

# Is mythical 'Willamette County' in the works?

More than 200 years ago, the political future of this country was determined by a small group of dedicated patriots who helped write the Constitution of the United States.

In the Portland metropolitan area today, a new process is going forward that closely resembles that of 200 years ago. A small group of dedicated citizens has embarked on defining the political future of the region by crafting a "constitution" for the Metropolitan Service District (Metro).

With the passage of Ballot Measure 1 in November 1990, the citizens of the state of Oregon authorized the drafting of a home rule charter for Metro. This new document, when it is completed and



if it is adopted by the electorate, has the potential to change the way in which cities and counties function in relation to one another in this region.

Seldom in recent history have so few citizens had the ability to affect political change as do the 16 members of the Metro Charter Committee. The possibilities for change could include a wide range of

revisions in our current system of governance. The committee could devise a structure in which we created one large county. Mythical "Willamette County" could become a reality.

The committee could recommend a system where local governments give up their powers for land use and transportation planning to a regional authority. The design might call for a Metro that only delivers regional services like the zoo and solid waste, while local governments define areas of regional significance through a cooperative governmental council.

The charter could call for a council of three full-time Metro councilors, or it could propose a council of 15, 20, 30 or even 40 part-time

volunteer councilors to increase the representative-to-voter ratio for equal representation.

The function of the Metropolitan Service District and its relationships to all other state and local governments will be redefined. Its ability to raise money to carry out its appointed functions will be determined. Metro's structure will be redesigned and its role in our political system revised.

Who is making the decisions about the future structure of our system of local governance?

Do they bring to the table the breadth of experience which a process of this nature requires? Do they represent the many diverse cultural, social and political interests that make up the citizenry of the en-

tire region? Can they set aside biases toward one political system over another and work toward drafting a "constitution" that will serve the region well for the next 200 years? Do they recognize the importance of the effort upon which they have embarked? Have they made a commitment to the communities whose future they will be shaping?

The answer to these essential questions is YES. The citizens of the region are well represented by the members of the Metro Charter Committee. The 16 delegates to the region's constitutional convention are dedicated, intelligent, thoughtful and energetic. The future structure of the political system should be secure when the region's constitution is completed.

However, all the efforts of this dedicated group of citizens will be naught if the electorate does not play its part. Every voter in the region has an obligation to follow the process closely and to voice an opinion on each of the issues the charter committee will debate. Each time a citizen decides to let an issue ride, or decides that the decisions are someone else's problem, then a choice has been made to give up control of governance to another.

The Metro Charter Committee is just beginning its work. Now is the time to join the effort and design the future.

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