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## Pasco considers consolidation, bridge studies

By Dalina Castellanos, Herald staff writer

Pasco city officials considered spending \$28,750 on studies to determine the benefits of consolidating the Tri-Cities and the best spot for building a new bridge across the Columbia River during a city council meeting Monday.

Though the council could not take action at the workshop meeting, most council members seemed open to the idea of exploring options relating to consolidating Richland, Kennewick and Pasco.

"The word 'consolidation' evokes a lot of emotion" in the community, said Councilman Matt Watkins.

Though the idea hasn't been embraced in the past, a new study could provide a new and objective look at the situation, he said.

The consolidation study would cost the city \$10,000 a year for the next two years, with the same contribution from Kennewick and Richland.

The proposed two-part study, by the nonprofit William D. Ruckelshaus Center, is expected to cost \$140,000, with additional costs shared by the private business sector and port districts. The center is a joint project of Washington State University and the University of Washington.

The center has a history of tackling "thorny" issues, said Pasco City Manager Gary Crutchfield.

Councilwoman Rebecca Francik thought the study ultimately could act as a long-term planning tool for the cities and future projects.

"The fact of the matter is that the Tri-Cities are growing," she said.

Also Monday, the council discussed whether to participate in a study to determine the best location for a new bridge on the Columbia River.

The Benton Franklin Council of Governments is planning to conduct a study for the best location for an additional river crossing.

In the anticipation of future growth, another bridge would be needed to alleviate traffic congestion on the blue bridge over the next 20 years, when the Tri-Cities could add 60,000 to 80,000 residents.

The study to be conducted by the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments would cost \$250,000, and about half of that will come from the Washington Department of Transportation.

The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments recommends that Pasco, like Kennewick and Richland, contribute \$18,750.

Other contributors would include Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties, four port districts, and the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments.

If Pasco decides not to participate, the other jurisdictions might follow suit.

"They're kind of like the Three Musketeers -- 'All for one and one for all,'" Crutchfield said.

Once the study is completed, the state Department of Transportation would make the final decision on the bridge's location.

The council is expected to make its decision on whether to participate in the two studies at its next regular meeting Sept. 21.

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