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Guest commentary: A worthy tax that does enormous good

Steve Callander & Greg Harms

Every year, Boulder County nonprofit organizations struggle to raise the operational funding required to provide essential services to families and individuals in our community who are in need. As demand for services increases, these organizations periodically need funding for new or expanded facilities. The Worthy Cause 1B initiative supports these capital needs.

As executives of Boulder County nonprofit agencies that provide emergency food, shelter and clothing; health and mental health care; early childhood education; and transportation for people with limited mobility, we ask voters to consider the difference their one cent sales tax on a \$20 purchase can make.

For the family of three, suddenly homeless because of the dad's job loss due to the bad economy, Worthy Cause proceeds will help the agency that feeds his family while he looks for work. For the single mother raising two young kids while working as a waitress, Worthy Cause proceeds will support the agency that provides child care while she works and attends school. For the 82-year-old woman faced with the loss of her driver's license, Worthy Cause proceeds will help the agency that provides her with transportation options.

In 2000, the Boulder County Commissioners created the Worthy Cause initiative and took it to the citizens of Boulder County for approval. Worthy Cause was designed to support capital projects --bricks and mortar -- of local human service agencies. Boulder County voters supported that initiative in 2000 and again in 2003. In the past five years alone, more than 30 agencies have increased their capacity to provide service by expanding or building new facilities. In these difficult economic times, agencies in our county are anticipating an increased call for their services and increased stress on their physical facilities. Worthy Cause will help them meet the burgeoning need.

The commissioners surveyed Boulder County citizens before designing the 2008 Worth Cause initiative. The county-wide human services master plan process included input from hundreds of community representatives to assess current needs. The commissioners used the findings from this process to determine priority areas for the Worthy Cause 1B initiative. Those areas include basic needs such as food and clothing; child care and early childhood education; primary health, mental and dental clinics; and services for the elderly and people with disabilities.

This 2008 Worthy Cause initiative has been designed to ensure that as many organizations as possible have access to capital funding. Three-quarters of the funds will be available for application by any health or human services non-profit agency. Those applications will be reviewed through a competitive request for proposal process. Eight nonprofit agencies, all with near-term capital needs, will receive 25 percent of the funding generated by this tax.

At a time when the economy is struggling, so are more families and individuals in Boulder County. This is an extension of the existing tax, not an increase in taxes. This tiny tax of one penny on a \$20 purchase will do enormous good.

Callander is executive director of the Boulder Day Nursery; Harms is executive director of the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless. This column was also signed by Lenna Kottke, executive director of Special Transit; Pete Leibig, president and chief executive officer of Clinica Family Health Services; Barbara Ryan, executive director of the Mental Health Center Serving Boulder County. 10/21/2008 12:00:00 AM MDT