



Health & Community Services  
**San Juan County**

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STAFF REPORT

TO: County Council

THRU: Pete Rose, County Administrator

FROM: John Manning, Director  
Barbara LaBrash, Human Service Manager  
Tom Kearney, Juvenile Court Administrator

FOR THE MEETING OF: November 4, 2008

ISSUE:

Shall the Council impose a one-tenth of one percent (0.1%) sales and use tax for the provision of mental health and chemical dependency treatment services, and establish a therapeutic court?

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The County Council should schedule a public hearing for December 2, to consider an ordinance to implement a one tenth of one percent (.01%) sales and use tax as authorized by RCW 82.14.460 to support funding of mental health, chemical dependency, and therapeutic court services.

POLICY DECISIONS:

The implementation of a .01% sales and use tax would allow a significant increase in county support for mental health and chemical dependency services to those in need in San Juan County. Significant state support for these services exists, about \$700, 000 annually. Local support is generally limited to about \$79,000 each year. These amounts do not meet the identified need. The passage of a sales tax could increase locally controlled funding in by as much as \$357, 000 each year.

BACKGROUND:

Legislation

In 2005 the Legislature passed the Omnibus Mental Health and Substance Abuse Reform Act (E2SSB 5763) including a provision focused on the expansion of mental

health and chemical dependency treatment, and the establishment of therapeutic courts (RCW 82.14.460).

The goals of the legislation are to:

1. Reduce the negative impacts of mental illness and substance abuse on children and families;
2. Avoid building more jails and prisons and prevent crime
3. Reduce public assistance expenditures and unemployment
4. Reduce homelessness
5. Reduce physical health care and emergency room costs
6. Improve recovery and quality of life for those with chemical dependency and mental health disorders

To meet these goals the legislation provides a funding mechanism to expand or provide new mental health and chemical dependency treatment services by authorizing counties to fix and impose a sales and use tax in the amount of one-tenth of one percent (10 cents per \$100) and requires the operation of a new or expanded therapeutic court(s).

### Local Actions

On September 25, 2007, staff met with the County Council to introduce the opportunity created by the Legislature through E2SSB 5763 to expand chemical dependency, mental health, and therapeutic court services. At that meeting the Council directed staff to move forward with developing a program of services and a process to include key stakeholders and provide public information.

On November 30, county staff met with Island County Human Services Administrator Jackie Henderson, and Superior and Juvenile Court Administrator Mike Merringer to review the process used in Island County to implement the mental health initiative.

On December 6, the Health and Community Services Director, Juvenile Court Administrator, and Human Services Coordinator met with the County Administrator to coordinate and plan next steps. The group agreed on the importance of having the new Superior Court Judge on board as soon as the Governor made the appointment and developed the following outline regarding next steps:

- Formation of a Task Force of stakeholders to drive and coordinate this process.
- The role of the Mental Health Task Force is to:
  - 1) Review data
  - 2) Identify empirical need
  - 3) Be an “ear to ground” to identify need
  - 4) Public Outreach to each of three major Islands for “truth testing” information; seeking priorities; & other need evaluations
  - 5) Develop program proposal
  - 6) Formal touch with County Council
  - 7) Vet with key stakeholders
  - 8) Formal meeting with Legislative Authority

Key members of Task Force could include: the Courts, mental health and chemical dependency treatment representatives, law enforcement, schools, Department of Social and Health Services, providers, San Juan County Community Network; business community, etc.

On December 18, the County Council directed staff to establish a task force and proceed as outlined above.

## Task Force

On February 7, 2008, the first meeting of the Task Force was held. Members recruited included representatives of the sectors identified to the Council from San Juan, Orcas and Lopez Islands. The first job of the Task Force was to review available information on the need for services in San Juan County. Over the ensuing months staff and the Task Force summarized this information in the document "Opportunities and Challenges - Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Services in San Juan County." (attached)

Between March and June the Task Force developed a more detailed work plan on achieving the additional tasks requested by the Council. The Task Force created three work groups: one, to seek and report on stakeholder views of the need for services; a second, to develop a presentation and conduct public meetings on the tax; and a third, to develop an allocation process that would determine how funding would be spent.

The Task Force subcommittee developed a list of stakeholders, those who provide services to the mentally ill, chemically dependent and at risk of needing a therapeutic court. This list included the mental health providers, chemical dependency counselors, law enforcement officers, clergy, family service workers, and social service agency representatives. The stakeholders were briefly interviewed by telephone regarding their view of mental health and chemical dependency issues in San Juan County. Results of these interviews were summarized and used as part of follow up discussions at "Stakeholder Meetings" on Lopez, San Juan and Orcas Islands held September and October 2008. (see attached "Stakeholder Identified Priorities")

A second Task Force subcommittee developed a process for deciding how funds collected under the proposed tax would be spent. This process would include a public solicitation of proposals to provide services, review by a citizens committee appointed by the County Council, with recommendations from Health and Community Services staff with oversight from the County Administrator. (see attached "Allocation Methodology")

The third Task Force subcommittee held public meetings in October, 2008 on Lopez, San Juan, and Orcas Islands. The presentations at these meetings included a summary of the law, a review of the Task Force's efforts, a discussion of the allocation methodology and the priorities for service developed with the stakeholders. Discussion at these meeting was generally supportive of implementing the tax, with some reluctance expressed as to the need for any new taxes.

## FACTS AND FINDINGS:

- The local Mental Health Task Force, the San Juan Community Public Health and Safety Network, the San Juan County Public Hospital District #1 and the Washington State Board of Health Mental Health Task Force all found that there is a need for more publicly funded mental health services especially for children and youth.
- The conclusions of these public entities are supported by multiple surveys and interviews with service providers, consumers, and helping agency personnel.
- The U. S. Census reports that 30% of adults under 65 years old in San Juan County have no insurance coverage for mental health. This makes San Juan County as the most poorly insured county in the state and among the lowest 5% of counties in the country.
- The county currently spends less than \$80,000 of local tax dollars on these services annually.
- The implementation of a .01% sales and use tax could generate over \$350,000 annually to improve mental health, chemical dependency and therapeutic court services.
- Implementing the tax this year could result in an additional \$100,000 in state funding for the treatment of methamphetamine addiction.
- The design and implementation of programs implemented through this tax remain in local control, not dictated by Olympia or Washington, DC.

## RECOMMENDED MOTION:

That the County Council direct staff to schedule and advertise a public hearing to consider an ordinance instituting a sales and use tax for the support of mental health, chemical dependency and therapeutic court services as authorized by RCW 82.14.460.