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Metro chief seeks consolidation vote

If government consolidation is a good idea, why not get rid of Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties and Tri-Met and the Metropolitan Service District and replace all five with one new regional government?

Metro Executive Officer Rena Cusma wants voters to give their opinion on this question during the November general election.

New state laws would be needed before such a consolidation could be accomplished, so the outcome of the vote would be only an expression of opinion.

This led Washington County Commissioner Linda Peters to call it "an elaborate—and high publicity—way to take a poll. There must be easier ways to get that information."

But Cusma said she didn't think the Legislature would take steps toward regional consolidation unless it heard a clear expression of support from area residents.

She wants the Metro Council to put the advisory question on the Nov. 3 ballot. A public hearing on the request, announced Wednesday, was scheduled today (Thursday) before the council's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee.

As an inducement to voters, Cusma would require that the new government operate in its first year with a budget 10 percent lower than the combined budgets of the five governments it would replace.

"I believe that is not impossible to accomplish," she said. "In fact, it wouldn't even be difficult. When you have five of everything, you've got quite a duplication of costs."

Cusma said she's beginning to wonder if the Metro Charter Committee is going to be able to produce a proposed charter for the November ballot.

In case they don't, she said her ballot measure could serve as a

referendum on regional government.

The charter the committee is thinking about putting on the ballot would eliminate Cusma's job.

Peters said she doesn't think total consolidation is a good idea.

"It's hard for me to see how a single entity could properly address the diversity of local needs throughout the tri-county area.

"I know the idea has been around a long time and there's a lot of talk now about consolidation, but I'm not convinced it's the best answer.

"There are some intermediate steps that could be taken that would get better results than trying to mold a whole new structure. We'd lose a lot of productivity if (all those employees) were trying to figure out how to make this work."

Gresham's Mayor McRobert backs consolidation of counties

The O 7-2-92

GRESHAM — Mayor Gussie McRobert thinks tri-county consolidation is an idea that's long overdue.

McRobert said Wednesday she supports a proposal by the Metropolitan Service District to eliminate Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties, Metro and Tri-Met and to create one regional elected government.

She will ask the Gresham City Council to study the proposal and consider endorsing it at its meeting Tuesday. For McRobert, the proposal gets to the heart of consolidation, and offers a solution to frustrated public officials, who have been discussing consolidation since Measure 5 passed.

"It just cuts through all of that stuff and gets to the bottom line," she said. "We spent \$100,000 in our staff time in meetings, and what did we get out of it? Zero."

McRobert and other Gresham city councilors attended several meet-

ings last fall with other elected officials to talk about consolidation.

Metro's proposal, spearheaded by executive officer Rena Cusma, would eliminate three county commissions for a nine-member elected council and elected executive. Cusma plans to put the proposal on the November ballot.

McRobert said a single regional government would eliminate duplications in several areas, such as libraries and corrections. "You don't need three sheriffs or three offices of assessment and taxation," she said.

Combining regional services will make greater government efficiencies and will make more money available for local cities, McRobert said.

The mayor said she will ask Cusma to present the proposal to the City Council. The council may discuss the plan, endorse it or decide to hold a public hearing about it, McRobert said.

Cusma: Metro supports end of Oregon Trail interpretive center

By Pete Malliris
of The Review

OREGON CITY — The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center enjoys strong support among Metro officials, according to Rena Cusma, the agency's executive director.

Cusma said the prospects appear good for a Metro area bond levy to fund the tourist attraction.

"(A bond to build) light rail passed in Clackamas County, passed in Multnomah County and was clearly a Washington County line," Cusma commented. "I would expect the same kind of support for the End of the Oregon Trail."

Clackamas County Commissioner Darlene Hooley said last week that the Oregon Trail Foundation probably will ask Metro voters for a bond next spring.

The amount hasn't yet been determined but is likely to be about \$38 million, Hooley said. Recent voter opinion polls in-



Rena Cusma

dicating strong support throughout the region for a bond, Hooley added.

When Multnomah County got its convention center, it was generally agreed that Clackamas County would be next in line for a facility, Hooley said.

Cusma said she supports the project, but scoffs at the idea that Metro owes Clackamas

County a tourist facility.

"I have a hard time thinking in those terms," Cusma said. "We shouldn't be making regional decisions based on whose turn it is."

But the interpretive center project stands on its own, Cusma added. "I think this is an excellent project."

Cusma said a successful regionwide bond would require Metro to wield some control over the project. She said Metro would have a responsibility to monitor where the bond money was spent.

"It's as much a legal issue," Cusma said. She added that if Metro sells the bond, it stands accountable for the project.

"It (the issue of control) concerns me, but I think it's something that can be worked out," Hooley commented.

Cusma said Metro's "control" wouldn't alter the facility itself. She added that Metro might make suggestions but wouldn't dictate how the center is run.

Consolidation plan gets little support at hearing

By JAMES MAYER 7/3/92
of The Oregonian staff

A bold proposal to ask voters what they think of abolishing Metro, Tri-Met and the three Portland-area counties to create a single regional government garnered no support at a public hearing Thursday night.

Clackamas County elected officials dominated the hearing, held by the Metro Council's governmental affairs committee.

All three members of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners testified that while the idea might have merit, it needed more study before going before the voters.

Others were more blunt, suggesting the idea just might kill off Metro, already on shaky ground with suburban and rural voters.

"I think you can kiss greenspaces goodbye," said Diane Quick, a former president of the Happy Valley City Council, referring to Metro's plan to put a \$200 million bond measure on the ballot to acquire open spaces.

Rena Cusma, Metro's executive officer, sprung the consolidation plan at a news conference Wednesday.

day. If approved by Metro voters in concept, the Legislature would be asked to refer a detailed plan to the voters.

Cusma said the idea had been studied for decades and the time had come to ask the people what they thought.

The governmental affairs committee will hold another hearing in two weeks and the Metro Council will vote on the proposal July 23.

Gussie McRobert, mayor of Gresham, said she always has liked the idea of merging the three counties, but she couldn't support Cusma's plan unless the charter committee, an independent panel, came up with a document consistent with it.

That seemed highly unlikely. "It is inappropriate, it is backhanded, it is sneaky, it is slimy," Mary Tobias, a member of the charter committee, said upon hearing of the idea.

Meanwhile, the charter committee, facing an Aug. 6 deadline, agreed Thursday to keep trying to find solutions to a series of thorny issues that have eluded consensus.