

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2508

As Reported By House Committee On:
Government Administration

Title: An act relating to revising administrative provisions of metropolitan park districts.

Brief Description: Modifying the way metropolitan park districts are managed.

Sponsors: Representatives Van Luven, Chopp, D. Schmidt, Radcliff, H. Sommers, Mitchell, Dyer, Dickerson and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Administration: 1/21/98, 1/27/98 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doumit; Dunn; Dunshee; Murray; Reams; Smith; L. Thomas; Wensman and Wolfe.

Staff: Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).

Background: A metropolitan park district is authorized to manage parks, parkways and boulevards.— One metropolitan park district, the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma, currently exists in the state.

District Creation and Boundaries

Metropolitan park districts may be created in cities with a population of at least 5,000. One election is held to determine whether a park district should be created and to elect a board of park district commissioners, if the district is in fact created. Five separately elected park district commissioners serve six-year staggered terms.

The initial boundaries of a metropolitan park district are the city limits. The park district may later seek to annex adjacent territory.

District Management and Employees

The county treasurer serves as the ex-officio metropolitan park district treasurer without additional compensation. With the approval of the county treasurer, the metropolitan park district board may designate someone other than the county treasurer to act as the district treasurer. The district must obtain a bond if a treasurer other than the county treasurer is designated.

Property Tax Levies

A metropolitan park district may impose two separate regular property tax levies on all property located in the district: (1) a levy not to exceed \$0.50 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation; and (2) a levy not to exceed \$0.25 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. As are other taxing district levies, the metropolitan park district levies are subject to the constitutional 1 percent limitation on property taxes.

Most of the 1 percent limit (i.e., \$9.50 of the \$10 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation) is segregated into two components: the state levy equal to \$3.60 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation; and local senior and junior levies to a combined total of \$5.90 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The metropolitan park district's two levies fall within the \$5.90 component. A few other levies may be imposed above the \$9.50 component but within the 1 percent property tax limitation (e.g., emergency medical services).

General tax levies within the \$5.90 component and the remainder component are to be proportionately reduced if the combined rate of regular property tax levies exceeds 1 percent of the true and fair value of the property. A metropolitan park district with a population of at least 150,000 is authorized to submit a ballot proposition seeking voter protection of all or part of the \$0.25 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation levy from proration in the \$5.90 component. The ballot must be approved by majority vote and can be effective for six years following voter approval. Even though protected from proration under this component, this levy is still subject to proration under the 1 percent limitation.

Summary of Substitute Bill: An alternative organizational structure for a metropolitan park district is established.

District Creation and Boundaries

In a city with a population of at least 500,000, the city legislative authority may be designated as the governing body for the metropolitan park district when the creation of the metropolitan park district is considered by the voters. The park district commissioners are to be selected either by direct election or by designation of the city council or commission members. The selection method for the park district commissioners must be made at the time of the election concerning park district creation. The type of commissioners selected to govern the park district may not be changed once the district has been created.

The boundaries for a metropolitan park district governed by the city legislative authority are coterminous with the city limits, including any later annexed property. A metropolitan park district with separately elected commissioners may annex property according to statutory procedures.

In addition to the other enumerated services metropolitan park districts may provide, metropolitan park districts are authorized to provide zoos, aquariums, and other recreational, civic, cultural, and interpretive facilities as well as administrative and support facilities.

District Management and Employees

A metropolitan park district board is authorized to contract with any public or private entity (including the city creating the district) for all of its operations and services. The managing organization may appoint the chief executive officer with the park district's approval.

Employees of a metropolitan park district governed by the city legislative authority may be included in a city's personnel system and civil service and retirement plans.

Separately elected metropolitan park district commissioners receive no compensation for their services to the district. City council or commission members serving as park district commissioners receive no additional compensation for services related to the park district.

For a metropolitan park district governed by the city legislative authority, the city treasurer serves as the ex-officio metropolitan park district treasurer without additional compensation. Any metropolitan park district may designate someone other than the county or city treasurer as the metropolitan park district commissioner.

Property Tax Levies

The levy reduction provisions that keep the combined rate of regular property taxes from exceeding 1 percent of the true and fair value of any property are altered to insure that a levy imposed by a metropolitan park district in a county with a population of one million may not cause the emergency medical services levy, county conservation futures levy, or low income housing levy to be reduced.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The city legislative authority may act as the park district commissioners only in a city with a population of at least 500,000. The selection of the type of commissioners (i.e., separately elected or city legislative authority) must be made before the election creating the district and cannot be changed after the district is created. The city treasurer serves as the park district treasurer when

a park district is governed by the city legislative authority. Organizational changes are made to the park district statutes as enacted.

Testimony For: The metropolitan park district has proven to be a good idea for Tacoma, and HB 2508 provides local citizens with the power to make the Woodland Park Zoo a great zoo. The Woodland Park Zoological Society is a regional nonprofit organization which has provided fundraising support to the zoo. The Woodland Park Zoological Society participated in the city of Seattle's Zoo II Commission, which recommended the Society continue to move toward greater management responsibility for the zoo, and has worked with Seattle in proposing the metropolitan park district structure as the vehicle for transferring zoo management authority. Making these management changes would further encourage private support. The metropolitan park district's levy authority would not preclude Seattle from obtaining transportation funding.

HB 2508 does not create a significant change to current law, as authority already exists to create a metropolitan park district.

Testimony Against: The Metropolitan Park District in Tacoma is the only functioning metropolitan park district in the state of Washington and wants to maintain the management structure it has today. An issue has existed regarding the city of Tacoma taking over the metropolitan park district. The threshold for choosing the city legislative authority for park district governance should be increased to 400,000 to eliminate application of this statutory change to Tacoma. The city of Seattle does not seem to be actively supporting this bill. HB 2508 may cause regional facilities to be funded out of local taxes.

Testified: Representative Van Luven (pro--prime sponsor); Robin Appleford, Gerry Johnson, and Bill Lewis, Woodland Park Zoological Society (pro); Mike Doubleday, city of Seattle (neutral); and T.K. Bentler, Metropolitan Park District (concerns).