

From: "Ron Orenstein" <rono@saber.net>
To: "County Board of Supervisors" <bos@mendocinocounty.org>
CC: "Tom Allman" <tomallman@hotmail.com>
Date: 7/13/2017 4:23 PM
Subject: Mental Health ballot initiative
Attachments: Letter to BOS re Mental Health committee - 2017.doc

Greetings,

I have attached a letter concerning the subject matter, for your consideration.

Ron Orenstein



July 13, 2017

To: Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
Carre Brown
John McCowen
Georgeanne Crosky
Dan Gjerde
Dan Hamburg

cc: Tom Allman

From: Ron Orenstein

Subject: Discussion of Mental Health Facilities Sales Tax Initiative for November, 2017 ballot

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Because the Board of Supervisors has appointed an ad hoc committee to work on the subject ballot initiative, I want to take this opportunity to offer my take on the issue, and to offer some advice on helping to make this a successful effort.

For what it's worth, and for the record I am in favor of, and support the creation of much needed mental health facilities in Mendocino county. I won't re-state the arguments for this; they are obvious on the face of it, but I do believe the last effort to pass a tax measure failed, albeit by a slim margin, because, in my opinion, it was incomplete, and it left too many questions unanswered and/or left to be resolved at a later date. In essence, the previous ballot measure in November, 2016 asked the voters to tax themselves at the rate of ½ percent for five years, leaving the very real question of how the more than \$40 million raised was to be spent.

The problem is, the measure inferred that nothing would be done until the tax sun-setted, five years after its implementation, and only then would any action be taken to determine what would be built, and where; how much it would cost to build; and would there even be enough money in the fund to cover the cost. As we have witnessed with the building of the new Howard Hospital in Willits, costs have a way of outpacing cash accumulation! There was a very real possibility that a large sum of money would have been collected with no possibility of accomplishing a complete project.

And on top of that is the realization that a facility that is needed *today* probably wouldn't even be started for maybe five years; too late to ease the current problem.

I am aware that building projects are complicated and require a great deal of design and budget analysis, and trying to develop a ballot initiative to raise money to implement that plan is different than developing a plan by which to spend the money. But it seems like it would be a waste of time to develop a ballot strategy only to see it fail, or worse, to see the Initiative passed only to discover that it can't be accomplished the way the voters envisioned it would be. So short of developing a full blown facility building plan in the brief time that you have given yourselves, I would like to offer a shortcut:

- 1) Have your committee or County staff do a quick inventory of the available properties in the county that could accommodate the project. It can be either empty lots or properties with existing buildings on them. This information shouldn't take too long to gather.
- 2) Based on the possible locations, have your building experts come up with a "seat of the

pants” estimate; nowhere near being an accurate estimate, but more like an “order of magnitude guesstimate.”

- 3) Include this information in the ballot language. I realize that this can be tricky, because the voters could very likely misunderstand that you are simply providing project parameters, but careful wording of the ballot measure could overcome this.
- 4) Develop a construction budget time line based on the various locations. For example, if one of the considerations is the old Howard Hospital, a renovation budget can be developed that, when compared to the potential cash in-flow from the new tax, might reveal that renovation could begin in year one or two, and not have wait for the full amount to be received in five years.

The bottom line is this: voters are leery of spending money with no assurance that something of value will result. Mental health is a problem of which most county residents are painfully aware, and most support the Sheriff's action to do something about it. But after many years as a public official, I am aware, as are you, that good intentions can quickly turn into serious problems if they aren't carefully analyzed, and if all of the “what if's” aren't fully considered. In my past life, I spent many years in the private sector as a Project Manager, and what I have proposed is something that was done routinely, and I offer whatever assistance in developing a plan, that may be desired.

Ron Orenstein