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Multnomah County commissioners approve six charter revisions for Nov. 2 ballot

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Allan Brettman, The Oregonian

The **Multnomah County Library** system and any county elected official could be the big winners in proposed changes to the county charter.

County commissioners Thursday approved six proposals that will be added as measures to the Nov. 2 general election ballot.

The 12-member county **Charter Review Committee** had met since October considering changes. The charter requires the review every six years.

One measure would allow county voters the chance to decide whether the board of commissioners can pursue a special library tax district. That had been anticipated since spring, when a citizens subcommittee recommended the change.

The proposal would allow commissioners to seek voter approval of a permanent tax district to fund one of the nation's busiest libraries. Even if the change is approved, it doesn't mean commissioners would pursue a library tax district, but it would free them to do so.

The library receives 62 percent of its annual funding from a levy that voters must approve every five years and is set to expire in 2012. About 20 percent comes from the county general fund, 6.5 percent from a library fund reserve and the remainder from miscellaneous income, such as fines, grants and foundation funding.

Another proposal would allow elected officials to file for a different elective office without ending their current term and creating a vacancy. Now, elected officeholders must resign if they seek another office midterm.

The change could help County Chairman Jeff Cogen, who has been mentioned in political circles as a potential challenger to Portland Mayor Sam Adams when the mayoral seat is up for election in 2012.

For now, though, Cogen said he is staying put and hasn't given a thought to seeking the Portland mayor's job.

"That's the last thing on my mind right now," Cogen said before the commission's meeting Thursday, saying the county budget occupies him now. "Who knows what's going to happen. That's a couple years away."

Charter committee chairman Brian Wilson said committee members discussed the proposal before the death of state Treasurer Ben Westlund in April, which led to changes in leadership.

Westlund's death prompted Gov. Ted Kulongoski to appoint then-County Chairman Ted Wheeler to the treasurer's position. Cogen then left his seat to seek election as chairman, opening that position to a Nov. 2 general election.

The other four proposed measures:

County term limits: The charter restricts officeholders from serving more than two consecutive four-year terms in any county office within a 12-year period. The change would do away with the limitation, leaving it to voters to decide whether a candidate should stay or go. Voters have rejected this proposed change three other times, Wilson said.

Salary commission: The change would require the auditor-appointed salary commission to set the salary for the sheriff and the supplemental salary of the district attorney, something it does now by request of the county commission.

Vacancy in office: The charter requires commissioner candidates or appointees to live in the district they represent for 1 1/2 years before taking office. Under the proposal, if a commissioner moved out of the district, that would constitute resigning from office.

Election to fill vacancies: This change would limit elections to fill vacancies to general and primary elections. The intent is to reduce election costs to the county.

-- **Allan Brettman**

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