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Council/executive Officer Workshop-Ernie Bonner

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I. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF METRO

1. Has Metro lived up to my expectations?

Generally, I would say yes; but note some important exceptions.

Metro is providing the functions and services I would have expected and at a generally high quality level. The zoo is well-managed and appreciated. The facilities Metro has provided at St. Johns and Oregon City in solid waste are good--and a substantial improvement to the region. Transportation planning proceeds on a respectable foundation of data and expertise, and has won over the local jurisdictions and agencies, by and large.

I would also say that the cooperation of other governmental units is actually greater than I would have expected. I think our relationship with other regional agencies is quite good--and directly related to the work of the Executive Officer and staff. Our relationship with the cities and counties is getting more positive, I think, in no small part due to the work and contacts of individual Councilors in those areas. Our relationship with the City of Portland appears to be strained, at best, but understandable. Metro Councilors in the City of Portland do not seem to be as involved with the Mayor and City Council in Portland as those outside the city are with their local officials.

Metro has failed to meet my expectations particularly in the area of cooperation among Council members, and among Council and staff. I am not surprised at the political competition between the Executive Officer and the Council, nor the level of that conflict. But in the case of cooperation among Council members, I am quite surprised that there is in some relationships a lack of basic respect for each other, and for each other's values and positions. The Council is a natural forum for honest disagreements and differences of opinion. But these honest differences seem on more than rare occasions to deteriorate into personal attacks, mutual animosity and vindictiveness. I have been guilty of this myself, but do not feel it is ever justified--and it is so counter-productive. It is no doubt related that I am very disappointed in the Council's demonstrated inability to function as a team. Part of this is because of the lack of basic respect that we have for one another. Another part is that some Councilors may not think we should act as a team--that individual representatives should be free to stand alone. I guess I expected much more in this area than was reasonable, given the very nature of such a political body and the specific history and depth of differences on the Council.

Further, Metro has not lived up to my expectations in terms of the quality and manner of our decisions--in particular, those decisions which are complicated and involve the public at large. The decision-making process at Metro (and many other public bodies) goes about like this:

Staff prepares background material, produces big, thick documents for Council's and public's review. Neither Council nor public

have time nor interest to read it, let alone accomplish the hard study and analysis it generally takes to understand the real issues and choices involved in the subject under review.

On the basis of that study, staff prepares a recommended plan of action. Along the way, they negotiate settlements with special interests to get their support before it goes to Council. The recommended plan is then sent to Council for public hearing and adoption.

Council holds public hearings on the recommended plan at which time special interests attend to point out how the plan does not provide what they requested. (It is clear that staff has found a safe, central place between all special interests.) The general public shows up to complain that no alternatives were considered and that they only heard about the whole thing yesterday. Individual Council members try to make small changes in the recommended plan, and are mostly unsuccessful because the 'deals' among the interest groups and jurisdictions have been made, and little change can be accommodated without upsetting those deals. The media reports great conflict and consternation, and no satisfaction on anybody's part.

Council adopts something that nobody wants.

The basic flaw in our decision-making is our lack of alternatives from which to choose. The process of preparing an issue for Council decision should produce valid alternatives at the outset, not recommended plans. Those alternatives should be evaluated with respect to certain criteria deemed important by the Council and a full public review of the evaluated alternatives should be carried out before a recommended plan of action and the alternatives are put before the Council.

The Council evidently recognized this need for alternatives in its original organization and established policy alternative committees.

I understand the difficulty and the cost associated with this kind of decision-making. But the alternative is bad decisions, or no decisions.

Why can't we make such a simple change in such a fundamental area of weakness? I wish I knew.

2. How do you rate Metro's overall performance?

Adequate.

3. List Metro's Strengths, Weaknesses, Successes and Failures.

a. Metro's Strengths:

1. Our association with the zoo (even though limited), which is a respected institution in the region. I think the professional and public relations genius of Warren and the management skills and common sense of Kay Rich make an unbeatable combination.

2. Elected political leadership, which gives Metro the credibility of being accountable to the voters. Associated with this is the fact that we are the only organization of this kind in the U.S.

3. A good staff.

4. Talented and intelligent Councilors and Executive Officer.

b. Metro's Weaknesses:

1. Our inability (or unwillingness) to establish a credible decision-making process involving the formulation of alternatives rather than recommendations.

2. Our statutory base, which sets conflict in place between a full-time elected Executive Officer and the part-time elected Council. The establishment of a part-time, elected Council (to set direction and policy) and a full-time, elected Executive Officer (to implement the Council policy) assures that the opposite, in fact, will occur.

3. Our structural inability as a Council to chart and then run a course which is informed by public review and consistent over more than the term of one Presiding Officer.

c. Metro's Successes:

1. Passage of the zoo levy and successful completion (almost) of the zoo improvements made possible by the levy.

2. Operation of the St. Johns landfill. We have made a distinct visible change at the gate, a fundamental change to fairness in the method of charging at the gate, and hired a good firm to operate the fill.

3. Establishment of the urban growth boundary and fair adjudication of requests for changes in that boundary.

4. Establishment and maintenance of a respected Transportation Improvements Plan and Process for the region. Though individuals at Metro are important to that, I think the Federal government deserves most of the credit for handing over to us a ton of money which Metro's process was assigned to allocate.

d. Metro's Failures;

1. Johnson Creek. By thinking up our own solution to our own problem, and hoping to leap into general government stardom, we blew it. Our single great mistake was our decision process. If we had laid out valid alternatives, and sought public discussion of alternatives, we would eventually have proposed a much more limited program of improvements for Johnson Creek, but we would have produced still more than what we have now--and not have the petition signers all around us.

