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KING COUNTY
2007-2008
Charter Review Commission

PUBLIC HEARING



6:30 p.m.
June 14, 2007
Bellevue Community College
Bellevue, Washington

REPORTED BY: Yvonne A. Gillette, CCR No. 2129.

1 COMMISSIONERS :

2 MIKE LOWRY

3 JOHN JENSEN

4 SARAH RINDLAUB

5 DOREEN CATO

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3 MS. CATO: Hello. Good evening. My name is
4 Doreen Cato. And I'm one of the commissioners of
5 the King County Charter Review. And so I would like
6 to welcome all of you being here this evening. And
7 we really are looking forward to hearing from you.

8 But what I want to do first is introduce my
9 fellow commissioner and chair, one of the cochairs
10 of the King County Charter Review, Governor Mike
11 Lowry. Thank you so much for being here this
12 evening. John Jensen is also a fellow commissioner
13 and past president of the Newcastle Chamber of
14 Commerce. And then on my-- I don't know if you can
15 see the folks. Can you see them? It's just me
16 that's real short. And this is Sarah Rindlaub. And
17 we're going to be here this evening to hear your
18 comments.

19 So what we're going to do, I am going to tell
20 you a little bit about the-- oh, I need to also
21 introduce three other individuals too.

22 And that's Mark Yango. He's going to be one
23 of the principle speakers here this evening after we
24 get through. And we also have Corrie Waterson.
25 She's the project manager. And Ms. Ohashi, who's

1 also back there. Ms. Ohashi is -- she's the glue
2 who makes sure we have all of our information and
3 keeps us moving.

4 So the process -- just to tell you a little
5 bit about the process this evening, what we're going
6 to do is of course tell you a little bit more about
7 who the other commissioners are. And then Mark's
8 going to talk some more about what the charter
9 review is all about. Sarah is going to tell you a
10 little more about what our role is as commissioners,
11 and what the charter review commission is about.

12 After we have finished just talking a little
13 bit about giving you some background, then we're
14 going to open it up, because we're not here just to
15 talk at you. We are here to hear what you have to
16 say to us this evening.

17 So I'm going to turn it over to Sarah.

18 MS. RINDLAUB: Well, thank you all for coming.
19 We're delighted to have you here tonight. And as a
20 part of -- as a member of the charter review
21 commission, you should know that this is a group of
22 citizens that is appointed by the county executive.
23 In this case, Ron Sims.

24 And the charter is actually reviewed every ten
25 years. And the last one, the last commission was

1 convened in 1997. And we do some work. We come up
2 with some ideas. And we present them to the
3 council. And some of them will go on the ballot,
4 and some may not. But that's the work of getting
5 the input from the community as well as working with
6 the commissioners.

7 So here's what we have done. Besides having
8 public meetings, we have reached out now to 360
9 organizations and heard from a number of these
10 groups, some in writing, some in coming to our
11 meetings. And now we're in the process of having
12 these public meetings, one in each council district.
13 So this is Jane Hague's district. She was not able
14 to be here tonight. But she did send information to
15 her constituents. So we're hoping to have some good
16 comments from everybody here.

17 So we look forward to hearing what you have to
18 say. And now Mark is going to present you with
19 slides showing you who the rest of the commissioners
20 are.

21 (Powerpoint presentation by Mark Yango.)

22 MR. YANGO: When you come up here, since
23 there's not that many people, we won't have a time
24 limit. Please state your name, what city or
25 neighborhood you're from, and your comments.

1 And if you're uncomfortable with speaking at
2 the microphone, you can give us comments in written
3 form or send us an e-mail.

4 MS. CATO: We have Robert Parker.

5 MR. PARKER: I have two things I wanted to
6 mention. One I think is that the confidence in the
7 electoral process is just very basic to what we do
8 here, and that you if you don't have confidence in
9 it, then people don't vote, and they don't
10 participate. And you have a big problem.

