

Oregon Commission for the Blind
Regular Meeting – April 2, 2021 - 1:00 pm
Approved Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Scott McCallum called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm via Zoom.com for a regular meeting of the Oregon Commission for the Blind. Members in attendance were:

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 5, 2021 (Action Item)

Chair McCallum asked for a motion to approve the February 5, 2021, meeting minutes. Commissioner Christi Closson made a motion to approve the minutes, as written, Commissioner Laurel Hudson seconded, and the motion passed.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW COMMISSIONER – NADEERA BROOME

Chair McCallum introduced the newest board member, Nadeera Broome.

RECOGNITION OF SHARON ZENGER, FORMER COMMISSIONER

Sharon Zenger, outgoing commission member, was recognized for her contribution as a board member. Executive Director Johnson read from the plaque presented to Sharon commemorating her service to the State of Oregon. Chair McCallum also expressed appreciation to Sharon for her commitment to the Agency.

AUDIENCE INTRODUCTION

Each audience member introduced themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pete Devasto introduced himself as the U.S. Support Representative for Inside Vision, manufacturer of the VarioUltra.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Dacia Johnson presented the Executive Director report.

DONATIONS AND FINANCIAL REPORTS

CFO Kat Martin presented the Donations and Financial Status Reports.

Referring to our Donations Statement, our cash balance in the fund is \$353,837 as of February 28, 2021. The legislature directed us to spend a portion of donations to match the salary expense of one transition counselor, as a costs savings measure to reduce our general fund obligation. Our remaining obligation on this special project is \$6,209 and the unobligated donations balance after this adjustment \$347,628.

Referring next to the Financial Status Report, I am projecting OCB's financial status to be under budget within all fund types at the end of the biennium by 9.8%, which is \$2.7M under our legislatively approved budget.

With 20 months of the biennium actualized and the remaining four forecasted, total personal services is projected to be underbudget by 4.1% or \$562,425.

Services & Supplies will be under by 23.8% or \$2,066,971 of which \$1.76 million relates to Business Enterprise vending machines we have authority to acquire but no ability to acquire and deploy before the biennium ends on June 30th.

Capital Outlay is projected to be under budget by 37.4% or \$16,295, and Special Payments is projected at \$4,850,362 is 0.9% or \$44,066 under budget.

There were no questions.

CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPDATE STATUS REPORT

The Business Enterprise Program began to use the new Case Management System (Aware) April 1. While this represents a small portion of our cases, we have learned valuable lessons we may use as we make progress with the remaining programs.

MICROSOFT 365

We are adopting the most current version of the Microsoft Office suite of applications which will increase our ability to standardize accessibility features in State government documents and allow us to use the same software that business and industry (and so, our clients in some career tracks) are moving to. Our conversion will take place the weekend of April 9-11.

IPADS FOR COMMISSIONERS

To accommodate the State's acceptable use policies and employ multi-factor authentication, we will issue iPads to commissioners to use for the board and meeting business. This will provide access to State of Oregon email accounts, as well as provide a means of distributing meeting materials (minutes, agendas, reports) ahead of the meetings. We anticipate delivery of the devices to Commissioners before the June meeting.

Commissioner Hudson asked if using the iPads is mandatory, and Executive Director Johnson replied that commissioners continuing to access their State email accounts through an unsecured device was not ideal. As we adopt Microsoft 365, it is the appropriate time to make this change.

COVID-19 EMERGENCY UPDATE

Commissioners had expressed concern about whether staff had been prioritized in the vaccination schedule at the February meeting. We have been able to secure priority for some staff who were determined to be frontline workers so will be able to access vaccines beginning April 5th. Remaining staff not yet eligible will be so by May 1.

The Governor's office has begun to conceptualize reopening of state government buildings as they assess the series of executive orders that must be undone. No date has been set for reopening. Additionally, a majority of state employees are represented by unions and they are in the process of collective bargaining which will also consider the reopening process.

Chair McCallum asked if the Agency was aware of challenges accessing vaccination services among the blind and low vision community. Director Johnson described efforts in Multnomah County to provide mobile vaccinations to reduce barriers to vaccination sites. Also, Oregon has enabled 2-1-1 Info services the ability to interact with callers and facilitate call-backs from vaccination schedulers. Also, expanding to local pharmacies will ease the difficulty of accessing the complexity of vaccine sites and procedures.

Commissioner Nadeera Broome asked if we would determine whether clients have been vaccinated before scheduling services. Director Johnson answered that we have not addressed that issue, but the Agency may not require vaccination, neither for clients nor staff, as the vaccine is still "experimental" and categorized for emergency use.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked about the issue of an individual's medical privacy. Executive Director Johnson replied that we have not yet discerned the limits of information we may request. However, the state has determined that we cannot require vaccination for employees.

