

**BOARDS OF BENTON AND FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
MEETING MINUTES**

**SPECIAL BI-COUNTY
COMMISSION MEETING**

Wednesday, June 2, 2021, 9:00 a.m.

HAPO Center
6600 Burden Blvd. Pasco, WA 99301

Franklin County Commissioners Present: Chair Clint Didier, Chair Pro Tem Rocky Mullen and Member Brad Peck

Benton County Commissioners Present:

Present: Chair Jerome Delvin and Chair Pro Tem Shon Small. Member Will McKay was present via phone.

Benton and Franklin County Employees Present: Superior Court Judge Cameron Mitchell, Franklin County Administrator Keith Johnson, Benton County Administrator Jerrod MacPherson, Franklin County Treasurer Josie Koelzer, Human Services Director Kyle Sullivan, Human Services Finance Manager Tammy McKeirnan, Juvenile Administrator Darryl Banks, Administrative Services Finance Manager Shela Berry, Benton County Sustainable Development Manager Adam Fyall, Benton County Community Programs & Public Relations Coordinator Shyanne Palmus and Benton County Finance Manager Linda Ivey, Sheriff Jim Raymond, Franklin County Prosecutor Shawn Sant, HAPO Center Manager Tom French and Franklin County Human Resources Director Carlee Nave.

Public Present: Matt Watkins, Stephen Bauman, Leo Bowman, Mark Brault, Richard Bloom, Brent Cook, Wanda Briggs, Michele Gerber, Ben Majetich, Desiree Hall, George Dockstader, Rick Reil, Steve Blodgett, Melody Otness, Mike Luzzo, Ruben Alvarado, Ken Hohenberg, Chris Guerrero, Donald Parks, Ana Ruiz, Angie Manterola, and Chris Lee.

9:00 a.m. Call to Order and the Pledge of Allegiance

Franklin County Board of Commissioner Chair Clint Didier welcomed everyone and called the Special Bi-County Meeting to order and introduced Franklin County Commissioner Mullen and Commissioner Peck. He then turned the time over to Commissioner Delvin to introduce Benton County Commissioners.

Benton County Board of Commissioners Chair Jerome Delvin introduced Commissioner Shon Small and Will McKay (present telephonically).

Commissioner Didier read the purpose of the Bi-County Meeting. Discussion regarding establishing a regional behavioral health recovery center and a possible means of funding a recovery center, including but not limited to a referendum to reduce local transit taxes in exchange for voters approving a mental health tax under RCW 82.14.460.

Commissioner Delvin gave an update on what Benton County has been doing to establish a regional recovery center. A group of advocates formed the Benton Franklin Recovery Coalition within the past two years. They spoke with those who are in charge of the old Kennewick General Hospital (KGH) campus and viewed this as a possible location for a new regional recovery center.

Commissioner Delvin and other advocates began working with other entities and the state to procure funding to establish the new recovery center. They were able to secure 2.5 million from the State. He stated that Benton County would be the project lead in obtaining this site for a recovery center. His thoughts were for Benton County to purchase the property for 1.5 million but allow another entity to run the facility. The funding from the state would go towards the architect engineering analysis prior to purchasing the building.

Commissioner Peck has been an advocate for a facility like this, however he is concerned about raising taxes. He preferred that the 1/10th of a percent go to services that are already in place and not brick and mortar. He thought that Benton County's plan was a good compromise, by buying an existing facility. Having a regional co-occurring treatment facility is of great value.

Commissioner Small was part of the narcotics task force and spoke of a pilot program he visited in 2005 with Human Services Director Kyle Sullivan. He was in support of reducing the Ben Franklin Transit by 1/10th of a percent to go towards the mental health services. He asked if BFT would be willing to do this.

Commissioner Delvin clarified the details as proposed by Benton County. He said that Benton County would still go forward in building the recovery center even without the proposed 1/10th of a percent from BFT. The state is supporting our action to move forward. There will be a written report on the facility and whether it is feasible to go forward with the purchase within a few months.

