

Oregon Commission for the Blind
Regular Meeting Portland, Oregon – December 1, 2023 – 1:00 pm

Approved Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm, December 1, 2023, by Board Chair Scott McCallum. Commissioners in attendance were:

Scott McCallum
Nadeera Broome
Vivian Carlile-Smith
Lillian Goodman
Alan Labrum, OD

RECOGNITION OF OUTGOING COMMISSIONER- MICHAEL BABCOCK

Chair Scott McCallum recognized Michael Babcock for his service as a commissioner. Commissioner Babcock has served a four-year term as Commissioner. The agency presented Commissioner Babcock with an engraved trophy in appreciation of his service. The trophy reads, "With gratitude for your guidance and commitment, November 2019, to November 2023.

Executive Director Johnson also expressed gratitude on behalf of the agency for his leadership and commitment to agency programs.

Commissioner Babcock served as the representative from American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) – Oregon Chapter.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – October 6, 2023 (Action Item)

Chair McCallum asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the October 6, 2023, meeting. Commissioner Vivian Carlile Smith motioned to approve the minutes as written, Commissioner Alan Labrum, O.D., seconded, and the motion carried.

AUDIENCE INTRODUCTION

Members of the audience introduced themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was submitted.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Dacia Johnson presented the Executive Director Report to Commissioners.

Donations Report: Our cash balance in the fund declined \$1,955 to \$292,248 on October 31, 2023. As a cost 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 once again carried forward to the 2023-25 biennium and, with \$13,000 of donated funds expended through October 31st, the unobligated donations balance after this adjustment is \$255,326.

Financial Status Report: Between the budget and end of session bills, OCB was approved for \$27,820,809, sixty-six positions, and 66.00 full-time equivalents (FTE) during 2023-25 by Oregon’s legislature. This represents a 7.9 percent increase over the 2021-23 Legislatively Approved Budget as of January 2023 and a 1.7 percent increase over the 2023-25 current service level.

Based upon four months of activity as of October 31, 2023, a 3.3 percent variance to our Legislatively Approved Budget is project for the end of the biennium with:

- General Fund fully utilized.
- Other Fund under the approved limitation by \$195,042 or 17.2 percent.
- Federal funding under the approved limitation by \$710,577 or 3.8 percent.

The total funding variance is projected to be \$905,619, or 3.3 percent where the approved budget is \$27,820,809 and projected expenditures \$26,915,190.

The Commission has submitted an information Notice of Intent to both the CFO and LFO offices of the State, for a budget request for the 2024 Legislative Session which we consider technical in nature. With the Board’s approval, we are requesting to move funds from IT Professional Services to Personal Services while increasing the agency FTE by 1.0 to provide IT Help Desk Support for the agency.

OCB received approval in our 2023-25 budget to have Help Desk services outsourced to the State Datacenter Desk (SDC) at DAS Enterprise Information Services (DAS-EIS). The SDC has not been able to commit to the agency that they have the resources to take OCB on as a client agency, and they do not have the requisite knowledge to support our visually-impaired and blind personnel, and the SDC has no specific timeline when they may know whether they can or cannot assume these responsibilities. At present we employ a Limited Duration employee that has been temporarily filling this need, pending resolution with SDC. After 18 months of discussion with SDC, we would like to make this solution permanent to stabilize IT Help Desk support to agency personnel.

We consider this a cost-effective solution, since OCB would realize cost savings which would allow us to make other necessary personal services changes. Included with those changes are finalization of classification changes for two positions that have been approved for inclusion with the budget request by DAS Chief Human Resources Office and a partial fix towards a technical correction in how the indirect personnel are budgeted with Federal and General fund but are paid with General fund only. The partial fix will address budgetary pressure on the agency’s General Fund allotment for 2023-25.

Introduction of New CFO Analyst Hari Vellaipandian

Executive Director Johnson introduced the Chief Financial Office Analyst, Hari Vellaipandian, to the commissioners. Hari's role as Assistant Policy and Budget Analyst will support the agency approving quarterly allotment requests and building the next biennial budget.

Hari was invited to offer introductory remarks and was welcomed by commissioners.

State Update

Governor Kotek established a set of expectations for agencies in which we have been engaged:

- We're in the final stages of our IT Strategic Plan (which Commissioners helped inform).
- Working with the Chief Human Resource Office, Human Resource Client Agency Manager to finalize a succession plan. This is an opportunity to think critically about how we're driving recruiting and retention of critical positions within the agency.
- We responded to an internal audit response query which the Governor is tracking (the agency doesn't currently have any outstanding items related to audits).

Executive Director Johnson also reported they were recently appointed to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Belonging Cabinet for the State of Oregon. Ms. Johnson hopes to increase the agency's visibility through that work and guide the overall planning within state government to ensure disability is included in the overall DEI&B. "Belonging" was added to the cabinet's name so that disability is included in the work.

Chair McCallum asked if there were other agencies representing disability in the group. Executive Director Johnson reported that the entire cabinet wasn't able to join when the kickoff took place, so she is unaware of other agencies that are involved.

Federal Update

Congress passed a Continuing Resolution to fund the government through mid-January 2024.

Agency Recruitment Update

Offers of employment have been extended to two individuals for our Business Enterprise and Center Director positions.

