



## Incoming Washington County Chairman Andy Duyck says governing unincorporated areas -- whether via annexation or not -- will be top issue

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"We can't stay where we're at. Whatever that direction, I hope we can all agree to, but we need to have a clear plan," says incoming Washington County Chairman Andy Duyck.

HILLSBORO -- As recently as a year ago, if you asked him, **Andy Duyck** would politely explain that the long-term solution for governing Washington County's massive unincorporated population was annexation by cities.

Now, Washington County's chairman-elect says he isn't so sure.

"I'm starting to believe," Duyck said in a recent interview, "that's not ever going to happen."

With Duyck preparing to take the reins of the county commission in January, the longtime rural-area commissioner says the biggest issue leadership must address is the governance puzzle that has befuddled Oregon's second-largest county for so long.

Two years after the county's ballyhooed **Urbanization Forum** began working toward such solutions, county and city officials have been meeting privately in recent months to discuss options, costs and financial resources in anticipation of an eventual public vetting. Options could include revisions to Oregon's annexation laws, new taxes, or divvying up money now shared only by cities.

Roughly 325,000 of Washington County's residents live in cities such as Hillsboro, Beaverton and Tigard. They pay taxes to the cities, which in turn provide services and amenities such as parks, code enforcement and police protection.

But more than 200,000 county residents live in urban areas beyond city limits, in upscale neighborhoods of Cedar Mill or Bull Mountain and aging areas of Aloha and Metzger. They don't pay taxes to cities and in some cases go without amenities or services they either covet or potentially could benefit from.

"We can't stay where we're at," Duyck said. "Whatever that direction, I hope we can all agree to, but we need to have a clear plan."

County leaders are considering whether to ask the Legislature to make changes to state law. Officials haven't endorsed or even publicly discussed what they might want specifically. But draft documents produced by the county include a few possible targets:

- Revisions to Oregon's protections against so-called cherry-stem annexations. State law limits cities' abilities to use long portions of roads to reach and annex areas that aren't contiguous to existing boundaries.
- Revisions to elections requirements for annexation. Large annexations require a majority of voter support from residents living in targeted areas and from city voters as a whole.

While those are issues the county may like to press, Duyck said he doubts the Legislature will considering giving local government more annexation power. That's because of concerns about potential land grabs and outrage among residents and businesses, as happened under former Beaverton Mayor Rob Drake's watch.

That means the county needs to consider ways to find more money, Duyck said.

County leaders could ask the Legislature to permit prorated distribution of liquor and gas taxes that are paid by unincorporated residents but distributed only to cities. They could ask for a share of franchise and utility fees also paid by unincorporated residents but shared by cities. Another concept includes creating new tax districts -- similar to the **Enhanced Sheriff's Patrol District** or the Urban Road Maintenance District -- to pay for selected services.

Some of those concepts may be non-starters. Duyck said city leaders have been reluctant to share franchise fees, for instance.

"I haven't found a single one yet that supports it," he said.

Duyck said he expects the county commissioners to push forward on these difficult discussions. Joining him for the policy discussion next year will be Commissioners Dick Schouten, Roy Rogers and two new faces to be decided by voters Nov. 2.

There's already a difference of opinion among members.

Schouten, who represents Beaverton and Aloha, lost the race for chairman this spring to Duyck. Schouten is the board's biggest proponent that the county could, and should, provide urban-level services.

"For me, I don't think the status quo is working," he said. "We need to be thinking about how we can grow, and grow smart."

Rogers, who lives on Bull Mountain, has a different take.

He thinks citizens should decide if they want to pay for more services by annexing into a city. At least in the short term.

"I believe in the status quo," he said, "only because we haven't articulated what the costs, consequences or alternatives are.

But Rogers, who as a county commissioner since 1985 is Washington County's longest-serving politician, said it's clearly time to answer those questions and work toward a lasting solution.

"We're going to have to struggle with what's our vision, not only near-term but long-term," he said. "It's easy to be politically expedient. It's hard to do what's politically right."

-- **Brad Schmidt**

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