Commissioner Mullen is in support of moving forward with acquiring a recovery center.

Commissioner McKay was also in support of moving forward with attaining a recovery center and would like to see the 1/10th of a percent from the BFT reallocated towards this project.

Commissioner Peck mentioned that Franklin County's entire yearly operation is several million dollars less than BFT's yearly Operation and Maintenance budget. He supports the transit system with dial-a-ride, and van pool, however he does not approve the ridership numbers, as he believes that they have declined and are not counted accurately. He believed that shifting the 1/10th of a percent from BFT is a great way to achieve much needed services without raising taxes.

Commissioner Didier has the 2021 BFT Budget book and he disclosed that there is more than 30 million in reserve and they also received approximately 18 million from the Cares Act Funds. They also will receive more funds from the American Rescue Act. He believed it was the perfect time to reallocate 1/10th of a percent to mental health.

9:36 a.m. Public Comment

- Franklin County Jim Raymond has been in service for four decades and spoke of the drastic increase of mental health and drug abuse. He encouraged the Commissioners to move forward with plans to obtain a mental health facility.

- West Richland City Council Member Richard Bloom and current Chair for the BFT board spoke of support for the 1/10th of a percent for mental health services. He said this will increase the taxes. He gave a background of how BFT built their fleet, starting 40 years ago. He also talked about the reserve and the capital plan.
- Michele Gerber, President of the Benton Franklin Recovery Coalition which she formed 3 years ago. They started with 8 friends and today the group is over 300. She lost her son to addiction in 2014. Tri-Cities is the only metro area in the state that does not have an addiction, detox and long term patient recovery services. She has forged relationships with entities in Olympia and started planning. There is an opioid epidemic and the Coalition supports a recovery center.
- Chuck Torelli opposed taking away any monies from BFT.
- Ginger Weirman opposed taking away any monies from BFT. She was concerned with the time that the meeting was being held and that there were no flyers on the buses to announce this in English and Spanish.
- Citizen supports the 1/10th of a percent towards mental health. He also supports 8 passenger busses since ridership is so low. He asked if Burbank could be included in the Transit area because it is part of the Tri-cities.
- Pasco Chief of Police Ken Roskey asked the Commissioners to step up to the plate and move forward with this recovery center as it is fundamental to the officers who deal with mental health issues on a daily basis.

Commissioner Delvin reiterated that this recovery center would be built. Commissioner Peck agreed we need to do this soon. Commissioner Small has dealt with those who have mental health issues for sixteen years. He spoke of Colorado and the mental health programs that became privatized and the cost associated with that. He proposed to move forward as we re-evaluate where the needs are in our area. Commissioner McKay wanted to emphasize the importance of this.

- Colin Berry supports taking away 1/10th of a percent from BFT.
- Dori Luzo Gilmore opposed taking away any monies from BFT. We need a transit system and mental health services. Don't treat them as businesses, they are services.
- Leland Kerr is encouraged and supports the efforts to use the old KGH campus for the recovery center. After doing the initial evaluation on the facility last year and seeing the positive results, he is discussed several other steps in the process to procure this property. Details can be found on <https://kenkphd.com>. The facility could be opened by summer 2022.
- Ruben Alvarado took off time from work to voice his opposition to taking monies away from the BFT.
- Matt Watkins, former Pasco Mayor opposed to taking monies away from the BFT.
- Ben Majetich Chief of Police for the City of West Richland is in total support of funding mental health recovery center with 1/10th of a percent from BFT. He does not want to see politics involved in this decision. He urged the Board to get it done now.
- George Dockstader supports taking away 1/10th of a percent BFT. BFT receives taxes from all the area, not just the transit area. There is a lot of money that is collected from non-transit area that the BFT receives.
- Desiree Hall asked the Commissioners to move forward with a recovery center. She is not addicted to drugs or alcohol but needed mental health services and found out the hard way that there is a long waiting period to obtain an appointment. She called Lourdes Health in April and could not get in until August.

