

Arts, green spaces matter to Metro

By JAMES MAYER / 1-31-92
of The Oregonian staff

Metro Executive Officer Rena Cusma on Thursday stressed the importance of finding a way to fill a \$6 million-a-year hole in the region's art and cultural life.

But in her annual "State of the Region" speech before the Portland/Oregon Visitors Association, Cusma didn't mention the major operations recommended by her task force on the problem: increased hotel taxes and a new admissions tax.



• CUSMA

The visitors association waged a fierce fight a couple of years ago to defeat a hotel tax increase tagged for support of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, and its members can be counted on to mount a similar campaign again.

Cusma, who is not known for pulling her punches, said after the speech that she didn't mean to duck the issue, or to suggest she had rejected the task force recommendations. Hotel taxes remain "a leading option" in her mind, but the ultimate answer will have to be a package that doesn't place the burden entirely on one group.

The arts subsidy problem is just one piece of "unfinished business" facing Metro and the region, Cusma said.

"The state of the region is in question," she said. "The state

of the region is under construction — it is in the making."

Other examples include:

- Green spaces. Metro is nearly done pinpointing natural areas that should be saved from developers' bulldozers. But, like the arts subsidy, what's missing is a way to finance land purchases or other forms of protection.

"You will be asked to vote to save this large piece of our region's livability at the ballot box," Cusma said.

- Trash compost. The experimental Northeast Portland plant designed to turn garbage into compost has failed to overcome a serious odor problem. The plant will shut Friday as negotiations continue between Metro, plant owner Riedel Environmental Technologies and the Swiss bank that guaranteed repayment of the project's bonds. Those talks could lead to a new owner.

- Growth management. Metro has launched a new planning effort, called "Region 2040" aimed at looking at different ways the region could grow over the next 50 years.

- Home rule charter. Cusma stressed strong views on what should be in the charter, including the same general grant of taxing powers that cities and counties enjoy, and the current separation of powers between the elected executive and legislative branches.

Acknowledging that much of what she said revolved around taxes, Cusma said she understood the twin pressures of the property tax burden and the recession.

"Still, we cannot stop in our tracks and do nothing to shape our regional future," she said.

Cusma: Plan for growth now or pay later

By ROBERT GOLDFIELD
Daily Journal of Commerce

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Emphasizing the Portland area's arrival at a planning crossroads, Metropolitan Service District Executive Officer Rena Cusma said Thursday the region has only a smattering of years to plan for a growth surge.

Cusma, giving an annual "state of the region" address to the Portland/Oregon Visitors Association, said the metropolitan area will change rapidly due to a predicted 500,000 increase in population over the next 20 years. That leaves Metro with some crucial decisions over the next few years, she said.

"Our window of opportunity to effectively manage growth is closing," Cusma said. Even 10 years from now substan-

tial change will have occurred in the region, managed or not, she added.

"We can't hide anymore, we know why they came," Cusma said of last year's influx of people to the region. "The question is, how are we going to maintain the livability that attracted them here?"

Metro governs a variety of metropolitan area issues that cross local government boundaries. Those issues include managing garbage disposal, planning regional transportation and administering the region's Urban Growth Boundary. It also operates Washington Park Zoo, the Oregon Convention Center, Memorial Coliseum, Civic Stadium and the Portland Center for the Performing Arts.

Cusma said key issues facing Metro include:

- Possible adoption of a home rule char-

ter that would contain taxing authority and make Metro a long-term institution. Cusma said any such charter should include "a general grant of powers ... to be able to finance what (Metro) is responsible for." The charter should also call for elected officials, separate executive and legislative bodies and the authority "to be effective not just for the next five years but for 50 years and beyond."

- Preservation of green spaces. Already 10 percent of the region's green spaces surveyed 18 months ago have been developed, she said. Preserving much of the remainder will require public funding of a program to purchase the parcels.

- Fine-tuning the region's solid waste disposal system. Recent years have wit-

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nanced opening of a new landfill in Eastern Oregon, a system to transport the area's waste there and closure of the St. Johns landfill, Cusma noted. Future goals are reopening of the Riedel Environmental Technologies compost — due to be closed at the end of the month because of operating and financial difficulties — and boosting the percentage of waste recovered through recycling, now standing at a high of 34 percent.

- Identifying a source of permanent operating funds of about \$6 million a year for the area's arts facilities and programs.

- Creation of a sports commission to woo major athletic events to the region. Cusma said establishing such a commission would require \$50,000

a year in public funds plus private money.

- Management of population growth. Metro is continuing its involvement with other governments to address regional land-use, density and transportation planning matters, Cusma said.

Summarizing each of these issues with the phrase "unfinished business — a region in the making," Cusma portrayed the metropolitan area as one undergoing construction in its broadest sense.

Despite recessionary times and the mandate of Measure 5, prudent management of resources will require steady public funding, she warned.

"If there is no free lunch," she said, "there certainly is no free ride to a future that nurtures and preserves our quality of life."