

**COMMISSIONERS' MINUTES
KITITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON
WEBEX
SPECIAL MEETING**

TUESDAY

6:00 P.M.

DECEMBER 7, 2021

Board members present via Webex: Chairman Brett Wachsmith, Vice-Chairman Laura Osiadacz and Commissioner Cory Wright.

Others present via Webex: Julie Kjorsvik, Clerk of the Board; Mandy Buchholz, Administrative Supervisor; Carly Brettmann, Communications Director; Dr. Mark Larson, Public Health Official; Neil Caulkins, Deputy Prosecutor; Audelia Martinez, Health Promotion Specialist; Nea Alfaro, Health Promotion Specialist I; Steve Panattoni, Jail Superintendent; Ed Buntin, Corrections Lieutenant; Greg Zempel, Prosecutor; Lianne Bradshaw, Assessment Coordinator; Emily Brown, Legal Process Assistant; and approximately 32 members of the public.

PUBLIC HEARING

MENTAL HEALTH TAX

COMMISSIONERS

At 6:00 p.m. **CHAIRMAN WACHSMITH** opened a Public Hearing to consider a 1/10th of 1% increase in Sales and Use Tax as authorized by RCW 82.14.60 (Chemical Dependency, Mental Health Treatment, or Therapeutic Courts).

DOUG FULP, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, KITITAS COUNTY HEALTH NETWORK, reviewed a power-point presentation on the proposed increase in tax. He said the increase would provide access to substance use disorder and mental health treatment and support services for Kittitas County community members. He shared information on the shortage of health professionals; number of Kittitas Valley Fire & Rescue mental health calls; mental health and substance use disorders in incarcerated individuals; surveys conducted by youth in Kittitas County relating to attempted suicides in the past year; and the support provided by numerous entities including the City of Ellensburg and the City of Cle Elum Councils.

BRUCE TABB, CITY OF ELLENSBURG MAYOR, commented on the limited number of services and resources available to residents of Kittitas County. He read a letter of support into the record from City of Ellensburg Police Chief Ken Wade and encouraged the Board of County Commissioners to approve the proposed increase in sales and use tax. **CHARLIE MCKINNEY** expressed his support of the proposal and said it was extremely important for the need of additional resources available to citizens. **CHRIS DEVILLENE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTRAL WASHINGTON COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH**, said there's a limited number of resources available, and with the significant increase in need for services, they are the same as it was 10-15 years ago. He

said the funding would be a great opportunity for assisting with expanding services and he encouraged the Board to approve increasing the Sales & Use Tax. **DAVID DOUGLAS** expressed his support of the proposal and reviewed the substantial increase in mental health and substance use issues not only nationwide, but locally. He felt the County would see many benefits and a positive return with additional funding from the proposed sales & use tax. **DELORES IRWIN, LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS** encouraged the Board to put the issue onto the ballot. **EMILY BROWN** felt it's been a long process and supported the proposal, stating how treatment services were just as important as medical services. **GAYLE SCOTT** said it's been a very stressful time for everyone, and the proposal was timely as additional resources for mental health services is needed. **GEORGE LONG** expressed his support of the proposal and encouraged the Board to approve the tax. **GREG AUBOL, DIRECTOR OF COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH**, said there's been significant process in obtaining funding since last spring, but only with grants, noting those were not sustainable. He supported the increase in tax and encouraged the Board to approve the proposal. **JACKIE HERUM** said mental health issues were close to her heart as she's been involved with programs since the mid 90's. She requested the Board to vote to approve the proposed mental health tax. **JESSICA KARRAKER** said while she agreed there's a mental health crisis and need for additional resources, she didn't believe in government overreach, and requested the Board put the issue on an upcoming ballot. She felt it would allow the voters to express themselves and give the Board an overall feeling of support or non-support of the proposal. She said if the Board approves the additional tax without going before a vote of the people, it will set a precedence. **JOHN BROTHERTON, MERIT BOARD OF DIRECTORS** explained there was a significant need for additional resources in the community and urged the Board to approve the proposed tax increase. **JOY STOCHOSKY** encouraged the Board to support the increase in sales & use tax. **KEN WADE, CITY OF ELLENSBURG CHIEF OF POLICE**, said the increase in sales and use tax funding would go a long way in the current crisis and thanked the Board of Commissioners for supporting the proposal. **DR. KEVIN MARTIN, KITTITAS VALLEY HOSPITAL**, said the increase in tax would not be a solution to everything, it is just a beginning to address the issues in the community. He reviewed the toll mental health and substance use disorders take on first responders and said the Board needed to enact the tax. **MELISSA DENNER, MERIT RESOURCES SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE**, expressed support of the proposed tax and explained how recovery was possible if people have access to resources. **MICHELE CAWLEY** said she deals with those who do not have access to services on a daily basis. She said patients end up going to the emergency room when in crisis because there's no resources available. She encouraged the Board to enact the proposed tax. **NANCY GOODLOE** acknowledged that increasing taxes was not an easy thing to do, she felt the proposal was necessary due to the lack of resources. She encouraged the Board to support the tax. **NANCY LILLQUIST** expressed her support for the proposed tax and