Jim Portillo has been offered the position as Director of the Orientation and Career Center for the Blind. Jim is moving to Portland from Seattle, and he has been the lead instructor at the training center for Washington State Services for the Blind. Jim will begin working in mid-January.

Ron Stewart has accepted the offer for the Director of the Business Enterprise Program, and he will begin working December 14. Ron is an executive chef by training, and he has more than twenty years' experience in catering and restaurant management and brings executive-level management skills and experience.

Chair McCallum recognized Michael Wolff who served as Interim Business Enterprise Program Director while the recruitment was under way.

NEW BUSINESS

Legislative Funding Request for 2024 (Action Item)

The agency is requesting approval to submit two separate legislative funding requests, both due January 16.

1. Move 2023-25 funding from the IT Professional Services category to Personal Services, adding one additional position for IT Help Desk Services. The budget was approved for 2021-23 to finance Department of Administrative Services Enterprise Information Systems (EIS) to provide Help Desk services, but they were not prepared to receive us as a client. We retained a limited duration employee pending resolution of the EIS request. With the completion of the IT Strategic Plan, we identified that it saves money for the State to bring those services in-house rather than to contract them out.
2. Using the savings of the resources from the Help Desk solution, we seek to, as resources allow, request incremental shifts and additional General Fund to reduce pressure on General Fund. We have positions that are budgeted with Federal Funds but cannot be paid using Federal Funds. We request to utilize the balance of the fund savings to correct some of the positions that are incorrectly budgeted. Also, this includes reclassification of two positions that are not classified according to their job duties.

Chair McCallum asked a clarifying question: With the first request to shift funds from IT Professional Services to Personal Services – is the agency requesting an additional FTE? Executive Director Johnson confirmed the plan would be to convert the limited duration employee into a permanent employee.

Chair McCallum asked for a motion to approve the legislative funding request as present by Executive Director Johnson.

Commissioner Goodman made a motion to approve the request, Commissioner Carlile Smith seconded, and the motion carried.

Agency 2024 Audit Plan

Clay France presented the agency's audit plan for 2024.

At the last meeting, Mr. France reviewed the recent Risk Assessment Report with Commissioners. The Audit Plan informs the internal audit plan for the coming year. The plan includes an audit, a review, several follow-up projects, and some additional projects. Clay will also perform annual audit work such as updating the annual risk assessment, internal controls, and any additional audit finding follow-up that is necessary.

The agency is also expecting a federal compliance audit in 2024, and Mr. France will serve as the liaison to the Secretary of State's office. Clay will also coordinate the corrective action plans with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

The State Archives Division has requested the agency update the records retention policy and the special schedule for record retention.

Executive Director Johnson added that we, every three years, receive a federal compliance audit from the Secretary of State’s Audits Division. The audit is of the full grant, so both grantees, OCB and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation at the Department of Human Services, are audited simultaneously. We have not received our engagement letter yet, but we anticipate its delivery soon.

Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) 2024

Angel Hale shared an update about the 2024 Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) for 2024.

Portland SWEP is in the planning stages. Applications are already out to the regional programs and students, and we are receiving completed App Alert applications.

Different this year, we are assembling a workgroup that will convene mid-December with representatives from the regional programs that will begin the discussion of how Salem (or Foundational) SWEP and our community-based SWEP experiences may look like in the future.

We have not been able to staff in a way that, we believe, is adequate for the students’ needs. Qualified staff will be essential to our future programming.

We want to be sure you, Commissioners, know these discussions are taking place. Regular updates will be provided in the coming months.

OLD BUSINESS

Business Enterprise Program Update

Michael Wolff, Interim Director of the Business Enterprise Program, provided an update to commissioners of the Business Enterprise Program.

- BEP staff are working on the RSA 15 Report as well as the annual report to the state legislature.
- The Fall Inservice for Vending Facility Managers will be held tomorrow, December 3. Topics include regional and national updates, discussions about micro-markets and how they’re performing nationally, active participation, and ways to collaborate. Two prospective BEP licensees are in training to become VFMs.

Chair McCallum thanked Mr. Wolff for stepping in to serve as the Interim Director.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Angel Hale reported on the activities to gather information for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). A questionnaire has been sent to commissioners, recently, to gain their perspective.

The CSNA is conducted every three years and is required by the Rehabilitation Service Administration for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, looking at our unserved and underserved populations. Statewide and national data is used to compare the services we’re able to provide. Surveys, too, are distributed to clients and providers to learn their priorities and points of view.

Angel expects a first draft of the report before the end of the month.

2024-27 Strategic Plan Development

Executive Director Johnson introduced Pete Pande from Pivotal Resources who will be facilitating the development of the 2024-28 Strategic Plan.

Mr. Pande provided background on himself and his firm, Pivotal Resources. They are an organization change and strategy consulting and training firm. They do training as well as consulting work and have worked over the past 12 – 13 years with a lot of different Oregon State agencies.

Mr. Pande facilitated a discussion around the development of the PESTLE – which are factors of consideration in planning around political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental impacts affecting the agency and the state as a whole.

Executive Director Johnson was recognized and closed the meeting by recognizing Jonathan Scrimenti, Workforce Innovation Manager for continuing to serve as Center Director awaiting Jim Portillo’s arrival to the agency.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:54 pm