Grays Harbor County Task Force Will Explore Sales Tax Increase

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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The Grays Harbor County Commissioners have asked a task force of local citizens to examine the issues related to a possible sales tax increase and provide them with a report and a recommendation on whether or not such an increase should be enacted locally. Legislation passed in 2005 provides Washington counties with the option of enacting a 1/10th of 1% (or a penny for each $10 spent) sales tax increase through a Board vote. The law limits the use of these funds to support of substance abuse services, mental health services, or therapeutic courts.

Commissioner Mike Wilson noted, "These are very difficult times for everyone, so a new tax is not something any of us want. But this is one we have to look at. We are paying huge costs in our jails and courts now. We need to know if expanded treatment is a way to reduce that cost so we can address other needs in the county."

Larry Kahl, a member of the Board of Directors of Behavioral Health Resources and former director of HarborCrest Behavioral Health Center will chair the group. "We will look carefully at the costs and benefits", Kahl said. "This would be a small increase - one penny on ten dollars - but it has to be justified. If we can keep people out of jail and get them into recovery, we have a chance to lower costs in the long run." The Task Force includes the following members: Rob Atkinson, Grays Harbor Community NetworkDr. John Bausher, Public Health OfficerJudge Art Blauvelt, Montesano, Elma, and McCleary Municipal CourtJudge Steven Brown, County District CourtDave Christensen, County Jail SuperintendentTroy Colley, Coastal Community Action ProgramKathy Crow, Mental Health Advisory BoardSteve Hall, Department of Social and Health ServicesAlex Kluh, Business OwnerStew Menefee, County ProsecutorJude Miniken, Roger Saux ClinicDave Murnen, NeighborworksJeff Myers, Hoquiam Police ChiefGreg Reynvaan, County Juvenile DepartmentGary Rowell, Union Gospel MissionRick Scott, Undersheriff The group plans to conduct about seven public meetings beginning on March 19 and continuing through June. In addition to the task force meetings, the group expects to hold an evening forum in May to focus specifically on consumer and business issues and concerns. The meeting schedule is available on the web at www.ghphss.org (click on the Community Task Force link) or in an alternate format by contacting Margi Slabaugh at (360) 532-8631 ext. 278.