11 So I think in the last election that we had,
12 people probably had some doubts about how everything
13 operated there. And there seemed to be a maybe
14 partisan bias. So I think it would be good to have
15 the director of elections be a nonpartisan, either
16 through an election -- either elected by the people
17 or appointed by a nonpartisan commission in some
18 way.

19 And the other one I have, I am not sure if it
20 falls into your charter amendment, but it has to do
21 with the budgeting process. And it seems to be like
22 the process that's followed tends to be partisan.
23 In my way of thinking, if in terms of this was an
24 organization like a corporation, you would start at
25 the top and say, what are-- what are the highest

1 priority items that we need to provide to the
2 public? And you would stack rank those things. And
3 then you would look at the money that you had, and
4 you would allocate them through that process. And
5 when you ran out of money, you would drop the things
6 off that list. So that seems a rational way to
7 approach the budget process. I am not sure if that
8 could be part of the charter.

9 Thank you.

10 MS. CATO: Thank you. Does anybody else want
11 to volunteer?

12 MR. TATE: My name is Richard Tate from Mercer
13 Island. I would like to second the remarks that
14 were just made about the need to appoint the person
15 responsible for elections. I think there's an
16 enormous amount of mistrust. Disbelief has been
17 engendered recently by what has happened with our
18 electoral process. And I think it's very important.

19 With regard to the initiative process, I do
20 think this is important now. I think, in
21 particular, that we should avoid any attempt to
22 remove the initiative process from King County
23 Council's decision making. And in particular, I
24 think it should be-- we should resist any attempt to
25 invalidate paid signature gatherers for example, so

1 that effective initiative processing can be
2 maintained.

3 I think with the number of people involved we
4 do require the opportunity to have paid gatherers.
5 Thank you.

6 MS. RINDLAUB: Next. Somebody else want to
7 volunteer?

8 MS. SOTELO: My name is Lori Sotelo. I'm from
9 Mercer Island. I'm here speaking in favor of an
10 elected elections auditor for King County and also
11 retaining an elected sheriff. As part of one of the
12 bullet points, I'll just add that in. I think it's
13 important that the people that are running our
14 government represent the people that live in the
15 government. And I think that they should be elected
16 by the people.

17 MR. LOWRY: Nonpartisan or partisan? If they
18 are running for election, you know--

19 MS. SOTELO: That's a very good question. I
20 tend to be partisan. So I would support a partisan
21 election.

22 MR. LOWRY: Thank you.

23 MS. RINDLAUB: So a couple of you we haven't
24 heard from yet. Does anybody else want to speak?
25 All right. We can have a discussion then. We

1 have-- let's go through that.

2 MS. CATO: The three questions, starting with
3 the first, major regional issues need to be
4 addressed. We spoke about a few. And we have had
5 some people actually come to our commission meeting
6 and share their thoughts, especially Suburban Cities
7 Association.

8 So what we really do want to hear are some
9 other issues that you might not think would fall in
10 the purview of the charter review, but you never
11 know.

12 Are there any that we should consider?

13 MR. HARPER: Does transportation fall within?

14 MS. CATO: Yes, it does.

15 MR. HARPER: I drive to work every day. So in
16 my mind, my impression is most of the dollars that
17 we spend in regional transportation get spent on
18 public transportation and mass transportation.
19 Although I think that the majority would be over
20 fifty percent, it's my opinion in driving to work
21 every day that significantly less than 50 percent of
22 the people use public transportation. Maybe two or
23 three percent. So it doesn't make any sense to me
24 to continue to spend a major amount of our dollars
25 on mass transportation when it's obviously not very

1 accepted by the public. People don't necessarily
2 want to use it, at least based on their actions.

3 So I would like to see some rational process
4 that-- where we spend the dollars in proportion to
5 supporting the people who are using the public
6 highways and transportation. Doesn't mean you
7 shouldn't have public of mass transportation, but
8 let's spend the dollars in a relative way.

