

Oregon Commission for the Blind
Regular Meeting – April 15, 2022 - 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
Dr. Christi Closson
Michael Babcock
Vivian Carlile-Smith
Lillian Goodman
Laurel Hudson

Nadeera Broome was absent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 4, 2022 (Action Item)

Chair McCallum requested a motion to approve the February 4, 2022, meeting minutes. Commissioner Christ Closson made a motion to accept the minutes, and Commissioner Michael Babcock seconded. The motion passed.

AUDIENCE INTRODUCTION

Each member of the audience was asked to introduce themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Linda Haseman submitted public comment, reporting on the issues encountered by Randy Hauth, a Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Vending Facility Manager (VFM).

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: Our cash balance in the fund was \$385,647 on February 28, 2022.

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 eight months of activity, the remaining

obligation on this special project is \$28,425 meaning our unobligated donations balance after this adjustment is \$357,222.

Financial Status Report: OCB's Legislatively Approved Budget for 2021-23 is \$24,349,910, sixty-nine positions and 66.42 full-time equivalents (FTE) before an increase in expenditure limitations relating to salary pot adjustments during the February session, and \$24,865,520 after. The salary pot is to true up personnel related costs frozen during budget development with the actuality of economic factors bargained after the freeze.

Based upon eight months of activity through February 2022, plus projections for the remainder of the biennium, a variance representing an underspend of 6.6% or \$1,604,739 of our Legislatively Approved Budget would exist.

With the BE vending project in mind, which we were not able to operationalize in 2019-21, we do not currently believe that we will need to request limitation adjustment however we will be watching federal funding closely, as the restraints on our ability to operate in the community caused by the pandemic lessens.

There were no questions.

Executive Director Johnson acknowledged Ms. Martin and the Accounting Department for their award of the Chief Financial Office's Gold Star Accounting for timely and accurate year end reporting for the State fiscal year 2021.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Wrapping up the recent session, the Legislature has invested several hundred million dollars in a variety of programs - housing and low-income services, payments for low-income Oregonians, schools, workforce programs, climate resilience and rural infrastructure projects. OCB's strategic planning and subsequent budget request should take into account the amount of investment funds being made available, improving and enhancing services where appropriate.

FEDERAL UPDATE

President Biden signed an omnibus budget bill March 15 to fund government through the end of the fiscal year, which ends September 30. This will continue the grant funds that we depend upon.

VR STATE PLAN UPDATES FOR PY 22 AND PY 23

Ken Dodge reported on the updates to the State Plan, required under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

The 4-year plan allows for an update after two years. As the most recent four-year term was submitted in 2020, mere weeks before the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. Given the effects of the pandemic, the wildfires, and the civil unrest that were experienced in Oregon, we, with our state partners, have elected not to modify the plan elements and to continue to operationalize the plan put forth in 2020. The federal partners required some revisions to the plan, but the plan elements and goals remain

unchanged:

1. Successfully implement the intent of WIOA into agency work and processes.
2. Increase Agency outreach and effectiveness of services to individuals and communities that would benefit from VR services.
3. Expend Pre-ETS for potentially eligible and eligible youth who experience vision loss throughout Oregon.
4. Increase the capacity of Oregon businesses to hire and retain Oregonians experiencing vision loss.

Chair McCallum questioned whether the legislation is up for reauthorization soon and if we anticipate there may be amendments to it – will it continue as written? Mr. Dodge explained that the Workforce Innovation Act was enacted in 1998 and remained in effect until 2014. We anticipate a similar lifespan for WIOA reauthorization.

Old Business

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM REPORT

Director Eric Morris presented the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Report.

Self-Service Initiative: We are continuing the rollout of the new vending machines. The machines now being installed were ordered in 2020, and they have been stored in a warehouse until now. We have experienced problems recently, but a final reason has not yet been determined. The manufacturer has a sound and particularly good reputation so, while there is speculation, we have not reached a sound conclusion or solution to the problem.

Chair McCallum asked about the many emails he has received from the vendor affected by the problem, asking if other vendors have also experienced these same problems or if they are concentrated within that single vendor. Director Morris answered that we have not had these widespread issues with this number of machines in prior installations. Chair McCallum asked if we would consider different brands of machines for future orders. Director Morris answered that this brand of machine is considered very high quality.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked if Mr. Hauth was the only VFM having trouble with the machines and, based on Ms. Haseman's comments, that they are losing inventory. Director Morris explained that every item dropped inside is not broken or unsalable, but some soda cans have been crushed which would ruin that inventory item. He has seen a service request for equipment to repair this problem in a different facility, but not for the machines we are discussing.

The Commissioners engaged with stakeholders on this subject.

Director Morris reported that the Agency is preparing for next round of installations which we will work very hard to ensure these same issues do not occur.