FEDERAL UPDATE

A new Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner has not yet been identified by the Biden administration. Miguel Cardona, Secretary for the Department of Education, was confirmed March 2, 2021. Positions for the Deputy Secretary of Education and Rehabilitative Services and the Secretary of the Office of Special Education must be filled before the RSA commissioner is nominated.

Due to COVID-19, our services are down which has limited spending of our federal funding. We are working along several fronts to obtain authorization for additional time to use funds for federal fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Normally, we have two years to spend grant funds for each fiscal year, but we do not have the level of expenditure activity that is needed to spend the grants.

Nationally in 2020, Pre-ETS (Pre-Education) services declined by 42% from 2019, while new applicants (students and adults) declined 39%. We anticipate a surge in interest as the job market recovers from the pandemic. A worst-case scenario would be having to revert the unused funds back to the federal government.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – 2021 SESSION

The Agency presented the proposed 2021-23 budget before Ways and Means Subcommittee for Human Services on March 4. The next step will be a work session in which the committee will make recommendations to the full Ways and Means Committee on what our funding will be.

Chair McCallum asked if the legislative fiscal office had indicated what they expect in the revenue forecast. Director Johnson replied that revenue was up at the time of the February forecast, so the economy may continue in a positive position for the May forecast.

FEDERAL COMPLIANCE AUDIT

The auditors have completed testing and we are in the final process of preparing the management letter. They examined for material weaknesses and question costs. While they found neither of these, they found deficiencies in two areas of our internal controls:

Reporting – we are a fairly flat organization, so Kat Martin (CFO) has been establishing separation of duties so that the accountant can prepare the report, and Kat can review it.

Controls - two minor issues were found: 1) a time sheet that was not approved by a manager. This was not considered material, and we needed to fix our controls for that procedure; and 2) a signature issue with a very small purchase that was submitted for reimbursement and approved by the same person, on which we have provided training.

We agree with the findings so in the final letter will create a corrective action plan and identify a responsible party and date to complete the work. We expect this process to complete soon, and we will keep the commissioners apprised of the details.

NEW BUSINESS

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM PERFORMANCE DATA

Director Johnson introduced the presentation of program performance data that had been included in the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services March 4 Agency budget presentation.

Vocational Rehabilitation and OCCB

Angel Hale, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Orientation and Career Center for the Blind (OCCB) gave a report on both programs and there were no questions.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith inquired after the recruitment for a new OCCB director. Director Hale replied that the recruitment is underway, but we do not have anything we can share at this time.

Business Enterprise Program

Director Eric Morris presented on behalf of the Business Enterprise Program and there were no questions.

Independent Living Program

Malinda Carlson presented on behalf of the Independent Living Program and there were no questions.

OLD BUSINESS

SUMMER WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM (SWEP) 2021

Director Angel Hale presented details of the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) for this year.

Currently, 20 students will attend one the three programs: Portland, Salem, and the Third Track. As in 2020, most interactions will be virtual, but we will include a paid work experience. At this time, it appears work experiences will be virtual, but we will closely monitor the communities to be aware of both opportunities that may arise, or risk posed by COVID-19 infection rates. Some students may not possess adequate skills for a virtual work experience, so hands-on options are being explored to provide in-home coaching or activities to increase their readiness.

Commissioner Hudson asked how many of the students are first time SWEP-pies? Hale estimated that “just-under half” may be new to SWEP this year.

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP) UPDATE

Director Eric Morris presented an update on the Business Enterprise Program (BEP).

BEP Administrative Rules

The permanent rules were adopted February 19th, 2021, after several years’ work that involved active participation with the Business Enterprise Consumer Committee (BECC) and subsequent review and approval by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

Randolph Sheppard Financial Relief and Restoration Payment (FRRP) Appropriation

The COVID-19 relief aid package passed by Congress in December 2020 provided \$20 million for the nation’s Randolph Sheppard 53 programs, titled Randolph Sheppard Financial Relief and Restoration Payment (FRRP) Appropriation.

Funds were allocated to the Agency based on the number of vending facility managers (VFMs) in the BEP program in 2020. We had 15 VFMs in 2020, and will distribute at least \$181,000 among them, based on their recorded uncompensated losses. We are assisting VFMs to calculate their respective uncompensated losses based on their 2019 and 2020 reports (less any income they have received during the time period). The elected committee approved our proposed distribution are awaiting RSA approval of the plan. The expected average payout is \$12,080.

Silver Falls State Park Café Opportunity

Oregon Parks and Recreation (ORPD) notified there was an opportunity at Silver Falls State Park for a café operation. The agency agreed that it is a good location for a blind vendor. In the past, the park recorded nearly two million visitors and the café reported \$220,000 gross sales. We will provide an update at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:36 pm.