

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6530

As Reported By House Committee On:
Government Operations

Title: An act relating to counties.

Brief Description: Changing provisions related to counties.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations (originally sponsored by Senators Haugen and Winsley).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Operations: 2/21/96, 2/23/96 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Reams, Chairman; Cairnes, Vice Chairman; Goldsmith, Vice Chairman; Hargrove; Honeyford; Hymes; Mulliken; D. Schmidt and Van Luven.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Rust, Ranking Minority Member; Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Conway; R. Fisher; Scheuerman and Wolfe.

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127).

Background: Provisions outlining various county responsibilities are established in statute.

Summary of Amended Bill: Several provisions relating to county responsibilities are clarified and updated.

A county is no longer required to furnish wood or attendance expenses, but must continue to furnish the court house, a jail, record books, stationery, lights, and other incidental expenses of the courthouse and court.

As an alternative to the requirement of creating a planning commission, a county planning under the Growth Management Act may establish an alternative method of

soliciting assistance from the public in the preparation and execution of a comprehensive plan and its implementing rules.

A county must prepare and adopt a comprehensive transportation program before the adoption of the county budget each year, instead of July 1 of each year.

The responsibility for determining whether a petition to vacate or abandon a road satisfies the appropriate requirements is placed with the county road engineer, instead of the county legislative authority. If the petition is satisfactory, then the county road engineer must prepare and submit an engineering report to the county legislative authority. Upon receipt of a satisfactory petition and the county road engineer's report, the county legislative authority will hold a public hearing. The county road engineer is required, as opposed to needing to be directed by the county legislative authority, to make a determination as to whether it is appropriate to vacate or abandon a county road.

Outdated time periods are deleted from the provisions regarding the hiring of employees for the county sheriff's office. Employees in an existing county personnel system in which appointments are made on merit may be transferred to new positions in the sheriff's office without meeting the open competitive examination requirements. The Civil Service Commission must approve the transfer, and the persons to be transferred must satisfy the specific appointment requirements of the sheriff's office.

A jail register for a county jail may be kept electronically. The requirement that an incarcerated person's records can be made available to criminal justice agencies for use in safety inspections of the jail is deleted. The underlying provision providing for these inspections was previously repealed.

A commission is created to review county finances and services, and report its findings on January 1, 1997. The committee is comprised of the Lieutenant Governor, members of the Legislature, and representatives from the Office of Financial Management, the Association of Counties, the Association of Cities, the Association of Sewer and Water Districts, and the Fire Commissioners Association. A member of a local government association may not serve on the commission if, at any time in the preceding 24 months, the association either had more than one employee engaged in lobbying or the association used its funds for campaign purposes.

The county legislative authority may appoint a clerk and any assistants for the county board of equalization, who serve at the pleasure of the county legislative authority. The county legislative authority is given the authority to hire appraisers to assist the board of equalization.

A county with a population of 75,000 or less that currently plans under all the requirements of the Growth Management Act may adopt a resolution by December 31, 1996, removing the county and cities located in the county from these requirements.

A comprehensive plan or development regulations adopted by a county may not be invalidated by a Growth Management Hearings Board.

The Department of Ecology must adopt rules increasing categorical exemptions from the State Environment Policy Act on activities within an urban growth area. In addition, several existing categorical exemptions for new construction and land use decisions are increased within urban growth areas.

The maximum number of lots in a short subdivision located in the unincorporated portion of an urban growth area is increased from four to nine.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The purpose of the study commission was added. Restrictions on members of local government associations serving on the commission were added. The 75,000-population county opt out of the Growth Management Act was added. Categorical exemptions were added. The prohibition on a Growth Hearings Board declaring a county's plans or regulations invalid was added. The potential increase in the number of lots in a short subdivision within an urban growth area was added. A provision was deleted relating to local hazardous waste plans.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The underlying bill is basically technical and establishes a commission on county services and sources.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Haugen, prime sponsor; Gary Lowe, Washington Association of Counties; and Elizabeth Schrag, Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation.