

Revamped tri-county government faces vote

BRIEF The Metro Council approves an advisory measure on a single entity to replace the counties, Tri-Met and itself

BY JAMES MAYER 7-25-92
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Portland-area voters will be asked in November what they think of radically reorganizing government in the metropolitan area.

The Metro Council voted 7 to 4 late Thursday to seek an advisory vote on the proposal to consolidate governments.

If the measure is approved by district voters in November, Metro would seek legislation to abolish the governments of all three counties —

Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas — and Metro and Tri-Met, and replace their 33 elected and appointed policy-making officials with a nine-member elected board and executive.

Judy Myers,
Metro councilor

Supporters stressed that all the measure does is take the public pulse on an issue that has been studied and discussed for decades.

"What do the voters think, that's all we're asking," said Councilor Judy Myers.

But since Metro Executive Rena Cusma announced the proposal July 1, suburban officials have seen it as much more than a simple opinion survey.

"An advisory vote without the analysis is a very expensive and faulty survey," said Bonnie Hays, chairwoman of the Washington County Board of Commissioners.

Metro's measure calls for a 10 percent cut in the combined budgets of all five local government agencies. The combined operating budgets of the governments are about \$650 million, so the projected savings would be about \$65 million.

The council split generally along ur-

Metro: Taxes concern suburban officials

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ban-suburban lines, with the suburban councilors following the advice of elected officials in Washington and Clackamas County who opposed the idea.

Suburban officials, including Ed Lindquist, Clackamas County commissioner, argued that a single property tax rate across all three counties would substantially raise taxes for their residents, shifting money into Portland and Multnomah County.

Although she didn't quite say she was in favor of a raid on suburban tax bases, Sharron Kelley, Multnomah County commissioner, noted that her county houses the bulk of the region's poor people and lacks resources to deal with it.

"Some substantial changes really need to occur in order to make

things right in the tri-county area," Kelley said.

Support for the idea came from Portland civic leaders.

"All you have to do is drive around. It's impossible to tell most of Washington and Clackamas counties from Multnomah County — or from each other," said Stephen Herrell, a Multnomah County circuit judge who served on a Portland City Club committee that recommended creation of a "Willamette County" in 1986.

"Sometimes I think people are smarter than we elected officials," Herrell said. "Maybe it's time to find out what they think."

Councilor Richard Devlin of Tualatin complained about the lack of time to consider the proposal.

"You're not only asking to buy a car without looking at it, you're

asking me to sell a car without looking at it," Devlin said.

Councilor George Van Bergen of Milwaukie pointed to the risk that the measure will turn people against Metro.

"While it is bold, it is also reckless," Van Bergen said. "This will be a public debacle. We have danger written all over the map."

The Legislature would probably refer the details of any consolidation proposal back to the voters of all three counties, said State Sen. Ron Cease, D-Portland.

Cease warned that support for the general concept may not translate into support for a particular scheme, recalling that people said they were for a Portland-Multnomah County consolidation until they got a chance to vote on an actual proposal 20 years ago.