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Changes proposed for tax allocations to mental health services

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Published: Tuesday, November 12, 2013 at 5:21 p.m.

Some changes will be proposed to the Etowah County 1-percent sales tax allocations to include funding for the CED Mental Health Center.

The Etowah County Commission agreed Tuesday to pass a resolution next week that reflects changing the wording for the 1-percent sales tax category of payments to include "mental health" instead of "mental retardation" in connection with three 310 boards. That encompasses a more broad description of the services provided.

Currently the CED Mental Health Center does not receive any of the funding. The three 310 boards split \$50,000 and the Smeltzer Center receives \$60,000.

It was discussed to ask legislators to reallocate \$15,000 — \$10,000 to Etowah County Rescue Squad and \$5,000 to Attalla Rescue Squad — to be combined with the \$50,000 for mental retardation. The \$65,000 total then could be split four ways instead of three, between the 310 boards and the CED Mental Health.

The 310 boards in Etowah County — the Northeast Alabama MR/DD Authority, Greater Etowah Mental Retardation 310 Board, and Regional 310 Authority Board — operate facilities for mental health services, more commonly known as group homes.

It was suggested the commission request from the rescue squads the number and location of the calls in which they have responded this year.

Sheriff Todd Entrekin said he supports the change because the work load of the CED Mental Health Center has increased significantly.

"We work with them every day," he said.

At the time the funding was approved for the rescue squads years ago, the agencies provided many services that are now provided by other agencies.

Now each volunteer fire department, the sheriff's office, and full-time fire departments such as Gadsden and Rainbow City, have boats, dive teams, much more advanced search and rescue equipment, and can handle the calls for service in their areas.

"Back in the day, they provided a valuable service," Entrekin said. "Now we've changed how we respond."

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