

Metro charter panel emphasizes more regional planning

By STEVE LAW

A powerful committee charting the future of Portland's regional government is advancing the idea of a far-reaching plan to guide land use and development throughout the tri-county area.

The radical proposal by the Metro Charter Committee would push the Metropolitan Service District toward taking a much stronger role in regional land-use planning.

Proponents say a regional comprehensive plan might restrict strip development that clogs suburban roads. Or it might prevent a large employer like Mentor Graphics from locating far from employee housing and transit service as the company did when it moved operations to Wilsonville.

"The spectacle of Seattle" is looming over the committee's work, said Charlie Hales, staff vice president of the Home

Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland.

With a half-million new residents expected here in two decades, the mishmash of various city and county plans won't do the trick to accommodate growth and maintain Portland's livability, he said.

"Twenty-seven local governments really can't do this," Hales said. "I don't think we have any choice."

City and county land-use plans would have to comply with the regional plan, said Frank Josselson, a land-use attorney who's leading the charge for regional planning. But Josselson added that city and county officials should have to "sign off" on the regional plan.

As an example of what the regional plan might do, Josselson cited Mentor Graphics' decision to leave Beaverton for an undeveloped part of Wilsonville. That move was bad planning, Josselson said, because

there was inadequate transit and housing for Mentor employees in the area. With a regional land-use plan, "you're not going to have a Mentor Graphics sited out in the middle of nowhere," he said.

Hales, who is a candidate for Portland City Council, said regional planning could avert the rampant strip development and poor transportation planning that have

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plagued roads like Scholls Ferry in Tigard and Beaverton.

Metro is a regional government serving the urbanized portions of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. It coordinates regional planning for solid waste and transportation and manages things such as the Metro Washington Park Zoo and the Oregon Convention Center.

It was somewhat of an experiment when it was formed in the late 1970s as the nation's first elected regional government. But in recent years, Metro has been taking on new roles as it gains credibility and political support.

The Metro Charter Committee was selected by state, county and Metro officials to frame a constitution for Metro. Currently, Metro has no home-rule charter, which makes its existence and powers subject to the whims of the Oregon Legislature.

After the charter committee completes a draft proposal, it will seek public comment. Then a final proposal will be put on the November 1992 ballot for a single up-or-down vote.

Some committee members think the idea of a regional comprehensive plan has merit but will doom the charter's chances for passage. Others, like former Sherwood Mayor Mary Tobias, don't like it because it shifts too much power away from local officials.

Planning works best when it's closest to citizens, said Tobias, president of the Tualatin Valley Economic Development Corp. Having one comprehensive plan for the Portland area will "homogenize the region," she said. Tobias said it would be best to maintain a mix of communities with different flavors and various modes of commercial development.

Tobias favors an alternative approach to region-wide planning that is embodied by Metro's recently adopted Regional Urban Growth Goals and Objectives.

The so-called RUGGOs call for Metro to consider a series of special-purpose regional plans as needed. Examples would be plans to improve air quality and preserve open space, across city and county lines.

The RUGGOs process for approving those plans would be akin to how Metro

does transportation planning for the region. A committee made up of delegates from various cities and counties hammers out a regional plan, based on horse-trading and compromise. For instance, Clackamas County officials agreed to support a tax measure for west-side light rail as long as money to study a future line in their county was included.

Under the RUGGOs, Metro will create a committee dominated by city and county appointees to frame special-purpose plans as needed. The elected Metro Council will have to OK the plans.

The Metro Charter Committee proposal ignores the RUGGOs model of city-Metro cooperation and "throws out 2 1/4 years of work" on the RUGGOs, said Gresham Mayor Gussie McRobert.

Tobias agreed, saying, "There's an incredible impetus to doing that regional problem-solving without it coming down from on high."

But a powerful coalition of forces wants to force Metro to take more regional planning authority. Officials from the Home Builders Association and 1000 Friends of Oregon, an environmental land-use watchdog group, say the RUGGOs process could amount to weak planning because of turf battles between various cities and counties.

