions to help clarify the intent, then rated their importance (low, medium, high).

Detailed information about the Strategic Priorities was shared with commissioners in advance. The proposed priorities are:

1. Service Equity
2. Aging Oregonians
3. Specialized Staff
4. Diverse Workforce
5. Good Government

Leadership from the Business Enterprise Program's (BEP) consumer committee (BECC) was also invited and introduced, whose input and suggestions for BEP have been sought. The Randolph-Shephard Act calls for BEP vendors to engage in active participation regarding management of their program.

Commissioners' oversight and guidance drives the selection of priorities relied upon by the Agency to execute their mission of providing services to Oregonians who are blind. The commissioner-approved plan and priorities, in turn, are operationalized and will form the basis for the Agency Request (biennial) Budget (ARB); any increases or changes in services that require funding will be presented to the legislature as policy option packages (POP).

Director Johnson kicked off the session by describing the process of examining the current goals (which we call priorities) that have been operationalized – turned into business processes – and the need to examine them periodically and align them with whatever new perspectives we've acquired. Changed views may have been brought about by environmental or financial conditions, or our stakeholders needs may change.

The labor market has shifted dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Agency has, for several years, had difficulty hiring for specialized position such as rehabilitation teachers.

We need to consider ways, keeping in mind the changes to the workforce, to ensure OCB can continue to attract, recruit and retain workers specialized to work with Oregonians who are blind.

We have enjoyed new opportunities in the Business Enterprise Program during the pandemic that have brought delivery systems changes.

Alicia Mickelson joined the meeting at this time, and briefly introduced herself. Alicia is the new fiscal analyst at the Chief Financial Office and will work with the Agency to develop the next biennial budget.

The Business Enterprise Consumer Committee's Chairperson, Randy Hauth, provided input on the strategic priorities as they relate to the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). Active participation is an element of the Randolph-Shephard Act which governs the BEP.

Speaking of the BECC's program needs, he explained that BECC had not yet been able to discuss the subject as several members of their group have been ill. Mr. Hauth agreed that the priorities have not changed, but reiterated that new opportunities for employment are key to the program. Mr. Hauth also suggested that any efforts to include state parks and recreational areas should be evaluated for profitability before committing to provide services.

Mr. Art Stevenson, Vice-Chairperson of BECC, was unable to attend.

Commissioner Michael Babcock echoed Mr. Hauth's request that new facilities must be profitable so that the manager is justifiably employed.

Barb Lloyd directed the commissioners through the Strategic Priorities activity.

Priority 1: Service Equity

- Requires statewide access, inclusive service delivery and increased visibility for the Agency.
- This priority affirms that we will deliver service in an equitable way, so that everyone who needs us can reach us and knows how to access our services.

Priority 2: Aging Oregonians

- Focuses on seniors to maintain independence in their homes and communities.
- Helping the workforce, as they age, retain employment.

Priority 3: Specialized Staff

- Recruitment, staff development, retention, and collaboration.
- Recruitment and retention of the specialized staff that deliver the critical services to Oregonians who are blind.
- Investing resources for existing staff to continue their professional development.

Priority 4: Diverse Workforce

- Making sure that the workforce of state government is reflective of Oregon’s population.
- To continue to expand opportunities for entrepreneurs who are blind, in the Business Enterprise Program.

Priority 5: Good Government

- Ensuring that we are prioritizing effective and efficient operations, making sure we’re being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.
- Collaboration with stakeholders and transparency in the way that we operate and do our work.
- Strengthen, modernize the technology infrastructure.

The recommendations commissioners made today will be integrated into the plan’s draft, after which the Agency will poll staff for their suggestions.

The Agency Request Budget (ARB) meeting kickoff typically takes place in March, and commissioners will be asked for their approval of ARB at the July 29 meeting.

Executive Session

Pursuant to ORS 192.660 (2) (h) this meeting or portions thereof may be held in Executive Session to confer with legal counsel with regard to current litigation or litigation likely to be filed.

Reconvene Meeting

The meeting was reconvened at 3:18 pm.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair McCallum adjourned the meeting at 3:22 pm.