

**COMMISSIONERS' MINUTES
KITITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON
PUBLIC HEARING
SPECIAL MEETING**

WEDNESDAY

6:00 P.M.

APRIL 14, 2021

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

Others: Julie Kjorsvik, Clerk of the Board; Mandy Buchholz, Administrative Supervisor; Dr. Mark Larson, Public Health Officer; Doug Fessler, Network Administrator; Sue Higginbotham, Chief Administrator; and approximately 21 members of the public.

Others in attendance via WebEx: Neil Caulkins, Deputy Prosecutor; Clay Myers, Sheriff; and approximately 36 members of the public.

PUBLIC HEARING INCREASE IN SALES & USE TAX - MENTAL HEALTH 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 82.14.460 (Sales & Use Tax for Chemical Dependency or Mental Health Treatment Services or Therapeutic Courts).

DR. KEVIN MARTIN shared a power-point presentation and reviewed information on the significant need for increased access to Mental Health services in Kittitas County. He explained how the funds would be used and said they have been providing education to the citizens through the Kittitas County Health Network. He indicated it was long overdue and encouraged the Board to join the other 26 counties in Washington State who have adopted to increase in Sales & Use Tax for chemical dependency and mental health treatment services.

THOSE PRESENT & TESTIFYING: A PROFESSOR AT CENTRAL WASHINGTON

UNIVERISTY said over a decade ago he did a research project on the 3/10th of 1% tax and the impacts to what would happen if it was passed or not. He said this proposed increase in tax for Mental Health was just as important and strongly urged the Board to pass it. **RICH ELLIOT** explained the Behavioral Health Advisory Board would make recommendations on the expenditures to the Board of County Commissioners. He said there were letters of endorsement previously presented to the Board, including one from the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce who endorsed the proposed increase which is telling the business community sees impacts to the community. He also provided data on the number of emergency calls relating to both mental health and behavioral health. **DAVID DOUGLAS** reiterated who would monitor the funding expenditures to ensure the

money is being spent wisely. He said most substance use disorders also have a mental health disorder and sees how the numbers have been magnified since the pandemic began over 15 months ago. He encouraged the Board to approve the increase in sales tax. **SARAH PORTER** felt the pandemic did not heighten any issues and there were fake people hiding behind the Mental Health system and parents should be held accountable instead of increasing taxes. **ARDETH KENNER** spoke against the proposed tax. She said she had been through 14 treatment centers, and if money could have solved her problem's she would have got sober a long time ago. **DR. JOHN ASRIEL** spoke in favor of the tax. He said there are widespread effects throughout the community relating to Mental Health issues. He said the tax would pay for itself many times over and provide for a stable funding source to support services. **CHARLIE MCKINNEY** spoke in favor of the proposed tax. He reviewed experiences from life-long challenges of his family relating to mental health. He felt professional help was critical and having the right services make a difference in people's lives. **SANDY BANKSTON** CASA Director encouraged the Board to vote in favor of the proposed tax. She said our community does not have enough services available for citizens and they end up being sent out of the area to receive help. **DIANE ROSSOW** said the mental health challenges are a large burden that has been falling on first responders. She asked the Board to approve the proposed increase in sales tax. **JARED BRONKEMA, EHS EXCEL HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL** said there was a significant need for students to have access to mental health services. He said mental health disorders are treatable if the services are available and asked the Board to enact the proposed sales tax. **LOWEL MURPHY** spoke in favor of the tax and provided information on how it would end up saving taxpayer's money in the end. He said it would also mitigate factors with mental health and addiction assessments while in jail. **LISA MARTIN, PSYCHOLOGIST** spoke in favor of increasing the sales tax and described situations of families who struggle with mental health crisis on a regular basis. She said they are no different, but it is our perception of them that is different. **MICHELLE CAWLEY** urged the Board to enact the tax and the importance of it to the citizens of Kittitas County. She said they have been working for a long time designing a program for the community to address the needs of having access to mental health services. **ROBIN READ, DIRECTOR OF THE KITTITAS COUNTY HEALTH NETWORK** explained how broad changes do not happen without resources. She felt there would only be positive impacts to the community from increasing the sales tax for mental health services and urged the Board to approve the proposal. **DR. MARK LARSON** supported the proposed increase in tax and said 50% of his practice relates to mental health. He said Kittitas County does not have the resources that are needed for his patients who need access to mental health services. **WILLIAM (LAST NAME UNKNOWN)** asked the Board to check into all of the information before implementing another tax.

