

## Drug, mental health boards near merger

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Louise Barkan of the ADAS board, left, listens while Linnie Willis from the mental health board explains a point.

Louise Barkan admitted yesterday she may have been the last one to believe in the concept of merging the Lucas County Mental Health Board and the Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services Board of Lucas County.

But when she appeared before the Lucas County commissioners at a special meeting yesterday, she said she now is convinced a combined agency is the best way to continue providing services to residents who need help. And after a contentious meeting and the airing of several concerns, the commissioners agreed - unanimously.

Commissioners approved a resolution expressing the intent to create a Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services. The final vote will be taken Tuesday at the commissioners' regular meeting.

"The fact of the matter is that there is less money everywhere. We feel that together we can get what we need," said Ms. Barkan, chairman of the ADAS board. "I was one of the last believers. What we're trying to do is get the best service for the most amount of clients."

Members of both boards appeared before the commissioners to present their rationale for the merger and to answer questions.

They received plenty from Commissioner Maggie Thurber, who said she was concerned that much of the reasoning for merging wasn't actually written up in the 15-page merger study presented to the commissioners.

In particular, Ms. Thurber questioned the perception that the merger was a way to fund the ADAS board, which has been unsuccessful in gaining voter support for levies.

The mental health board, which has passed levies, has a \$45 million budget.

The ADAS board, which is funded with state and federal money, has a budget of about \$10 million.

Ms. Thurber also asked that the study group give her five reasons why a merger was not a good idea - a request that frustrated David Zoll, an ADAS board member and member of the merger study group.

"I'm amazed that someone in your position of leadership would engage in this type of attack," he responded, before saying that there were not five but one reason that he could see for not moving forward with the merger. The main concern, he said, was whether the smaller ADAS board would be swallowed up by the larger mental health agency.

Linnie Willis, chairman of the mental health board, said that her board also had concerns that were discussed during the nearly yearlong study process, including what would happen to mental health services after adding ADAS to the system.

"At the end of the day, we arrived at the conclusion that we had to go forward and try to find the best way to make an individual whole," she said, referring to those clients who need services from both agencies. "If we only deal with one side of the coin or the other, then you haven't healed the whole person and your job is still not done."

According to the mental health board, the agencies had 2,937 consumers who needed help from both agencies during the 2004 fiscal year and 3,238 dual consumers the following fiscal year.

The study, completed in February, said a combined agency would be beneficial to consumers and would save the county more than \$270,000 in administrative costs.

It also recommended creating a new 18-member board.

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