

Martin Hall is topic at meeting next week

Judges speak out on issue of sending youth elsewhere

The Chronicle

OKANOGAN — A meeting is set for March 15 to talk about the Okanogan County commissioners' proposal to close the county juvenile detention facility and contract for space at Martin Hall in Medical Lake.

The meeting is set for 6-8 p.m. in the commissioners' hearing room of the Grainger Administration Building, 123 N. Fifth Ave.

Commissioners met Feb. 23 with Superior Court Judges Chris Culp and Hank Rawson, and retired Judge Jack Burchard.

"Not much substantive was decided; rather, we worked to set a schedule for the future sessions," Culp said.

The meeting did get "a little testy" when Burchard wanted to comment and then others at the meeting also sought to speak, Culp said.

Commission Chairman Jim DeTro shut them down.

Rawson asked, bluntly, what offers had been received from Martin Hall and Chelan County, and didn't really get a reply, Culp said.

Martin Hall, on the campus of Eastern State Hospital mental institution, is run by a consortium of several eastern Washington counties. Day-to-day operations are run by a Montana company.

The discussion, in its early

stages, has included housing Okanogan County juvenile offenders at Martin Hall, with the possibility of video or telephonic hearings to avoid hauling them back and forth for court appearances.

"I didn't realize it, but apparently the board was surprised when I told them that I would absolutely not allow telephonic, electronic or any type of video hearing," Culp said.

"All youth must be personally present in court."

Such hearings also are not allowed by the county courts, either.

In addition to the March 15 meeting, commissioners and the judges set five more meetings through the end of May.

At the first one, law enforcement is scheduled to provide a scenario of what happens from their perspective, starting with initial contact and ending at detention.

"It's designed to give a picture for the board of what all is involved in the process," Culp said. "Hopefully city mayors will be present to add the financial picture of what it would mean for a city officer to have to transport the youth to (Martin Hall) 136 miles away."

The public will have 30 minutes for comments and then a topic for the next meeting will be set.

Commissioners have said they want to gather as much information as possible before making a decision.

The meeting was not recorded; future sessions will be, he said.

Residents to cast votes in presidential primary election

The Chronicle

OLYMPIA — Voters will have their choice of two Democrats and five

person at county elections offices until May 16.

The presidential primary was created in 1989 as an

Afternoon fire razes

Donations sought to help local family

By Dee Camp
The Chronicle

OMAK — A fire of undetermined cause destroyed a Dayton Street house Sunday afternoon, forcing one of the home's residents to flee through a window.

Resident Harry Bessette, 66, said he was watching television and heard something that sounded like a snow shovel hit the driveway. He said he'd checked the weather earlier and heard there would be wind, so he didn't think much of the noise.

He said he looked toward the kitchen window and saw what appeared to be a plume of dust, but didn't see any dust at a window in the living room. He soon heard a pop, ran to the door and was confronted with flames and smoke coming from the carport.

Bessette said he felt heat on his face, turned and slammed the door, singeing the hair on the back of his head in the process.

"I could feel the heat," he said.

He opened the window and put his dog outside, tried to gather a few belongings and then went out the window himself as smoke and flames began moving through his home of about 25 years.

His wife, Theresa Bessette, has been working for the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and was not home.

Their son, Charlie, who lived in a small apartment behind the house near the carport, arrived and got his dog own out.

They tried to call 911 but couldn't get through; they reasoned neighbors were calling, too, because they soon could hear sirens downtown. The Omak Fire Department arrived and doused the flames.



Firefighters rush with hoses in hand to th

Fire Chief Kevin Bowling said the department was called at 2:08 p.m. and found the double-wide mobile home engulfed in flames. The home, carport and apartment all were destroyed.

The cause is under investigation.

LifeLine Ambulance also responded and was on hand when a neighbor, who was watching the blaze, collapsed from an apparent seizure, Bowling said.

Harry Bessette said the family lost everything. The home was insured.

He said Red Cross volunteer Cindy Gagne, who also is the city's mayor, responded and helped him fill out agency paperwork so he, his son and the dogs could check into the Rodeway Inn temporarily.

"She was very helpful," he said.

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