

No date 1991 based on *

Early action for Metro (undated)

The property-tax limitation is commanding legislative attention, but lawmakers must preserve some of it for another constitutional amendment approved Tuesday.

The Oregon Constitution now authorizes the Metropolitan Service District to have its own charter, like home-rule counties and most cities.

But it is up to the Legislature to establish the machinery to design a charter and bring it to a vote. For several reasons, that task should be taken up and completed early by the 1991 Legislature.

A charter commission must be formed. It has to cover a range of interests throughout the region without being too unwieldy to function. It must have time for a thorough debate, including ample public participation. Yet the process ought not drag on to the point of collapse.

Moreover, the finished product must be aligned with the election cycle. A vote on a charter preferably should be held in May 1992, but no later than the following November.

So, if the Legislature passed legislation within the first two months of the session, the charter commission

would have just a year to put something in final form for the May ballot, a year and a half for November.

There will be a debate on whether the Metro Council is too large or too small and whether to appoint or elect the executive. Out of it is certain to come some structural change that would require another election after the charter is approved.

If the charter passes in May, the November election could take up changes in elective positions, and the new government would be ready to go in January 1993. If the charter is approved in November, such changes would have to be made in a special election the following spring for a new government to begin in July 1993.

Waiting for 1994 elections might drag out the process until it dropped from public view. Voting on the charter in 1992 and waiting to implement it in 1994 elections would stick the region with a lame-duck government far too long.

So legislators would be wise to move their duties under the new constitutional amendment near the head of their 1991 agenda.