In attendance:
Jerre Van Hoose, Springdale, Chairman of the Board
Mike Lanier, Madison County
Juliet Richey, Washington County
Neal Elliot, Benton County
Joel Gardner
Mindy Campbell
Kendall Luallen
Karen Eccles
Tim Conklin

The meeting was called to order by Jerre Van Hoose. He welcomed new board members Juliet Richey representing Washington County and Neal Elliot representing Benton County.

Proxies were sent from Alan Ley and John Reeve.

The agenda was adopted for the meeting by Mike Lanier making the first motion and Juliet Richie making the second. All were in favor.

No one was present to make any public comment.

Minutes from October board meeting were reviewed. Jerre VanHoose made a motion to approve the minutes and Mike Lanier made the second; all were in favor.

The budget review was covered by Joel Gardner.

Federal funding local match and NWACC monies will remain consistent as they were in 2015.

ORT is looking at some potential public/private funding to support additional routes. The routes will not be offered on any pilot programs; companies will have to financially support a 180 day exploratory run. Joel is currently having preliminary meetings with a number of groups who have expressed interest, to include George’s and Ozark Mountain Poultry who ran prepaid trial work force routes for the past six months. He is also working with a group known as Move Bentonville who is interested in adding two to six fixed routes through Bentonville. Prior to beginning any route development or further construction from the ORT end of this business, the private and/or public parties considering extra routes will have to supply a twelve month advance for all operating costs.

The 2016 budget has included charters for the University of Arkansas home football games. Previously, the charter contracts were signed later in the fall, so the revenue and expense numbers were not incorporated into the budget forecast. However, the charter service is always provided, so the forecast is now in the budget.
ORT expects a higher advertising revenue this year than we have received in the past. An advertising contract was awarded to the Mullikin Ad Agency. ORT anticipates a very favorable outcome due to having an advertising professional sell that space on the buses.

- In 2016, ORT employees will receive a 2.5% increase in pay rate.
- Health care remains consistent.
- Professional fees and advertising fees are slightly higher this year.
- Communication expenses are higher due to increasing technology on the vehicles.
- Vehicle insurance is higher.
- Fuel costs are fairly consistent and are showing a lower trend.

ORT should be in a high growth mode over the next several years and the budget is going to be challenging to manage in this state of high growth. Throughout the year the budget will be readjusted on an “as often as needed” basis. The money in the account is kept as closely as possible to the exact needs of operations in order to best comply with requirements federal fund usage set by the government. There is no savings amount kept and unforeseen expenses are handled as they occur.

Mike Lanier made a motion to accept the 2016 budget and Juliet Richey made the second. All were in favor.

Ridership Statistics: Each Board meeting, Kendall Luallen presents a series of ridership statistics which are excellent reporting tools. This Board packet contained two monthly ridership statistic reports; one for October 2015 and one for November. Kendall discussed the November stats, while explaining how to read the report for the benefit of the new Board members. Fixed route passenger count was up 4% from the year before. Paratransit is up approximately 7% year to date. Collectively, the statistics are up approximately 5%. The reports include days of operation, fuel consumption, number of vehicles, accidents, number of staff, etc. The Route designators are indicated by the last digits of the zip code. There are also reports showing key performance indicators by the specific cities and the cities within their counties. Overall, ORT continues to show record breaking development.

Executive Director’s Report: This is presented by Joel Gardner each meeting. The ED Report highlights events and challenges documented for the purpose of communicating with the Board.

Advanced technology is being implemented on the fleet vehicles. The hardware being installed on the vehicles has experienced a great deal of technical difficulty, but the problems have taken a high priority and are gradually being corrected. ORT monitors its social medial accounts Facebook and Twitter, and has linked into aps like Route Shout to support all ridership. Applications are being installed to include being able to track the buses by desktop and mobile application. The bus stops are being geocoded to assist passengers in accessing the bus stops and routes by their own smart devices.

Joel presented a typical average of incoming and outgoing calls in the course of a business day. On the particular day presented, the ORT call center received 1192 phone calls for passenger assistance and made 800 out of the office.
Federal funding has been passed for transit agencies for the next five years. However, the money has not been guaranteed or released to date. In the third month of the 2016 federal fiscal year, there has been no operating funds released for use.

Additionally, the application for federal grants for the 2016 year are made through a web based program, now called Trams. The site has not been opened for application for the operating funds for 2016.

Some items of interest for the next year include

- Annual Customer Appreciation dates during which time all passengers ride for free. The first takes place the week of Thanksgiving and the next between Christmas and New Year’s Day.

- There will be six Saturday football games to charter for revenue in 2016.

Joel informed the Board he is works at the members’ discretion and is available for all their calls, be it of question, concern, suggestion.

The meeting was adjourned and rescheduled for February 25th at 10:00 a.m. at the same location, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission.