

MINUTES

BOARD OF BENTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Special Board Meeting
Richland Public Library, Richland, WA
Tuesday, August 31, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Meeting provided in-person, by Video Live-Broadcast and Telephonically

Present: Chairman Jerome Delvin
Commissioner Shon Small
Commissioner Will McKay
County Administrator Jerrod MacPherson
Clerk of the Board Cami McKenzie

Benton County Employees Present During All or a Portion of the Meeting: Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen; Robert Heard, IT Manager; Dan Waggoner, Facilities; Adam Fyall, Sustainable Development Manager; Robert Blain, Operations & Capital Programs; Linda Ivey, Finance Manager; Kyle Sullivan, Human Services Manager.

Discussion and Potential Decision/Direction to Staff on Property Condition Assessment Report for Trios Auburn Property

Matt Rasmussen discussed the property assessment performed by Wave Design Group. He said the purpose of the assessment was to make sure there were no unexpected issues, and beyond the HVAC and electrical, which were expected, it was in sound condition. Additionally, it was the opinion of staff and the architect that it was viable for its intended use and the County should consider purchasing the property. It was considerably less expensive than buying land and building new, it was already zoned for this purpose, and the City of Kennewick was agreeable to having it used for this purpose.

Chairman Delvin described the concept of the crisis recovery center that he envisioned to be “no wrong door”. Individuals could seek treatment on their own, or fire and police could divert from the jail and/or emergency room and show up at the door. It was his goal to not have an issue deciding who would pay for the first 24 hours in the facility and that would be covered.

Mr. Rasmussen said they had already secured \$2.7 million for the architect and engineering to put out an RFP for design of the building. As soon as they were able to secure the site, they were ready to roll into that part of it; additionally, the State was committed to funding this and Benton County would return to them for additional funding.

The Board discussed the condition of the property and agreed it was a good option to move forward. Additionally, they could provide a multitude of services and housing at a future time due to the additional 150,000 square feet available outside of the 40,000 to 50,000 square feet needed for the recovery center.

Discussion and Potential Decision/Direction to Staff on Creating an Advisory Committee for the Proposed Behavioral Health Crisis Recovery Center

Mr. Rasmussen said it made sense to engage with regional experts to have an advisory committee regarding the construction and operation of the facility. He provided an initial draft of how the advisory committee would be represented and said they would guide the design and construction of the building and help choose providers so the design would fit their operations. The second purpose of the advisory committee would be to guide ongoing operations and services, so the County was making good decisions and not paying for things they did not need. Ultimately the Commissioners would have the contract with the providers, but it was good to get community input and therefore community support.

Discussion and Potential Decision/Direction to Staff in Implementing the 0.01% Sales & Use Tax for Chemical Dependency or Mental Health Treatment Services or Therapeutic Courts Authorized in RCW 82.14.460

Mr. Rasmussen summarized RCW 82.14.460 that authorized the Board of Benton County Commissioners to impose a sales and use tax of 0.01%. Money collected could only be used for chemical dependency and mental health treatment programs and services or for the operation and delivery of therapeutic court services. Supplanting of already budgeted funds was generally not allowed. It required a therapeutic court element, which Benton County already had in place.

The imposition of the tax could be by resolution or ordinance and a referendum or vote was not required, however, there was an appeal process established. They estimated the new tax would generate \$5 million annually for Benton County.

Mr. Rasmussen recommended a separate public hearing process if the Board wanted to proceed with imposition of the new tax.

Chairman Delvin said his goal was establishing a process to pay for the first 24 hours so there was not a question about who paid for it.

Commissioner McKay discussed the potential of utilizing the transit tax instead of this new tax. Chairman Delvin said in his opinion, they were not tied together.

Commissioner Small said he was not a fan of raising taxes but was in favor of this tax specifically for mental health.

Public Comment

William Waters, via/WebEx, spoke in favor of the proposal, however, had a concern regarding the mental health non-compete clause and said he hoped this could be broadened due to co-occurring illnesses.

Charles Eaton, said he worked in addiction recovery, behavioral health, etc. for 40 years. He asked what problem this facility was meant to be an answer for and why the single location with the

focus on residential detox. Additionally, he asked about the most cost-effective approach to dealing with problems with behavioral health.

Marilyn Dickenson, via/WebEx, said she recognized the facility was needed but was concerned about it being used for the shielding approach put out by CDC and requested the County protect it from this type of takeover.

Bill Jenkins thanked the Board for looking at this issue because it was needed for way too long. He said he was tremendously opposed to new taxes. However, this was a bi-partisan priority during his time in the legislature and he was committed to making this work and would donate his time as needed and lobby the legislature for funding.

Michelle Gerber, President of Benton-Franklin Recovery Coalition, and parent of a child who died, said this was the largest coalition in the state. She said they were all volunteers and would continue to advocate to receive funds for this project. She they launched the push for a recovery center three years ago and supported citizen contribution through the tax. Additionally, they supported the choice of using the KGH building and Benton County ownership and management of the building. She requested the advisory committee be made up of professionals, including:

- Local experts in treatment – who run treatment centers
- Law enforcement personnel
- ER doctors and personnel
- Individuals with lived experience – in recovery or close family members
- Officials elected to run counties and cities
- Not a place for amateurs as these are complicated medical diseases

Bevin Bricks, West Richland, ARNP, said he taught nurse practitioners, and recommended clinicians involved in mental health treatment and prescribing providers be involved in the advisory committee. He also expressed concern about how much would be for addiction recovery, how much could be used for inpatient mental health, and about being able to expand services for juvenile treatment.

Chairman Delvin said he was in favor of juvenile treatment as well.

Pam said she was new to the area and believed it was a very needed project, however, she was in favor of using the \$27 million from Transit they were not using. She wanted to put it out to the voters to use the Transit money, at least the first \$5 million that would be generated by the new tax.

William Forsyth, via/WebEx, ER doctor, said there was a need for something like this in this area, and agreed with the importance of choosing an advisory committee.

Lee Kerr, Superintendent of Two Rivers Hospital District, agreed with the decision on the location and said the Board was brave to separate the sales tax issue from the Ben Franklin Transit. He recommended utilizing a broad approach with the other counties through an interlocal agreement

with cities and counties to combine statutory authority and financial resources. Additionally, he agreed with the creation of the Citizen Advisory Committee.

Mike, via/WebEx, asked if the Board was moving forward with this process without Franklin County.

Chairman Delvin said that Benton County was interested in being the owner of the facility and to have Franklin County join in the process.

Dana, via/WebEx, thanked the Board and spoke in support of the crisis recovery center.

Chuck Torelli, via/WebEx, thanked the Board for making this decision and suggested the advisory committee not be limited to one, but perhaps more than one (operations, goal, implementation) and to consider the Franklin County element and non-compete issues.

Jim Millbauer via/WebEx, said he was not in favor of new taxes, but this was a good use of funds and he was in support.

The Board agreed to start working on negotiating the purchase of the building, defining the structure of the advisory committee, and next steps for a public hearing to consider implementing the proposed sales tax.

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Clerk of the Board

Chairman