9 MR. PUTTER: I have to put the mic down. My
10 name is Sonny Putter. I'm a councilmember for the
11 City of Newcastle. And I serve on behalf of
12 Suburban Cities Association as the chair of the task
13 force providing input from all 37 member cities of
14 suburban cities to the commission. So I'm pleased
15 to be able to hear what the citizens are saying.

16 I want to emphasize that Suburban Cities is
17 not yet in a position to be able to provide you with
18 the views of our membership. We will at the next
19 meeting. We hope by the 20th to be able to get
20 direction from our chief policy making body. The
21 public issues committee, and ultimately the board,
22 ratifies that.

23 So any comments I have are purely my own, not
24 those of the city of Newcastle. With that, I would
25 like to share a little bit about the regional

1 committees and my experience on them. I have had
2 the honor and pleasure to serve on all three of the
3 regional committees. Three years on the regional
4 water quality committee at the time that the
5 committee forwarded to the King County Council
6 approval of the Brightwater project. One year on
7 the regional transit committee in 2002, when the
8 regional transit committee recommended a change to
9 the policies for allocating new service for transit
10 that distributed new service 40 percent to south
11 county, 40 percent to the east side, and 20 percent
12 the west part of the county, while preserving
13 approximately 63 percent of existing service for the
14 Seattle area. So it was a very momentous
15 opportunity for cities and county councilmembers to
16 collaborate.

17 Finally, I currently serve on the regional
18 policy committee, where some of the very crucial
19 issues are, for example, coming up. The emergency
20 medical services strategic plan, which we
21 recommended a due pass to the King County council.
22 And I would expect we'll see the Medic One levy on
23 the November ballot. We have been spending about
24 two years on a solid waste export plan that
25 basically takes all the garbage from all of

1 unincorporated King County and the incorporated area
2 of King County outside of Seattle and determines how
3 we're going to deal with it once Cedar Hills is
4 closed, our one remaining county land fill. So
5 these are important issues.

6 And my colleagues and the elected officials in
7 cities very much want to strengthen the sustained
8 regional committees. There may be some ways in
9 which you can do it. And I would like to have some
10 alternatives for you to examine.

11 As you know, with the reduction of the King
12 County council from thirteen to nine members, you
13 have undoubtedly heard as I have heard, that county
14 council members are a lot busier than they were
15 before. I would suggest one way in which we might
16 be able to make their process more efficient is
17 eliminate doubles. Currently there are some issues
18 that are referred to both one of the regional
19 committees and to another King County standing
20 committee. Since they are both King County
21 committees, that may be one way to make the process
22 more efficient and perhaps reduce the burden on King
23 County council members.

24 In order to strengthen these regional
25 committees, we have to give more opportunity for

1 elected officials from the cities to feel like the
2 work they are doing is meaningful and gauged. A
3 couple of ways you might consider doing it is to
4 have the charter amended to permit committees to
5 select the chair from among their own membership.
6 Currently, the chairs are appointed by the chair of
7 the King County council, whereas if each of these
8 committees were given an opportunity to rotate the
9 chair among different constituent members of these
10 committees, there would be a lot more buy in,
11 because there would be more opportunity for
12 collaboration.

13 Similarly, you might consider having each
14 regional committee have final authority over its
15 yearly work plan. Currently, it's in statute -- I
16 don't know whether it's charter or ordinance -- that
17 the King County Council must adopt the regional
18 policy committee's work plan and has historically
19 adopted the work plan of the other two regional
20 committees as well. So, again, this is another way
21 in which to strengthen those regional committees.

22 Finally, and this is perhaps a little further
23 out, and that's to consider adding budget authority
24 over the enterprise funds, transit, water quality,
25 to the respective regional committee's scope of

1 work. Under the current King County Charter, the
2 regional committee's authority is limited to county
3 wide policies and plans. That's the term of art
4 that's used. The regional committees have no
5 authority to weigh in on financial issues.

6 Yet, as a result of the King County Metro
7 merger, the two specific Metro functions that were
8 amalgamated into King County were Metro transit and
9 sewer. You might want to consider examining whether
10 it would be appropriate to give some element of
11 financial authority to regional committees in these
12 two areas.