said the law allows for the legislative body to enact the tax in order to deal with issues on a local level. **NICOLE MATTHEWS AND TYLER MATHEWS** expressed their support of the tax and expressed concerns with the increase of homelessness in the community. **PAMELA TUGGLE** said the community was in crisis and she fully supported the tax. **ROBIN READ** explained how mental health issues can be very hard, scary, and an extremely tough situation for people and when there is nowhere to go when in crisis, they tend to just fall through the cracks. She felt there's been a lot of opportunity for the public to speak and now is the time to approve the tax. **TIFFANY CRISMAN** referenced Commissioner Wrights comments from the public hearing that was held back in April, when he felt most of the community was probably unaware of the proposed tax, and that the Board should allow the community an opportunity to vote on it. **ABIGAIL RABEL** thanked the Board for supporting kids in the community. **ARLEIN ANDERSON** said she was a Republican and felt it was time to approve the proposed tax as the community needs help. She didn't want to lose more people and encouraged the Board to enact the tax. **DR. MARK LARSON** expressed his support of the tax. He reviewed results from surveys that were done in the community by youth and how there was a high amount of students who claim they've attempted suicide and those feelings of hopelessness. He also addressed the significant problem with those who are incarcerated and need for resources. **GREG ZEMPEL, PROSECUTOR** said statistics support the action that is being asked of the Board of County Commissioners to approve the tax. **JINGER HABERER, ELLENSBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT** supported the proposed tax and said there's an extreme increase in mental health needs in the school system, including students in the younger grades. **THERE BEING NO OTHERS REQUESTING TO TESTIFY, THE PUBLIC PORTION OF THE HEARING WAS CLOSED.**

NEIL CAULKINS, DEPUTY PROSECUTOR reviewed the statute and said there were wrinkles found in the previous Ordinance. He said in order to enact the tax it needed to be approved by the legislative authority and not an advisory vote.

ORDINANCE 2021-013

REPEAL ORDINANCE 2021-005

COMMISSIONERS

COMMISSIONER WRIGHT moved to approve Ordinance No. 2021-013, Repealing Ordinance No. 2021-005, and to direct Staff to prepare enabling documents enacting the provisions of RCW 823.14.460 in Kittitas County Code, additionally such documents shall specify an expiration date of six (6) years following enactment unless further authorized by the legislative body approval prior to expiration. **CHAIRMAN WACHSMITH** seconded.

COMMISSIONER WRIGHT expressed his appreciation for everyone's testimony. He commented on the recent loss of life at an early stage, stating it was unprecedented. He said the statistics were piling up and the County needed to start somewhere., and while the

plan may not be perfect, there will be the ability to check on the results before the end of the sunset clause. He wanted to ensure there will be measurable data to show and that every issue stands alone. **VICE-CHAIRMAN OSIADACZ** thanked the public for their comments. She said even though the tax can be enacted by the Board, she felt it was important that any new tax is voted on by the people, even if it's only advisory. She said while she supports the proposal, she does not support the process of allowing an increase without having a vote of the people, as it limits participation. **CHAIRMAN WACHSMITH** said he's been very open about his support throughout the process. He said he's looking forward to getting people healthy through having additional services available.

Motion approved 2-1 (Vice-Chairman Osiadacz opposed the motion).

The meeting was adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

CLERK OF THE BOARD



Julie Kjorsvik

**KITTITAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
KITTITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON**



Brett Wachsmith, Chairman