2. Metro does not have a solid waste plan. I think the responsibility for this goes to our reliance on the Oregon City burner decision and the slippage in that decision. And not only have we not adopted a plan yet, we still do not have a process in place which is intelligently designed to get us an adopted plan in the next fiscal year. We don't do well at plans.

4. If you were outside looking in, how would you describe Metro?

Metro is a limited purpose service district. It has a zoo, which is run by others. It operates the City's St. Johns landfill and owns a transfer station in Oregon City. It is trying to find a landfill to take the place of St. Johns when it closes. Metro also produces the region's transportation plan.

Metro is neither here nor there. It is not a general purpose government on the road to more and more general public responsibility in the region (largely picked up at the expense of the Counties) because it does not have the funds to operate those services. Neither is it a known service agency like Tri-Met or the Port. It has a much more public and obvious "governing body" than other regional agencies, but is less known because press coverage is virtually non-existent. It has no general revenue base and no prospects of getting one. In most ways, it is like ESD--which also was established to gain certain service economies, has an elected "governing body", a large budget, and little press attention or public understanding.

In those cases where somebody else gave Metro a specific mission, and resources to carry the mission out, (zoo, solid waste, transportation planning) Metro is generally successful. In those cases where there are no resources and Metro and others must agree to Metro's mission (Johnson Creek, Housing Policy) there is no success at all. The Council members do not agree on what Metro should be and, even if they did, the Executive Officer may not agree. Metro's areas of responsibility are limited to those where somebody else (the Feds, State or Counties) hands that responsibility over along with the resources to discharge the responsibility.

Metro has invested a limited amount of general revenue in a great

variety of efforts, with no clear return. It will have that general revenue for only a few more years, fail to get more, and settle back into a role of limited purpose special district, living on the overhead extracted from enterprise services.

II. GENERAL DIRECTION FOR METRO

1. What are the three most important issues that Metro must confront in the next 2 to 3 years?

a. The most important issue facing Metro is in the area of solid waste. Can we develop a comprehensive facilities plan for solid waste for this region that has the support of a broad constituency; and can we take visible first steps toward building those facilities? This is a responsibility that is clearly ours. Resources are available to accomplish plans. We must do a good job on this, or take ourselves out of the local government game. I rate the challenge of this issue as way above all others in priority, as important as those other issues are.

b. The next order of priority I would assign to gaining a stable revenue base for the zoo, and completing important, visible improvements at the zoo. The good job that has been done at the zoo cannot be continued without resources, and that good job is a major positive factor in the region's acceptance of Metro.

c. We must find a way to more systematically and routinely examine Metro's role and service potential. It does not appeal to my rational sense just to wait until someone hands something to Metro before we can consider a new role.

I think the idea of a metropolitan agenda is a good one for this region, and defined properly, it could be the vehicle we need to put regional issues before the public and other jurisdictions for review, analysis and recommendation.

First, a metropolitan agenda is not just Metro's agenda, it is the region's agenda. Although we can take some responsibility for developing and maintaining the agenda, it is not ours so it should not frighten people and jurisdictions as much as having it on our agenda.

Second, the agenda can change. Items can be added to, and taken from, the agenda--because they are no longer considered an issue or because they have been accomplished. New ideas about this or that regional service or issue could be added, as opportunity or demand dictated.

Third, the agenda can include projects which need to be done as well as subjects which need to be discussed. And it can include projects which need plans as well projects which are planned but need money.

Fourth, it is the kind of framework that local jurisdictions might find useful, and therefore be willing to voluntarily contribute

to when our dues authority runs out in 2 years.

Finally, a metropolitan agenda is a great device for keeping the idea of regional in front of the public.

In short, a metropolitan agenda can serve the region and Metro in a variety of ways. The present metropolitan agenda is, I feel, too narrowly confined to a few projects. If taken seriously, it will have the affect of concentrating a lot of money for a lot of time on projects which have a limited constituency, and leaves the Council with no flexibility in adding to that agenda.

Let's establish a metropolitan agenda over the next budget year which has wide interest and a variety of projects and subjects for discussion by individuals, groups, businesses and jurisdictions across the region. This will not be possible without a fundamental budget change, admitted.

d. Last, though not an issue in the strict sense, I feel we must do something about the way in which the Council does business. It starts with a hard look at how we are established by statute, includes how we organize the Council by our own rules, and must eventually conclude with a set of written and unwritten (but accepted) rules of general personal conduct of Councilors during our proceedings. I don't think we should do this ourselves. We are too involved, positions are too established and perspective too limited. Maybe an outside group-- or a number of outside advisors--could take a fresh, independent look at us and offer some suggestions.

2. What needs to be done by the Council, Executive Officer and Staff to accomplish the work above?

a. The Council, Executive Officer and Staff must view the solid waste system plan as the Council's choice among alternatives. They must address as many qualified resources as necessary to come to that choice; and they must follow up an early adoption of the plan with immediate facility improvements. From now until November 1, this item should be on the top of everyone's agenda.

b. The Council, Executive Officer and Staff must demonstrate that the zoo is on Metro's team by pitching in to help get a new levy or base established by vote of the region. This will be on the ballot at an especially hard time for some regional voters, who are just coming out of a deep recession. From the conclusion of the zoo master plan effort until the May primary, this item should be on the top of everyone's agenda.