13 Happy to answer questions if you have them.

14 MS. CATO: I do have a question. And it's
15 regarding the water. And please excuse me. I'm
16 still learning. So if it doesn't fit, let me know.
17 The regional committees, did they also look at the
18 aquifer?

19 MR. PUTTER: Interestingly enough, King County
20 does not have any direct authority on water supply,
21 only in one small element of water supply planning.
22 As you can imagine, until quite recently, the City
23 of Seattle has been the major water purveyor in this
24 region, and until the cascade water allowance came
25 about. The political deal, I presume, was cut that

1 the City of Seattle retained that authority.

2 There are a couple of areas where King County
3 does have water supply authority. One is in
4 regional planning. And then the other is as a
5 result of reuse of sewage water, so called gray
6 water, and there have been some discussions and
7 plans to be able to use some of the treated effluent
8 from the sewage plants for things like golf course
9 water.

10 MS. CATO: Any questions from my fellow
11 commissioners?

12 MR. LOWRY: I wanted to ask Sonny a question I
13 should know the answer to, but I don't. What is the
14 make up of the regional committee as opposed to like
15 county council members, city, and other people? I
16 mean, how are they made up?

17 MR. PUTTER: Again, that's strictly from the
18 charter, as amended. The regional transit committee
19 consists of -- let me see if I can do this right --
20 six votes of county council members, six votes
21 combined from the city of Seattle and the suburban
22 cities. And at this point, there are four full
23 votes that have been allocated to suburban cities,
24 two full votes that have been allocated to the city
25 of Seattle, and six to the county council members.

1 And the county council members that are appointed to
2 those committees vote them. That's one committee.

3 The regional policy committee works in a very
4 similar way, four votes to the suburban cities
5 outside Seattle, including Bellevue, two to the City
6 of Seattle, and six to the county council members.

7 The regional water quality committee is a
8 slightly different animal because we have so many
9 water and sewer districts that are their own
10 separate governance. In addition to the
11 representation from the cities outside of Seattle,
12 Seattle and King County, there are two full votes
13 for representatives of the water and sewer district.

14 MR. LOWRY: With your experience on having
15 served on all these committees, is that the right
16 apportionment? And what do you do-- I mean, I heard
17 six and six, and I'm sure it doesn't break down six
18 and six. Seems to me--

19 MR. PUTTER: It does in terms of votes. But
20 prior charter commissions have proposed amendments
21 that have been adopted that enable, for example,
22 elected officials from the non Seattle cities to
23 have alternates that serve. And in general, it's
24 really not the number of votes, but rather the
25 voices at the table. So historically, council

1 chairs of these regional committees have encouraged
2 the participation of alternates, either from the
3 city of Seattle or from the cities outside of
4 Seattle.

5 In order to get a greater number of voices at
6 the table when it comes to voting, the appointed
7 members, rather than the alternates vote unless a
8 member is absent. Recognizing, of course, outside
9 the city of Seattle, all of the elected officials
10 that serve in the cities are part time. And that
11 really does help insure that we have a quorum when
12 necessary to be able to have votes on a timely
13 basis.

14 MR. LOWRY: If I may-- and I was told that one
15 of the council members said that they were on 43
16 different committees. Actually I think Julia
17 Patterson said that. Just because of how they are
18 with the regional committees, which didn't exist
19 before the merger -- I used to be on the county
20 council in the previous century, and before the
21 merger, those regional committees didn't exist.
22 With the merger, they did. But do you feel that
23 there is just an almost impossible-- I'm trying to
24 give a leading question here-- number of committees,
25 that like the county council members need to be

1 serving on, are required to be serving on, it is the
2 responsibility to serve on?

3 MR. PUTTER: It's hard to answer that
4 question. Let me see if I can try to take a stab at
5 it. Many of the committees that I'm sure that
6 council members refer to are not strictly King
7 County committees.

