

Current
67°F
94°/64°
Complete Forecast

Thu
Clouds
breaking
87°/48°

Fri
Mostly sunny
87°/51°

Sat
Not as warm
with some
sun
81°/53°



Voice of the Mid-Columbia | Kennewick, Pasco and Richland, Wash. | Wednesday, September 2, 2009 8:54 AM

MOBILE

SUBSCRIBE

PLACE AN AD

E-EDITION

HOME	NEWS	CRIME	SPORTS	BUSINESS	OPINION	A & E	LIFESTYLE	BLOGS	PHOTOS/VIDEO	WINE	CLASSIFIED	OBITS	ABOUT US/HELP
------	------	-------	--------	----------	---------	-------	-----------	-------	--------------	------	------------	-------	---------------



Welcome **Guest** Become a Member | Sign in

Search tri-cityherald.com Web Search powered by **YAHOO!** SEARCH

tricityherald.com / News / Mid-Columbia News

reprint or license

Print E-Mail

BOOKMARK

Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2009

Comments (2)

Recommend (10)

Should the Tri-Cities consolidate?

By John Trumbo, Herald staff writer

Consolidation of government and other community services in the Tri-Cities could build a stronger community, lead to better regional facilities but not necessarily save costs for taxpayers, says a report being released today.

Advantages and disadvantages of regional consolidation are included in the 34-page analysis, which was produced by a task force of the Three Rivers Community Roundtable.

The task force recommends having an independent study done to address the questions, challenges and opportunities identified in the report, which lists pros and cons of consolidation for improving municipal and county government.

The report does not identify task force members whose viewpoints are quoted. For instance, one task force member wrote: "I for one still believe that consolidation of the Tri-Cities is imminent. I believe that it will not take place suddenly but will slowly transition through a series of successful collaborations and functional consolidations, first in Benton County and then expanding across the river."

The consolidation issue was raised in December, when William D. Ruckelshaus, founder of the Ruckelshaus Center, attended a Tri-Cities Development Council meeting and expressed interest in being involved with the consolidation issue.

Mike Schwenk, chairman of the Three Rivers Community Roundtable, said then that the roundtable's task force would have its report on consolidation ready this month.

The 13-member task force focused on bringing community success through four progressive steps: communication, cooperation, collaboration and consolidation.

The report notes the issue of consolidation has been considered and debated in the Tri-Cities since the 1980s. Voters in Kennewick and Pasco rejected a consolidation proposal in 1985, and a subsequent attempt to consolidate Richland and Kennewick also failed.

"But times are changing, and more community leaders now think regionally," the report says.

While past consolidation attempts involved two or three cities, the task force includes West Richland as a candidate to join one larger city.

"Many people who voted on the issue 20 years ago are no longer here. Each city has seen an extended period of economic growth and expansion," one task force member commented in the report.

He noted population of the Tri-Cities has increased by almost 70 percent over the past two decades, and that improved regional transportation has helped "blur" the boundaries between the cities and counties.

Other factors noted in the report that could shape a new attitude toward consolidation are:

- A statewide 1 percent property tax growth cap, which is forcing more efficiencies in government.
- Greater public interest in regional facilities such as an aquatic center, another Columbia River bridge and a performing arts center.
- A teetering national financial system.

"The primary driver will be citizens' unwillingness to pass any new taxes or accept increased fees for service until substantive drops in levels of services occur," one task force member wrote in the report.

But not all task force members were enthusiastic about consolidation.

Forging three cities into a super city wouldn't necessarily ensure savings in administrative and management costs, said one task force member. The member wrote that savings on paper could easily disappear with higher pay warranted by salary surveys that compare with comparably sized metropolitan areas.

Likewise, the consolidation critic acknowledged that having three cities become one would give citizens a bigger voice in lobbying at the state level. But the critic also said citizens would have less access to their city council representatives. That argument is based on going from about 7,600

Advertisements



TOP JOBS

FT position Assistant to our
We are currently looking f
Columbia Industries
Seeks an
COMPANY DRIVERS/
OTR/ w/CLAS
Loan Officers Need a so
PROJECT DIRECTOR
Hiring Rang
» See More Jobs

Find a Job

Keywords:

Location:

Search



