

Opinion

Franklin County should help fund Tri-City recovery center

BY THE TRI-CITY HERALD
EDITORIAL BOARD

Benton County Commissioners made the judicious choice when they decided last month to approve a nominal sales tax increase that would boost mental health and drug treatment services in the community.

Now it is Franklin County's turn to do the same.

The Franklin County Commission plans a public hearing Tuesday, Dec. 7, at the HAPO Center to discuss the possibility of adding an extra penny to every \$10 in sales in order to help establish a recovery center in the Tri-Cities.

Without a doubt, this is a much needed facility that would be used by

MENTAL HEALTH AND DRUG ADDICTION DO NOT END AT THE COUNTY LINE. IT WOULD HELP IMMENSELY IF FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ALSO SHOWED SUPPORT FOR A FACILITY THAT WILL SURELY BE USED BY ITS CITIZENS — AND WHICH ALSO WILL, IN TURN, REDUCE ITS JAIL COSTS.

residents in both counties.

Too often jails and hospital emergency rooms on both sides of the river end up being the default location for those suffering with drug addiction and mental breakdowns.

A recovery center would provide a safer, more suitable place for these troubled souls, and it is time the community had one.

The Tri-Cities is the only major metropolitan area in Eastern Washington without a detox center, which is shameful.

But thanks to efforts led largely by Michele Gerber and the Benton Franklin Recovery Coalition, what was just an idea a few years ago is now getting close to becoming a reality.

Through sheer persistence from those involved in the project, the state legislature already approved \$2.7 million to start the building process.

But now the Tri-Cities must prove it has a plan in place to operate the facility in order to attract more state and federal funding.

In short, the local community has to have skin in the game.

By state law, county commissions have the authority to tack on a 1 cent sales tax to a \$10 purchase. With that increase, customers would pay an additional 10 cents on a \$100 purchase and \$1 on a \$1,000.

The cost is insignificant compared with the benefits that would be gained by providing people with mental health and drug problems a safe place to get help.

The majority of shoppers wouldn't even notice such a paltry increase. But just say the word "tax" and controversy begins.

That is why it was impressive that Benton County Commissioners Jerome Delvin and Shon Small approved the sales tax ordinance. Few local elected leaders relish raising taxes, even if it is a nominal amount that can provide a desperately needed service.

Small noted at the time of the vote that this was the first time he supported a tax increase since he was elected more than 10 years ago.

But he and Delvin understand what is at stake.

Providing a new facility like the recovery center would reduce crime and jail costs. It also can help free up waiting lines in hospital emergency rooms, which could lead to savings in insurance premiums and taxes that go to Medicaid.

And most importantly of all, it helps Tri-Citians get the help they need in our

own community.

Benton County Commissioner Will McKay voted against the increase, suggesting the county look for other funding sources or put the issue on the ballot next spring.

But there is no time for delay.

The legislature meets in January for a short session and the Tri-Cities has the momentum now to get more state funding for the project.

Mental health and drug addiction do not end at the county line. It would help immensely if Franklin County Commissioners also showed support for a facility that will surely be used by its citizens — and which also will, in turn, reduce its jail costs.

An additional penny on a \$10 purchase is an extremely small price to pay and provides a way for all Tri-City residents to contribute to something that will benefit us all.

Franklin County should do its part.