THOSE TESTIFYING VIA WEBEX: **DEBBIE BOGART** said she was representing herself and as the Executive Director for Cle Elum Downtown Association.

She shared personal experiences and said there are wonderful people in the community who have tried to help, but the community needs more services. **DEDE UTLEY, KVH NURSING DIRECTOR** spoke in support of the increase in sales tax and said they have been seeing an increase in patients in ER with both mental health and substance use disorders. She said by passing the tax would open-up more opportunities for those in need. **ERIN ZAMZOW** supported the proposed increase in sales tax and the need to support mental health services. **GREG AUBOL, DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL WASHINGTON COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE** urged the Board to approve the increase in sales tax to address the mental health issues in Kittitas County. He reviewed how the additional funding would have a positive impact throughout the community in various ways. **DR. HANNAH DUNNING** said she practices in King County and she cares for a lot of kids and families who cannot find resources in their communities such as Kittitas County. She asked the Board to vote in favor of the tax. **JOY STOCHOSKY** provided testimony regarding the need for resources and urged the Board to approve the tax. **KARA HENDERSON** said she was a nurse in the Emergency Department at KVH and urged the Board to approve the tax to assist with the need for mental health resources in our community. **LAURA CROOKS, CHILDRENS VILLAGE and CO-FOUNDER OF CHAD'S LEGACY** said she was a mother who lost a son to suicide and how first responders cannot be mental health counselors too. There is a significant need for mental health services and urged the Board to pass the tax and provide hope for the future. **LIZ WHITAKER** said the funding would make a difference in the community and be able to provide more services to citizens. **SUE GUNN, CENTRAL WASHINGTON NCOMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE** provided testimony on how law enforcement must deal with some very difficult situations relating to mental health issues and felt there was a big need to expand programming in Kittitas County. **CLAY MYERS, SHERIFF** spoke of new programs and grants that have been approved, but those are only temporary. He said it was important to remove some of the barriers for people who need immediate treatment. He said he did not have any concerns with the plan and sees benefits to the County if the tax is approved either by the Board or the voters. He indicated that as an individual he would vote in favor of it if it were placed on ballot. **JESSICA KARRAKER** felt the issue should go on the ballot and to give people a voice and weigh in on their opinion. She said if it's a quality product it shouldn't be a hard sell. **THERE BEING NO OTHERS REQUESTING TO TESTIFY, THE PUBLIC PORTION OF THE HEARING WAS CLOSED.**

VICE-CHAIRMAN OSIADACZ said she had questioned and debated over the last year whether it is an advisory vote. **NEIL CAULKINS, DEPUTY PROSECUTOR** said should the Board decide to put this potential increase in tax to the voters, it is not an advisory vote. If the public were to decide affirmative, the Board would need to enact the tax.

CHAIRMAN WACHSMITH moved to approve Ordinance No. 2021-005, and to enact a Sales and Use tax for Mental Health purposes, as the legislative body. The motion died due to a lack of a second.

VICE-CHAIRMAN OSIADACZ moved to approve Ordinance No. 2021-005, relating to a Sales & Use Tax for Mental Health Purposes, and to approve it going before the vote of the people. **COMMISSIONER WRIGHT** seconded.

COMMISSIONER WRIGHT moved to amend the Ordinance to reflect the tax to expire in 5 years, unless approved by a vote of the people or legislative approval. **VICE-CHAIRMAN OSIADACZ** seconded.

COMMISSIONER WRIGHT felt having a sunset period would allow for assessing the effectiveness of using the funding, as a specific tax could be judged on its own merit after allocations have been spent. He said he has not heard from a cross section of the community and he doesn't know if everyone is aware of the proposal. He believes it will have support but did not want to short-change the process and would not want to do a disservice to the voters.

Motion on the amendment approved 3-0.

VICE-CHAIRMAN OSIADACZ felt it was a difficult decision but would like to hear from the voters to ensure everyone has a voice. She understood it was most likely disappointing to those who testified in favor of the proposal and wanting the Board to just enact the tax. She said she would personally be support of a tax and feels like she has been extremely transparent while listening to all sides.

CHAIRMAN WACHSMITH said he has been very open on where he stands with the issue, and although he feels frustrated with it going to a ballot instead of just approving the tax, he understood it is part of the process.

Motion as amended for Ordinance No. 2021-005 was approved 3-0.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

CLERK OF THE BOARD


Julie Kjorsvik

**KITTITAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
KITTITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON**


Brett Wachsmith, Chairman