- Commissioner Peck is going to look into the details of the BFT budget history to verify the actual funds. He is personally frustrated with the lack of transparency in respect to those dollars.
- Claudia Johnson did not see the notices in Spanish for this meeting. She opposed cutting the BFT money. It will impact disabled and Spanish speaking people. Have you done an impact analysis?
- Franklin County Assessor John Rosenau spoke as an assessor and a citizen. He asked the Commissioners to move forward with obtaining a recovery center regardless if you receive the 1/10th of a percent from the BFT. It will cost us much more if the problem is ignored.
- Anna Ruiz Peralta said we benefit from transit and mental health services.

❖ *Commissioner Didier called for a five minute recess at 10:55 a.m.*

❖ *Commissioner Didier reconvened the meeting at 11:04 a.m.*

Commissioner Peck clarified that we can make a request for the BFT to place this on the ballot for the citizens to vote on reducing the tax from 1/6th to 1/5th of a percent. He suggested the two counties sign a resolution to use the 1/10th of a percent for mental health as a provision for BFT to place this matter on the ballot and the voters vote in favor of it.

Commissioner Small agreed with Commissioner Peck to send a letter to the BFT to entertain placing this matter on the ballot to reduce the tax to 1/5th of a percent.

Commissioner Peck called for a consensus to extend a request to BFT Board to consider the proposal discussed today. To place a measure on the ballot if they would reduce the tax from 1/6th to 1/5th of a percent. With the clear understanding that the 1/10th of a percent would go to mental health services. Having consensus for the Franklin County Administrator and the Benton County Administrator work together to send a letter to the BFT Board.

❖ *Franklin County Commissioners were in consensus to have the Administrator draft a letter to the BFT and commit to the 1/10th of a percent towards mental health.*

❖ *Benton County Commissioners were in consensus to have the Administrator draft a letter to the BFT and commit to the 1/10th of a percent towards mental health.*

11:17 a.m. Discussion on the Facility needs for the Benton Franklin Juvenile Justice Center.

Commissioner Delvin spoke of the joint ownership of the Juvenile Justice Center building. He asked if Franklin County would relinquish their share of ownership, so Benton County can solely take responsibility and care of the building.

Commissioner Peck asked Commissioner Delvin for clarification. Benton County would have sole ownership of the facility, to update the existing building or to build a new one. Franklin County would still share the juvenile justice facility at a pro rata population rate of operation and maintenance costs.

Benton County Director of operations Robert Blain showed a brief PowerPoint presentation in which he discussed the problems with the juvenile justice building. It was built in 1979 and an addition was added in 1996, with minimal maintenance since then. He gave a report on the assessment of the Juvenile Justice Center and with consideration in light of current trends, gave two proposals. Proposal one is to remodel the existing building, which has three options. The other proposal is to construct a new building, which has two options. Benton County is recommending building a new facility.

Discussion between the Commissioners ensued and they will continue to work out the details of this proposal.

11:29 a.m. **Public Comment**

Juvenile Administrator Darryl Banks updated the Commissioners with trends that are happening within the Juvenile system. With a potential increase of services, Mr. Banks believed that a new facility would be the best route in order to accommodate the needs of the juvenile justice system.

❖ *Franklin County gave consensus for the Administrators of each county to work out a solution and bring it back before the Board.*

Commissioner Shon Small thanked everyone for a constructive meeting and he felt that things were moving in the right direction.

Commissioner Didier thanked all those who participated.

11:35 a.m. **Public Comment**

Steve Bauman asked the Commissioners to consider having a meeting quarterly or bi-annually since, we have several joint programs. He also asked the Board to look into traffic and the possibility of having another bridge. Thank you for working on the mental health issues.

There being no further business to bring before with Board, the meeting adjourned at 11:39 a.m.


Franklin County Chair


Clerk of the Board

6-22-2021
Date