

BOULDER DAILY CAMERA: JULY 16, 2008
Commissioners consider extending 'worthy cause' tax



PRESCHOOL AND INFANT STUDENTS AT BOULDER DAY NURSERY, A PAST RECIPIENT OF WORTHY CAUSE POOL FUNDS

The Boulder County commissioners Thursday will discuss whether to put an extension of the "worthy cause" sales tax - which provides capital improvement money for local nonprofits - on this fall's ballot.

The tax, which amounts to a nickel on every \$100 purchase, was first passed in 2000 with a scant 50.5 percent of the vote. Three years later, the tax was extended by a much healthier margin.

"I think the first couple of rounds of worthy cause funding have shown that it's a program that really works to help our nonprofits and, more importantly, to help the vulnerable people in our community that need help," said Commissioner Will Toor, who said he's leaning toward voting to put the extension on the ballot but won't make his final decision until after he hears from the public.

Eight nonprofits have already been designated to receive 25 percent of the revenue generated from the tax if it passes, including Mapleton Early Childhood Center, Clinica Campesina, Mental Health Center of Boulder County and Special Transit. The remaining funding would go into a pool that qualifying nonprofits could access through an annual request process.

"The funding would be a huge benefit because capital campaigns are hard, especially for smaller, grass-roots nonprofits," said Steve Callander, executive director of the Boulder Day Nursery Association, which is one of the eight designated agencies. "Boulder County really gets how hard it is for nonprofits to raise money for capital, and it understands what a good job the nonprofit sector is doing in meeting the needs of the less fortunate."

The Boulder Day Nursery would use the money to help expand its facilities, which now serves about 60 kids on any given day.

The last two times the tax was on the ballot, it met some opposition from people who argued that the government should not decide which cause is worthy.

"This referendum is not about whether you, a single voter, want to give a penny for a worthy cause," Brian Schwartz wrote in a Camera editorial in 2003. "It's about whether you want to force, through power of the law, your neighbors to support a particular set of charities instead of their own favorite charities. ... The sales tax will make it a crime for people not to donate to certain charities."

Even so, more than 60 percent of the voters that year elected to keep the tax in place.

It is set to retire at the end of 2008. And, according to Edwina Salazar, executive director of OUR Center in Longmont, the need for nonprofit services is steadily rising as the economy falls. The center is also one of the eight agencies designated for funding.

"There is squeezing in all different areas," she said. "Even volunteers aren't able to afford the gas to get here to volunteer."

OUR Center will use the money, if the tax passes, to consolidate and possibly expand its operations, which are now scattered in five different buildings.

Laura Snider, 07/16/2008 07:20:00 AM MDT