



STATEWIDE — INDEPENDENT — NON-POLITICAL — FACT-FINDING

WASHINGTON STATE RESEARCH COUNCIL

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WALLA WALLA CITY-COUNTY CONSOLIDATION RECOMMENDED

Consolidation of the entire County of Walla Walla with the City of Walla Walla and the other cities and towns in the county was recommended as a long-range answer to local government problems in the area by a Washington State Research Council report released today. The report suggests that the consolidation be modeled along the lines of the one effected by the City of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee a few years ago.

Under the proposed plan, the new city-county would consist of two districts--an Urban Services District (generally the City of Walla Walla and surrounding area) and a General Services District (the entire county, including the Urban Services District). Each district would be taxed according to the services provided. Policy for the new governmental unit would be set by an elected city-county council and an elected chief executive.

The Research Council report states that such a reorganization would simplify local government organization, eliminate duplication and overlapping of services, reduce administrative costs, provide greater flexibility in meeting needs, and create a public agency capable of providing service on a logical, area-wide basis.

The study by the Research Council was financed in part by a grant from the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin Foundation. The report is largely the work of Richard L. Ballinger, Jr., University of Washington graduate student in the School of Public Affairs. Ballinger was employed by the Research Council last summer specifically for this project.

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One of the reasons that Walla Walla was chosen for the study is that it is one of the few counties in the State of Washington which has only one major city. Problems facing the city and county of Walla Walla are not as severe as those confronting local governments in some of the larger, more urbanized areas of the state. The study found that, generally speaking, Walla Walla local governments were capably administered and in reasonably sound financial condition.

Despite these plus factors, the area does have some problems. They include:

1. City and county governments provide a number of similar services, resulting in duplication, unnecessary problems of coordination and unnecessary expense for administrative overhead.
2. Special districts which hinder the provision of services on a logical, economical, area-wide basis.
3. County government organizational structure which makes coordination of services difficult and hinders the fixing of over-all responsibility.
4. Suburban areas outside cities and towns which require services neither the city nor the county can now provide to them.
5. Postponed, needed capital improvements, particularly at the city level.
6. Inadequate salaries for city and county employees.
7. Insistent pressures for larger local government expenditures coupled with a revenue structure which does not produce large increases each year.

The Research Council study was limited to an evaluation of city-county consolidation because this kind of proposal crops up with increasing frequency in the search for a local

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government reorganization plan which will resolve a wide range of difficulties. City-county consolidation continues to be suggested in Washington State and in other parts of the nation even though (1) constitutional and statutory obstacles to this plan of reorganization generally are formidable and (2) few localities have utilized this plan, particularly in recent years.

In the Research Council report, withdrawal of the City of Walla Walla and a portion of the surrounding area from the County of Walla Walla to form a new, consolidated city-county government was rejected as impractical. "Functional consolidation" of certain county and city services (e.g., police protection, jails, libraries, etc.) was recommended as a short-range solution which would establish the groundwork for a more complete and lasting reorganization.

The study is believed to be the first analysis ever made of the possible effects city-county consolidation might have on a specific area of Washington State. Recognizing the extensive changes in laws and local attitudes which would be required to make city-county consolidation a practical alternative to existing organizational forms, the report concludes that efforts to bring about these changes would be justified by the strengthened local government which could result.