8 As you know, the council has a committee
9 structure where there are individual committees that
10 actually do the work before it comes to either
11 committee as a whole or more likely to the full
12 council for full adoption. But they also serve on
13 other committees, the regional transit authority
14 board, for example. They serve on the regional
15 transportation investment district board and
16 planning committees. These are not strictly King
17 County committees, creatures of this charter. But
18 because of state legislation, they have been between
19 these positions to take action on specific topics.

20 Now, if you want to consider consolidating
21 some transportation issues in the Puget Sound
22 region, according to some of the discussions taking
23 place, some of these bodies may ultimately go away.
24 But it's not just charter committees either within
25 the King County council structure or these regional

1 committees that they attend.

2 MS. CATO: Thank you very much.

3 MR. JENSEN: If it's okay, three of them
4 mentioned the elected versus appointed positions if
5 I can ask, and if they are comfortable talking about
6 it. I don't know if that's appropriate. Basically
7 where I'm coming from is this is a new type of seat
8 for me. So I did some research before we started
9 our work. And I learned that when the charter was
10 formed, that appointed positions were generally
11 positions that implemented policy. And positions
12 that created policy were typically elected.

13 And yet, you know, there's a lot of talk about
14 the feelings when you have a position like an
15 elections director or a sheriff. And all three of
16 you spoke to that. So I'm just curious if there's
17 anything else you would like to say about that,
18 because I'm also a contractor, and I know that
19 sometimes things on paper don't work in the real
20 world the way you would like them to.

21 So can you differentiate for me why a position
22 like-- what's an absolute appointed type of
23 position, no question about it, if you can give me
24 one?

25 MR. LOWRY: A departmental director.

1 MR. JENSEN: Compared to the sheriff or the
2 elections director, where obviously there's a
3 different level of trust, do you have any anything
4 you would like to add to that or that could help me?

5 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am not sure exactly what
6 your question is.

7 MR. JENSEN: You mentioned yourself where it
8 was something in the last election. I think you
9 used the word trust or a lack of it in the process.
10 And I'm keeping an open mind. If I show a
11 formulated opinion, please ignore it. I would like
12 to hear more about why all three of you spoke to
13 that. And I think it's obviously an important
14 issue. I know there's other tracks that it's moving
15 forward on it. And, you know, you all spoke so
16 well. I hope you didn't limit yourself thinking
17 there was a time limit.

18 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is the question, should it
19 be elected versus appointed?

20 MR. JENSEN: I think you voiced your opinion,
21 but I would like to hear more about that.

22 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think my point, I didn't
23 care whether it was elected or appointed. But if it
24 was appointed, it should be appointed by a
25 nonpartisan commission as opposed to appointed by an

1 elected official, who's part of a party. I think it
2 may be totally-- it may be totally impartial in the
3 whole thing, the image. If there's anything going
4 on here, it's going to be slanted towards the party
5 in power, and I think that's not the appropriate way
6 to run an election.

7 So personally, I didn't care whether it was an
8 elected official or appointed by a nonpartisan
9 commission, but in some way you have to isolate this
10 person from the politics of the situation in such a
11 manner that the people who are voting have
12 confidence that the election is carried out honestly
13 and fairly.

14 MR. JENSEN: Some type of firewall between the
15 elected officials and the person overseeing the
16 elections.

17 MR. LOWRY: And perhaps are you suggesting
18 that it be considered that perhaps that commission
19 be in the charter, that nonpartisan commission?

20 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah. It could be described
21 in the charter that it could be equal numbers of
22 people from each party that would appoint this
23 person. I think-- I almost favor appointing by a
24 nonpartisan, because then I think you could get
25 people who are more of an expert, and they could be

1 appointed on their expertise as opposed to maybe
2 their personality.

3 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I second everything that's
4 been said. I think we have to recognize it wasn't
5 just a King County problem. There was at the
6 federal level considerable mistrust on the matter of
7 the integrity of the election. But here in King
8 County, I think the concern was serious enough that
9 we have to do something. And what else there is
10 that we could, I don't really know.

