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Metro home-rule bill on way to Senate

SALEM — The Oregon House passed a measure Thursday that sets the course for residents of the Metropolitan Service District to write a home-rule charter and put it on the ballot.

Senate Bill 298, which previously passed the Senate, had been amended in a House committee and will go back to the Senate for final approval before going to the governor. The House vote was 45-14.

The service district includes parts of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. Some rural residents have worried that the charter committee makeup would be dominated by Portland-based, urban residents. Five of the negative votes came from representatives of Clackamas and Washington counties, and another from an East Multnomah County legislator.

The House Intergovernmental Affairs Committee amended the bill to guarantee Multnomah County five members of the 16-member charter committee, with four each from Washington and Clackamas

counties. The remaining three could come from any county. The earlier, Senate-passed version guaranteed Washington and Clackamas counties three members each and Multnomah County five.

Rep. Larry Sowa, D-Oregon City, said the bill would allow Portlanders to tell rural areas of the metropolitan region "how to run our lives and our government."

Rep. John Meek, R-Hillsboro, who led support for the bill in the floor debate, said later that rural areas of the region "are either going to be part of the process or we're going to be dragged along."

Rep. Lonnie Roberts, D-Portland, who lives in east Multnomah County, said after casting a "no" vote that charter committee members would be chosen "by politicians and bureaucrats, and I'm not sure that people are going to really have a say in this thing."

Home rule would give metropolitan-area voters, instead of the Legislature, power over Metro.

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Metro charter measure goes to governor

SALEM — The Senate on Tuesday approved the final form of a bill that lays the path for developing and voting on a

LEGISLATIVE NOTEBOOK

home-rule charter for the

Metropolitan Service District.

The measure, Senate Bill 298, previously had passed the Senate and then was amended in the House. The second vote in the Senate was 25-1. The bill will go to the governor.

To meet objections from relatively rural areas in the Metro district, the House had amended the bill to guarantee Washington and Clackamas counties four spots each on the 16-member charter commission. Multnomah County is guaranteed five. The version originally passed by the Senate guaranteed three seats each for Washington and Clackamas counties.

The remaining three seats can come from anywhere within the Metro district, which includes Portland and portions of all three counties.

Home rule would give metropolitan area voters power over the regional government without oversight or approval from the Legislature.

Sen. Joyce Cohen, D-Lake Oswego, cast the lone negative vote Tuesday.

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BILLS PASSED

■ **HOME RULE:** Senate Bill 298 outlines how members of a home rule charter committee for the Metropolitan Service District would be chosen and the method for adopting a proposed charter. The House version guarantees additional representation from Clackamas and Washington counties. Passed the House, 45-14, and will go to the Senate for final passage.

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BILLS PASSED

■ **METRO CHARTER:** Senate Bill 298 outlines the means for writing and voting on a home rule charter for the Metropolitan Service District. The Senate voted 25-1 to approve the bill, had been amended in the House.

NEW BILLS

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These bills were introduced in the Oregon Legislature:

■ **SOLID WASTE:** Senate Bill 3352 would establish policies, goals and requirements for solid waste management. It would establish a Recycling Markets Development Fund and provide for a surcharge on garbage bills.

Merging City/County Would Save Costs: Create Willamette County?

By Patrick Mazza

As local governments in the Portland metropolitan region stare Measure 5's property tax revenue loss in the face, ideas for merging government units and services are gaining more play than they have in many years.

Seeking cost savings through creating larger scale organizations, officials are pondering a range of scenarios. Minimally, they are looking at gradual consolidations of services such as parks, planning and police.

"The ultimate is Willamette County," Kafoury said. County lines as they exist today "are ridiculous. They don't fit the development patterns of the late 20th century city."

But larger schemes on the backburner since the 1970s are also on the table. Among them are unifying Portland and Multnomah County into one government, and joining Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties and possibly Metro into a Willamette County spanning most of the metropolis.