In contrast, the proposal advanced by Josselson and others calls for Metro to adopt a 50-year vision for the metro area, including the ultimate population and settlement levels for the region.

The proposal also would have Metro plan for new communities, expansions of communities and sites for industrial and office developments with a wide impact. The proposal also would mandate Metro to plan for regional water supplies, green spaces and other issues that are suggested but not required by the RUGGOs.

Charter committee members will have to walk a fine line to keep criticism of their plans from jeopardizing a public vote on the charter. Metro officials frequently hear citizens complain the regional agency is an unneeded layer of government.

But some committee members say citizens are ready for dramatic steps to improve land-use planning.

"I think voters want to keep from happening here in Oregon what is happening in Seattle and in California," Josselson said. Oregon has been lucky to avoid the development pressures faced by those areas, he said, but it won't be spared such pressure much longer.

Hales said that aside from Victoria, British Columbia, Portland is the "last livable city left on the West Coast."

"Boy, we better get it right," he said.

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Charter panelist says more public input vital

By BILL CHIDESTER
Of the Argus

More public opinion about the Metropolitan Service District's future role is needed, directors of the Greater Hillsboro Area Chamber of Commerce were told Tuesday.

There was poor attendance at public hearings held this fall by a committee appointed to draft a "home rule" charter for the regional agency. And the charter may be drafted before the public again is invited to review it, the directors were told.

Mary Tobias of Sherwood met with the chamber board to discuss the charter drafting process. She is one of four representatives from Washington County on the 16-member charter committee.

Oregon voters in 1990 authorized Metro to write a "home rule" charter or constitution that will spell out the agency's responsibilities and taxing powers.

Once the committee finishes its work, voters in the Metro district—

most of Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties—will be asked in November 1992 to approve it.

But Tobias said the charter committee is moving ahead without agreement on the purpose of a regional government such as Metro or the charter.

"We seem to agree on the need for some regional services, but I would like to see more local input," she said.

The charter committee, she noted, is divided on the scope of Metro's authority. Some members favor strong regional authority over local communities, especially in land-use regulations. Others oppose more regional government.

Once the charter is in place, Metro could then adopt a regional framework plan, a system of land-use regulations that would override local zoning.

"I'm concerned that Metro might adopt one regional comprehensive plan for the entire (tri-county) area," she added.

Tobias, who is president of the non-profit, pro-business Tualatin Valley Economic Development Corp., said a single regional plan would remove the diversity of existing communities and hurt their

chances of attracting new business and industry.

"One reason we do so well in bringing new industry to Washington County is our variety of environments. A business can choose from a rural community like Sherwood or North Plains, an urban area like Beaverton, a small college town like Forest Grove or a county seat like Hillsboro," said Tobias.

The Metro charter and Metro's future authority over local communities is a major issue, but the general public seems uninterested, said Jerry Willey, president of the Hillsboro chamber.

"I'm concerned about apathy, and I'm not sure what we can do about it," he said.

Flo Rhea noted the lack of attendance at the chamber's government affairs committee. "And we've had some outstanding speakers. Maybe the issues are too complex," she said.

But Jim Harp said the problem lies with an older generation that is tired and a younger generation that won't take on the burden of responsibility.

He also said it's becoming harder to prod government into action unless there's a crisis.

11/26/91
Cusma to speak
at luncheon forum

LAKE OSWEGO — Rena Cusma, executive officer of the Metropolitan Service District, will be the guest speaker Wednesday at a luncheon forum at the Lakewood Chamber of Arts.

The luncheon, open to the public, starts at 11:45 a.m. Wednesday in the center at 308 S. State St. Reservations for the \$9 meal may be made through the Lake Oswego Chamber of Commerce.

Cusma is in her second term as executive officer and in her first elected post. The district operates solid waste facilities in the region, coordinates transportation planning and land use and operates the Washington Park Zoo. It also oversees the Metropolitan E.R. Commission, which manages the region's convention center, trail- and spectator facilities.