11 I have to say I fall back on an elected
12 position as opposed to appointed by a nonpartisan
13 other party, because I am not really sure how anyone
14 in this game is nonpartisan. They may not be a
15 declared partisan. But the fact is, the way we run
16 our affairs has increasingly become so very
17 partisan, that I do feel that we have got to do
18 something. And it may be that you can think of
19 something better to do. I can't.

20 MS. CATO: I saw Laurie stand.

21 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I tend toward a partisan
22 elected official. But my feelings come from, you
23 know, one of the most fundamental rights we have as
24 citizens is to vote. And we have to have the
25 confidence that the person counting the votes is

1 going to be fair. And if that person, if they are
2 fair, they are accountable back to the voters. And
3 the voters should have the right to tell them to
4 take a hike if they don't do a good job. And I
5 think in 2004, there probably would have been some
6 sort-- there probably would have been some sort of
7 electoral change should that elections person's term
8 have run out if he was elected.

9 So basically, you know, we have to have
10 standards. We have to be accountable. And being
11 appointed by a partisan person, again, I agree with
12 you on the that point. But I tend to go toward an
13 elected official that is partisan.

14 MR. JENSEN: Thank you for letting me put you
15 on the spot.

16 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think it goes beyond
17 counting votes. When I came up here, and we
18 registered to vote -- I thought when we went to
19 register, I should probably bring my passport. And
20 I walked down there and signed up. And they said,
21 well, that's it. Don't you want to a see an ID or
22 make sure I'm really the person that's on this
23 thing? No, that's what you signed. You swore to
24 that. Yeah, I did, but-- so, I mean, I think
25 there's a lot of processes in place that require

1 somebody with some expertise to go and have the
2 ability to change these things. Because, you know,
3 it's those kinds of things, when everybody registers
4 to vote, if they experience that, then they are
5 going, I wonder how many people are voting here who
6 aren't really citizens.

7 MS. THORNTON: I'm June Thornton. And I am
8 not going to be as wordy as these wonderful people.
9 I really feel strongly, one, that I don't want to
10 hear about Washington state being on the news being
11 humiliated that way. I feel there is a need for
12 accountability there. And I think an elected
13 official would achieve that. Thank you.

14 MR. LOWRY: Madame Chair, I think you or Sarah
15 or Mark mentioned that this is all being recorded.
16 And so everything that's said will be distributed to
17 all 21 members of the commission. And there are
18 nine of these particular hearings. So that's why
19 there are four or five of them at each given one,
20 but these will all be assimilated and distributed.

21 MS. CATO: Thank you very much for asking that
22 question. I was interested also in the initiative
23 process. It still is pretty controversial. So my
24 question, I know you were talking about the sign
25 up-- I think it was Mr. Tate. I know you were

1 talking about having paid signers, was that correct?

2 MR. TATE: Yes.

3 MS. CATO: Why do you prefer just paid versus
4 the-- or a combination of both? Or is there some--

5 MR. TATE: The initiative process is another
6 issue where there have been allegations and concerns
7 about the integrity of the process, the validity of
8 signatures. I believe that professional signature
9 gatherers are much better equipped to insure the
10 integrity and validity of the signatures they
11 collect -- not on the spot, but by checking them
12 afterwards, before they are submitted -- than can
13 reasonably be expected of enthusiastic volunteers.
14 And I'm also concerned that initiatives do come up
15 on very contentious issues where there may be
16 particular special interests that are very strongly
17 opposed to that initiative. And I think we have had
18 cases where a representative of the special
19 interests may exert quite improper pressure on
20 signature gatherers. And, again, I think the more
21 professional it is, the better off we are.

22 I believe it is an important part of our
23 democratic system. And I'm well aware that it's not
24 always very popular with the elected officials. And
25 I sympathize, because I have the greatest respect

1 for my friend Sonny. But it's not easy being an
2 elected official. There are enormous pressures and
3 complications. And very often, it's just darn hard
4 to get anything done. But bearing that in mind, I
5 quite understand why one of the things that elected
6 officials are very likely to wish to do to simplify
7 their lives is to make it harder to get initiatives
8 on the ballot.

