

**NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF  
REGIONAL GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE OUTLINE FOR A  
HOME RULE CHARTER FOR  
A METROPOLITAN SERVICE DISTRICT**

This document provides a summary of the basic rationale underlying the Regional Governance Committee's proposed outline for a charter for the regional government.

**PURPOSE OF CHARTER**

RGC believes that a charter for a Metropolitan Service District should set forth the process by which this region will determine what constitutes a "matter of metropolitan concern" and, once this determination is made, what form of treatment such regional matters should receive. That process should include two fundamental components: 1) the application of decision criteria which are specified in the Charter; and 2) and required consultation with affected governments in the area.

**PURPOSE OF REGIONAL GOVERNMENT**

The overriding need for a regional government in this region today relates to regional planning for growth management and continuing to provide existing service delivery functions and financing for major regional facilities.

These priorities could change over the life of the charter. The region will be best served if the charter is flexible enough to allow the region to use its regional government to best meet regional needs as they change. Fifty years from now it is possible that the regional government should be primarily a vehicle for service delivery and have only a limited planning role.

**PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

To create a government with the flexibility needed to respond effectively to changing circumstances will require strong checks and balances. RGC believes that the following principles should be followed when designing these checks and balances for the regional government:

- Collaboration between regional and local governments should be required prior to making any decision to use the flexible powers of the regional government to expand into a new area of planning or service delivery;
- On-going consultation with local governments as planning and service delivery functions are executed should be required; and
- The directly elected legislative body should retain final decision-making authority so long as the collaborative processes are specified in the Charter.

**REGIONAL PLANNING ROLE**

Generally, the regional government should provide planning for matters of metropolitan concern and local governments should deliver services. However, there are exceptions. Sometimes planning issues which affect the entire region are best handled by cooperative local action. This is

particularly true for certain issues which have strong state and federal involvement and creating a new role for a regional government would only add another layer of government without adding value to the planning product.

When the regional government develops planning documents for a certain topic area, the general formula should be that the regional government identifies clear regional objectives and performance standards and allows local governments to determine how best to attain those goals and performance standards through local comprehensive plans and development codes. It is appropriate for the regional government to hold local governments accountable for meeting the regional needs; it is not appropriate for the regional government to prescribe how each local community will meet those needs.

METRO can make major advances in growth management planning through more active use of its current regional planning authorities. The RUGGOs, which were supported by a broad base of local governments in the region, have set the foundation for this enhanced regional planning role. The planning system set forth in the Charter should build on the good work done to date as a starting point. Creation of a regional vision (2040 study), regional goals and objectives (RUGGOs), performance standards (Metropolitan housing rule, new state transportation rule) and functional plans (Regional Transportation Plan) are planning tools which are known and understood. More importantly, they can if properly utilized provide the effective regional growth management strategy which everyone desires. What is needed is the time and resources to apply these tools.

## **STARTING FUNCTIONS IN CHARTER**

The Charter should give the regional government the planning role it needs to effectively manage the regional aspects of growth and carry forward the service delivery functions it currently has. Additional planning and service delivery functions may occur after application of a rigorous analytical and collaborative process. So long as the Charter requires the use of decision criteria and a sound decision-making process there is no need or benefit from trying to define or limit what future directions the regional government might take.

## **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

RGC believes that the Charter represents an opportunity to improve the structure through which METRO today is governed. While there may be no absolutes when it comes to designing a government's structure, we do believe there are some general principles which are important. These general principles include:

- The METRO Council must be an effective policy making body. Its members must have the time to become knowledgeable on the important policy issues. The size of the Council needs to promote sound group processes and decision-making. The Council needs to be visible to the region so that the voters can hold it accountable for its actions. All of this leads us to believe the Council should be smaller in size than it is today - probably seven members.
- The government needs to operate as efficiently as possible. There is no benefit at this level of government to the costs of overlapping staff functions of executive and legislative arms of the government. The current system promotes confusion between executive and legislative functions, and between regional and local government roles. Every argument within or among governments in this region today further convinces voters that their government is not doing what they want it do - spend their money wisely to solve real problems. The current system which splits executive and legislative functions and poorly defines the role of regional and local governments results in overlap, duplication, and

inefficiency. It should be changed. The METRO Council should establish policy for the region and hire a professional manager to oversee the operations of the government.

RGC is still working on the issue of whether the Council members should be full-time, part-time or volunteers with a paid per diem. The ultimate answer to this question will depend on the extent of the responsibilities assigned initially to the regional government and what the voters will be willing to support. RGC offers four alternative approaches to this issue for consideration at this time and will make its final recommendations later this spring.

## FINANCING

While it is necessary to spend the time to think through the details of function and form, RGC believes that the voters are going to be most concerned about how this government is financed. We can all be assured that there are people and groups within this region who will scrutinize the financial aspects of this Charter with a magnifying glass. This is not a particularly opportune time for any one government to have a referendum on itself before the voters. However, we believe the post Measure 5 climate can be seized as an opportunity to demonstrate to the voters that passage of this Charter can and will improve financial accountability in their regional government. If the financing portion of the Charter is done properly, it should enhance the chances for passage.

The general principles of RGC's financing recommendations are:

- Funding sources should be linked to functions. Some funding sources are not appropriate to use for some functions. The people should be able to understand what is being funded when they pay a particular fee or tax.
- Generally, the regional government should have access to the same funding sources as local governments so long as they are approved by the voters. The exception to this is property taxes, which for operating purposes should be limited to currently approved taxes. Under Measure 5 adding the regional government to the confused property tax situation would simply make a difficult situation worse.
- More oversight and accountability should be added to the current financial processes. A citizens budget committee should be required. Clear limits on spending user fees for general government functions should be required. Limits should be placed on the annual growth which is allowed in the revenues collected from the excise tax on regional government functions. Rate review by local governments should be provided for whenever a user fee such as solid waste must be collected for the regional government at the local level. Independent financial and performance audits should be required.

A government financed in this manner should meet the appropriate tests for financial accountability which good government at any level requires and which the voters surely will demand.