New roles are also being eyed for the Metro. City and county citizens advisory committees just this week issued a joint recommendation that all parks be placed under the agency. Metro itself is doing no formal planning regarding consolidations. But it is mentioned as a potential regional administrator for planning, transportation, water, law enforcement and libraries, said Dave Kanner, Metro senior public affairs specialist.

Of those agendas, two which seem to be gaining significant attention are city-county consolidation and some limited mergers of tri-county services.

County Commissioner Rick Bauman is considering a resolution which would start the process towards combining city hall and the county courthouse. If the county commissioners passed such a measure, it would trigger a mechanism set up by state law. An 11-member citizens commission would form to draft a city-county charter. The group would have a year to do that, after which the matter would go before voters.

Drafting the charter could cost up to \$125,000, Bauman said.

Citizens rejected a similar measure in 1974. But Bauman sees a changed situation now. In the 70s, "There was no compelling need. The mid-70s were a rich time in this state." Now local governments are facing deep budget problems, he added.

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The 1974 proposal also lacked a strong base of support, Bauman said. Now, he is gaining "a very good response" from the public. One important exception is mayors of the county's smaller cities, he noted.

Under state law, Gresham and other cities could continue as separate entities if their citizens voted down a merger, even if Portland and the county combined. Bauman acknowledged that situation would cause "real difficulty."

Opposition to full city-county consolidation is also coming from City Council.

While bringing together some services now spread between the two units is an active issue, "Consolidation per se is an idea whose time has passed," City Commissioner Earl Blumenauer said.

"The issue is no longer complete merger between the city and county," City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury said.

Instead, both Blumenauer and Kafoury are looking to a broader, regional government. Blumenauer said the major consolidations would come between the three metropolitan counties and Metro.

"The ultimate is Willamette County," Kafoury said. County lines as they exist today "are ridiculous. They don't fit the development patterns of the late 20th century city."

Blumenauer wants to examine regionalizing such services as election administration, jails and tax assessments and collections.

"I think there's some big money to be saved there," he said, adding that progress toward that regionalization can be made this year.

That county-city citizens advisory group in its "Report of the Citizens' Committee on City/County Consolidation" this week recommended creation of a tri-county tax assessment office.

Bauman said eventually the three counties need to be merged. But that will not happen in one "big bang. We're going to have to take one step at a time." He said the next logical step is a unified city-county.

But, in Blumenauer's view, "If we consolidate the city and the county, it will make it harder to consolidate the three counties. Portland makes some people nervous."

Where action appears more likely in the short-term is in splicing together some functions now split between city and county.

Among recommendations of the Citizens'

Committee on City/County Consolidation were: merge land use planning, or divide it between Portland and Gresham planning arms; put cable regulation on a countywide basis; create a united city-county citizen involvement office; study countywide collection of business taxes; and place the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission and the Commission on Aging under county purview.

"Wherever you say, 'Let's get rid of a job,' there will be resistance," Abrams commented. But in the face of budget crises, "You can't just shuffle the deck chairs on the Titanic."

In February, Mayor Bud Clark and County Chair Gladys McCoy asked managers to look into ways to save money by merging services. Clark said \$500,000 to \$1 million might be saved. But last week officials were disappointed by a city Office of Finance and Administration report showing only \$9,700 in potential efficiencies.

However, Blumenauer said, "We were asking the wrong questions of the wrong people." He also noted that in business, mergers often add to costs in the beginning while reducing expenses in the long run.

Marc Abrams, co-chair of the citizens' consolidation committee, sees substantial cost-cutting possibilities. His group did not put dollar figures on its proposals because it did not have the technical expertise. Nonetheless, "It's just logic. If you merge services and you have one administrator, you reduce costs."

Abrams also predicts a more comprehensive regional government. "Some version of it is inevitable and desirable. It faces formidable obstacles," he said.

Any level of consolidation will face some opposition, he noted.

"Wherever you say, 'Let's get rid of a job,' there will be resistance," Abrams commented. But in the face of budget crises, "You can't just shuffle the deck chairs on the Titanic."

Skanner 3-13-91