9 But I feel so strongly that it is an important
10 part of what we can do as members of the electorate
11 to exert some further influence on the people who we
12 possibly accidentally elected a couple years before,
13 I feel it's important to keep that protection in
14 there. Thank you.

15 MS. CATO: Thank you.

16 MS. RINDLAUB: I just wanted to see -- number
17 two up here is a big issue in some other parts of
18 the county. I didn't know if anybody here wanted to
19 weigh in on that or might know something about it or
20 might feel like they want to have a comment on this
21 issue here, that combining the rural and the urban.
22 Maybe not. Just thought we'd see if anybody had any
23 comments. And that's going to be a very heated
24 issue at some of our other meetings, but maybe not
25 here.

1 We have talked about number three here.
2 Several things have been brought up relating to
3 accountable, efficient, and fair government. But we
4 can bring up other things too. I think we have
5 talked about some other issues, some issues related
6 to number three already.

7 Does anybody else have any comments that you
8 would like to make about government in King County
9 in general?

10 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Just back to number two.
11 What are some of the issues that are being proposed
12 at this point in time of melding the urban and rural
13 residents?

14 MS. RINDLAUB: We haven't had any of the
15 meetings yet. But there's a lot of issues with the
16 usage of land and also with the protection of the
17 sheriff's department. Those seem to be --
18 personally those seem to be the two key issues. But
19 maybe we'll let Sonny talk about that.

20 MR. PUTTER: There is a long term impending
21 structural financial problem in both the structure
22 of King County government and the structure of the
23 cities. Because of initiatives, Mr. Tate, we have
24 had some restrictions on King County government in
25 raising property taxes and in adequately funding

1 services. So the long term structural problem has
2 not gone away in King County because the economy has
3 improved. It will be coming back as soon as the
4 economy starts showing a little bit of the weakness
5 that we're seeing in other parts of the country.

6 The problem is basically that costs are rising
7 faster than moneys. It's not just a King County
8 problem, a King County government problem. It's a
9 problem among cities as well. What can be done?
10 Well, I think to their credit, King County council
11 executive Ron Sims and the King County council has
12 been collaborating with the cities to encourage
13 cities to annex the urban unincorporated parts of
14 the county that should be served by cities. Of the
15 approximately 1.7 million residents of King County,
16 there are approximately 350, roughly, thousand
17 people in unincorporated King County. About 200
18 thousand in urban unincorporated King County, about
19 150 in rural. And they are very rough numbers.

20 But what this means is the cities and King
21 County need to find some collaborative approach that
22 helps broach the financial difficulty of absorbing
23 the urban unincorporated areas into cities.
24 Typically these are areas that are not-- that are
25 not able to be served by cities without the existing

1 residents of cities subsidizing the services to new
2 residents. The state has done some good in trying
3 to give a credit to annexations over ten thousand
4 people. But even that has really not quite yet been
5 effective. Well, no. Federal Way is going to try
6 one of those. Now Burien is looking at it. City of
7 Seattle is looking at it.

8 But I don't know if there's anything that the
9 commission can do to recognize this vise of costs
10 exceeding revenues that is slowly closing around its
11 services. But it's a structural problem that the
12 county tried to grapple with. The recommendations
13 from another citizen's committee about three years
14 ago said, hey, these incorporations and particularly
15 these annexations have to take place so the county
16 can focus more directly on what it calls its
17 regional, IE, county wide role in providing services
18 to all residents, as well as retain that small
19 portion of its services to rural residents.

20 AUDIENCE MEMBER: What is the rate of increase
21 in expenses?

22 MR. PUTTER: I don't have a recent number. I
23 think the rate of increases is in the four to five
24 percent number. And the increase in revenue is in
25 three percent range.

1 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Don't you get the property
2 tax?