Also, State government buildings are reopening May 1, and building managers are contacting us to secure new vending, revisions to existing vending, to move locations, etc. Often, building managers are unable to predict how many staff will be expected during the days or weeks. It will be some time before

the populations stabilize, enabling us to serve them more efficiently.

SWEP 2022

Angel Hale reported on the upcoming Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP).

SWEP will be in person this year, and we are still recruiting for several positions, both in Salem and in Portland.

In Portland, we will have seven students, Salem will have eleven, and the Third Track, which is community-based work experiences will have nine students. The Portland program will be based at Portland State University (Portland), and Salem's program will be stationed at Western Oregon University in (Monmouth).

Commissioner Babcock commented that he is excited we will be using Western Oregon University as he attended school there for a couple of years, and it is an amazing campus.

Director Hale thanked the commissioners for helping to broadcast the SWEP job postings to their networks.

AGENCY 2023-25 BUDGET/POLICY PACKAGE OVERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and exacerbated by the social unrest that began in 2020 and then the wildfires in 2021, the Agency has concentrated on operational issues, and was unable to focus on the strategic priorities. The current version of the strategic plan will rely on our existing plan with a combination of enhancements to our existing priorities.

Commissioners performed a considerable amount of work evaluating and discussing the existing strategic priorities at the December meeting. Commissioners approved the draft form of our Strategic Priorities at the February 4 meeting where we also engaged stakeholders to gather their feedback. Since then, our leadership team relied on your guidance to share the priorities with Agency staff to gain their suggestions and ideas – some of the enhancements are based on their helpful feedback.

These are the Strategic Priorities for which we are asking your approval.

1. Service Equity
 - Statewide access.
 - Inclusive service.
 - Technology accessibility.
2. Aging Oregonians
 - Aging citizens.
 - Aging workforce.
3. Specialized Staff
 - Recruitment.
 - Retention.
 - Qualified rehabilitation professionals.

- Staff development.
4. Access and Opportunity
 - Outreach and public education.
 - State government.
 - Inclusive communications.
 - Business partnerships.
 - Opportunities for entrepreneurs.
 5. Accountable Government
 - Performance optimization.
 - Information technology.
 - Information technology accessibility.
 - Collaboration and transparency.

Chair McCallum called for a motion to accept the strategic priorities as presented. Commissioner Carlile-Smith motioned, and Commissioner Laurel Hudson seconded. The motion passed.

NEW BUSINESS

AGENCY 2023-25 BUDGET/POLICY PACKAGE OVERVIEW

Executive Director Johnson outlined the budget process for the commissioners and discussed the unique challenges the post-pandemic and economic outlook present, in view of developing the budget and associated plans. An overview was provided to commissioners ahead of the meeting. Director Johnson summarized the four policy option packages (POP) that are under development.

Director Johnson discussed several conditions that impact the budget:

- The 21-23 budget was pared down significantly due to the unpredictable financial outlook during the early pandemic.
- This 23-25 request budget represents two biennia of improvements to Agency services.
- The revenue and investments being made are substantial, and Oregon’s individuals who are blind should also be invested in.

POP 101 Expanding Opportunity and Access: Reaching unserved and underserved communities, ensuring the Agency has adequate capacity for outreach, and expanding our capabilities to help support accessibility and usability of statewide systems. Also, expanding the older blind services and supports for seniors who experience vision loss.

POP 102 Business Enterprise Program Economic Recovery and Resilience: This plan supports economic recovery and resilience for vending facility managers (who are blind) and to help them innovate their businesses as they adjust to the smaller populations in office buildings since the pandemic. These are small business owners who rely on the Agency to help them respond to changes in the market and to help their businesses remain profitable.

POP 103 Information Technology Modernization: Continue to invest in the Agency IT infrastructure, and align with the state information technology infrastructure requirements. Shift to Phase 2 of the Case

Management IT project. Expand the Agency's capacity to maintain Human Resources Information System records, reporting and tracking.

POP 104 Specialized Staff: A comprehensive effort to recruit and retain and compensate staff appropriately as well as provide adequate professional development and continuing education.

Director Johnson asked the commissioners for feedback to these proposed items. Commissioner Michael Babcock supported the ideal for in-person continuing education experiences for staff. Chair Scott McCallum agreed and noted the recent effects of inflation on domestic travel. Commissioners agreed that there is a gap between the effectiveness of virtual engagement and being somewhere in person.

COMMISSION MEETING FORMATS POST MAY 3 REOPENING

Director Johnson led discussion among commissioners regarding future meetings, whether to remain solely virtual, to return to in-person meetings, or whether we should plan to coordinate hybrid meetings that include both the in-person and virtual platforms. Director Johnson proposed that the June meeting be held virtually, then consider the hybrid meeting for July when the SWEP students make their presentations to the Commissioners.

ADJOURNMENT

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