

NEWS RELEASE

August 9, 2011

MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

**411 NORTH 5TH ST
SHELTON, WA 98584**

TO: KMAS, KRXV, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN

RE: Community Task Force Will Explore Tax for Mental Health, Chemical Dependency and Therapeutic Court Services

The Mason County Board of Commissioners has appointed a community task force to explore whether to increase the sales tax to address issues related to mental illness and chemical dependency in Mason County.

The task force will decide whether to recommend Mason County take advantage of legislation that allows counties to adopt a one tenth of one percent sales tax to enhance prevention and diversion services. The 2005 legislation provides counties with the option of raising the tax, which amounts to a penny for each \$10 spent, and limits its use to substance abuse services, mental health services, and therapeutic courts.

Commissioner Jerry Lingle, who will serve on the community task force, noted, "There is never a good time to talk about raising taxes, but we can't ignore the huge cost we are paying now in jails and courts for people with untreated mental illness and chemical dependency. We have to consider whether expanded treatment and therapeutic courts is a way to reduce that cost."

Mason County Public Health Director Vicki Kirkpatrick said the group will look carefully at services currently available in Mason County, and consider the costs and benefits of raising the tax. "If we can keep people out of jail and get them into recovery we have a chance to lower costs in the long run."

Joining Commissioner Lingle on the task force are Mason County citizens Douglas Sayan, Shawnie Whelan, and Tom Davis; Jeanie Gruber, United Way of Mason County; Tom Haugen, Mason County Jail Services; Kimberly Klint, Mason Matters; Debra Nielsen, Mason County Homeless Shelter; Laura Porter, Family Policy Council;

and Patti Sells, Mason County Housing Coalition. The County is also seeking representatives from the business and health care sector to serve on the Task Force.

The task force will hold three meetings in August and September, and will submit its recommendation to the Commissioners in October.

Public comment is welcome. The county will soon provide an opportunity for public comment on the website. People will also have a chance to learn more about the problems in Mason County, the tax costs and benefits, and make their feelings known at two public open houses:

The first open house will be August 18, 2011 from 6:00 – 8:00 PM immediately following a meeting of the Task Force. The meeting and the open house will be held at the Belfair Community Baptist Church upstairs in the Great Room. Entrance to the room is via an outside ramp that goes directly to the room. The Belfair Community Baptist Church is located at 23300 NE State Route 3, Belfair, WA 98528.

The second open house will be September 8, 2011 from 6:00 – 8:00 PM immediately following a meeting of the Task Force. The meeting and the open house will be held at Mason County Public Works located at 100 W. Public Works Drive, Shelton, WA. 98584.

The last scheduled meeting of the Task Force is September 22, 2011 and will be held at Mason County Public Works from 3:00 – 6:00 PM.

For additional information, please contact Vicki Kirkpatrick, Director, Mason County Public Health at 360-427-9670, Ext. 260 or in Belfair at 360-275-4467, Ext. 260 or via email at: vickik@co.mason.wa.us.

Lynda Ring Erickson
Chair

Jerry Lingle
Commissioner

Tim Sheldon
Commissioner