3 MR. PUTTER: The problem with property taxes
4 under statewide initiative 747, property taxes may
5 not be raised more than one percent per year. Not
6 for individuals. But as any jurisdiction, whether
7 it's the county or an individual city, cannot raise
8 more its property tax levy more than one percent,
9 the levy being the amount collected.

10 So even though the cities that annex
11 unincorporated areas get property taxes from the
12 annexed areas, that's not enough to offset the cost
13 of providing services.

14 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Are you saying property
15 taxes are limited to the one percent year increase?

16 MR. PUTTER: For each jurisdiction, yes.

17 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I must have missed that in
18 mine.

19 MR. PUTTER: It doesn't apply to each
20 individual. It applies to each jurisdiction. So
21 King County government or the city of Seattle -- if,
22 for example, the City of Seattle's property tax
23 collected each year was a hundred million dollars,
24 they can only increase their collection the
25 following year by one million dollars. Plus the

1 cost of-- plus the property tax allocated to new
2 construction that came on the rolls that year.

3 AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's saying if somebody's
4 taxes went up twenty percent, somebody else's went
5 down.

6 MR. PUTTER: More likely you're looking at the
7 cumulative effect of a number of jurisdictions.
8 Kind County collects probably fifteen percent of the
9 taxes for themselves. And the rest are collected on
10 behalf all the jurisdictions. There are well over a
11 hundred separate jurisdictions in King County alone,
12 cemetery districts, school districts, water and
13 sewer districts, 39 cities, Regional Transit
14 Authority. All of these are tax raising
15 governments.

16 And so when you look at your tax bill, you are
17 paying individual taxes to different jurisdictions.
18 For example, the King County Library District is the
19 library for all of suburban King County, except for
20 three cities. Renton has its own and Seattle. They
21 have a property tax on our property tax bill. So
22 the combination of the operating costs and the
23 capital costs is roughly 50 cents per thousand of
24 assessed valuation. It's collected by King County,
25 but it goes to the King County Library District,

1 which is a separate jurisdiction.

2 MR. LOWRY: Excuse me. And of course, Sonny,
3 your knowledge on this is tremendous. Of course
4 that's not counting voter approved increases, such
5 as schools, you know. In other words, sure, our
6 property taxes up 10, 15 percent over what it was,
7 our individual and our home. But that was a voter
8 approved school levy. In case we live in Renton,
9 there was a valley services district. But those are
10 voter approved. Sonny was of course referring to
11 the nonvoter approved property tax collection across
12 the jurisdiction, which is the problem you're trying
13 to address.

14 MS. RINDLAUB: All right. Well, it's 7:30.
15 We still have a little bit of time if anybody wants
16 to talk about anything else here.

17 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a suggestion.
18 There's very few people here at this meeting. I
19 think that's too bad. So I appreciate the
20 opportunity to spout off. But maybe there should be
21 some effort to publicize this a little more.

22 MR. YANGO: There has been efforts to
23 publicize, getting out press releases in the local
24 newspaper and some of the big papers. We have done
25 a lot of outreach. It's-- part of it has to do with

1 the time of year. And part of it has to do with the
2 issues and topics. And I think it's also the rural
3 areas are going to have a lot more turn out, because
4 most of the cities are being served by their own
5 departments.

6 MR. JENSEN: I think it will be different this
7 spring when the Commission is coming forward and
8 saying here's the amendments that we decided are
9 worthy of going forward. And then people will
10 choose that opportunity to come and speak. And it
11 would be nice -- I don't know if we have a sign up
12 sheet for people that are here. It would be nice as
13 things are developing they could be kept--

14 MR. YANGO: Absolutely.

15 MR. JENSEN: It feels a little funny for us,
16 because usually we have a little more of a focus,
17 but this is such a big broad thing.

18 MS. CATO: Not hearing any more comments, we
19 can bring the proceedings to a close. So I'm going
20 to have to stand again, but I just want to say thank
21 you for all of you coming out.

22 (Meeting adjourned.)
23
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25