

MINUTES

BOARD OF BENTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Special Board Meeting
Tuesday, October 27, 2015, 6:30 p.m.
Benton County Justice Center
Commissioners Conference Room, 2nd Floor
7122 W. Okanogan Place, Bldg. A
Kennewick, WA 99336

Present: Chairman Jerome Delvin
Commissioner Shon Small
Commissioner James Beaver
County Administrator David Sparks
Clerk of the Board Cami McKenzie

Benton County Employees Present During All or a Portion of the Meeting: Deputy Administrator Loretta Smith Kelty; Adam Fyall, Sustainable Development Manager; Kyle Sullivan, Interim Human Services Manager; Maria Loera, Human Services; Shela Berry, Human Services.

Discussion on the Future of Human Services

Commissioner Small said he invited the following individuals to talk about the mental health services that were provided in their communities: Yakima County Commissioner Kevin Bouchey, Walla Walla County Commissioner Perry Dozier, and Rick Weaver, Comprehensive Mental Health. He said he wanted to hear from others about the benefits of having a private agency take over Crisis Response.

Commissioner Bouchey said as it related to mental health and chemical dependency, Yakima County had undergone a transformation in the last 24 months that was driven by state policy and looking at a stand-alone Human Services and who should be handling these services. He said that once Chemical Dependency was combined with Behavioral Health they would only have the Veterans Program to administer.

Commissioner Bouchey also discussed the other programs that were being administered by other agencies including Homeless Housing, Aging & Long Term, and Developmental Disabilities. He said in the end it saved tax dollars because they were absorbed by the entities and did not require additional administration.

Commissioner Small asked about the risk of liability with the County administering Crisis and how it interacted with the jail. Commissioner Bouchey indicated that Comprehensive Mental Health provided those services within their jail to assess the suicide and mental health risks. He said they had really good results from those contracted services.

Commissioner Small asked if they could now leverage those funds that were saved. Commissioner Bouchey commented that the purpose of these programs was to provide services so keeping the overhead down increased funds for services.

Commissioner Dozier said they started looking at a transition three to four years ago because they had lot of challenges in their Human Services Department and they wanted to look at how they could stop duplicating services for the same clients. Additionally, they felt they could not provide the services as well as those that provided it all the time. He said they had cut costs on administration, however, the transition was not without some difficulties.

Chairman Delvin asked about feedback from clients and Commissioner Dozier said it had been very positive. He said Walla Walla County instituted the 1/10 of 1% tax for mental health and started mental health services right away in the jail.

Additionally, it had saved administration costs and the contractors absorbed most if not all of the employees so the clients were continuing to see the same providers. He said the County did not want to oversee this in the long term and they found the right avenue to privatize.

Commissioner Small said there was concern from the employees about losing their jobs and he asked why the employees were all hired by Comprehensive Health. Mr. Weaver said the employees were in high demand and they hired all but one of the employees.

Commissioner Small asked if there was a down side to privatizing. Commissioner Dozier said there were problems with changing the computer system and some reporting data entry issues but a weight was lifted off Commissioners to have Comprehensive come in because they managed everything and the Commissioners continued to oversee a few contracts.

Commissioner Small also asked Commissioner Bouchey if there was a downside and he voiced his support for the private mental health services offered in his county and said that Comprehensive did the work for them and the Commissioners didn't have to worry about it.

Commissioner Beaver asked if there was a difference in the overhead rate. Commissioner Dozier said they still had three or four employees that administered the contracts but dollar wise he couldn't say. Mr. Weaver said the Comprehensive overhead rate was sub 10 and since the agency took over, he estimated a 50% increase in client services the first year.

Rick Weaver said he believed in the system and didn't like to see waste and wanted to see the communities be successful; the other counties were successful because they had a plan. He urged the commissioners to develop a detailed plan for the future of human services programs in the area. He said the officials in Benton and Franklin counties needed to sort out how human services programs would operate or risk losing control of their design when the state moved toward an integrated system.

Commissioner Small said he felt they had done their due diligence in gathering information and he was in favor of moving forward with privatization.

Commissioner Beaver said he appreciated everyone coming, was sensitive to having the services mandated by the State, so he was in favor of getting a plan.

Chairman Delvin said he wanted to open up the meeting to public comment.

Public Comment

Karen Cagle said it sounded like a lot of research had been done and she wondered if thought had been given to the distinct differences between Walla Walla, Yakima and Benton County and if the Board knew what the citizens wanted. She asked if it would be valuable to form a citizens committee comprised of professionals and the public to study the issue and present that to the Board.

Commissioner Small said he liked the idea of a committee, in its time and place. He said the only thing that would be changing was Crisis Response; other than that, they subcontracted everything else.

Troy Wilson, RSN, stated from the audience that only 20% of the funding from RSN went to Crisis and the other 80% was already contracted.

Chairman Delvin said they would have to meet with Franklin County. Additionally, they were now without chemical dependency services and it would be taken over by the RSN in April and there were some decisions to make.

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Clerk of the Board

Chairman