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COUNTY, CITY FIND *CHILDREN'S LEVY* COMPROMISE

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Summary: Both governments have debated the makeup and operations of an oversight committee for programs

A power struggle between Portland and Multnomah County over a \$50 million *children's levy* has been resolved into a draft agreement that both governments will consider next week.

The deal to be voted on by the City Council and county Board of Commissioners came after talks nearly broke down between staff for the two governments.

But negotiators from the offices of City Commissioner Dan Saltzman and county Board Chairwoman Diane Linn said they've struck a workable compromise.

"We're eager to get this group up and running," said Jeff Cogen, the Saltzman policy adviser who negotiated the agreement with Linn chief of staff Kathy Turner.

Progress has come in fits and starts since Portland voters passed the levy, thought to be the first of its kind in Oregon. City and county officials have haggled since the November election over the makeup and operations of a levy oversight committee. The City Council put the measure on the ballot without specifying which groups would get the money or how they would meet the commitment to pay only for "proven" programs.

Talks on who was responsible for what had to balance the county's background in social services with the city's interest in decision-making authority over money approved by its residents.

In the traditional division of government labor, the county is responsible for social services and the city for urban services such as fire, police and utilities. But in the case of the five-year *children's levy*, it was city voters who approved the spending.

"After months of hard bargaining, we found something that works for both of us," Turner said.

The draft agreement calls for the county board to review a five-person oversight committee's spending plan and provide advice to the City Council on it.

The council must approve the entire plan or send it back to the committee. The committee will consider any changes, with recommendations by the county board and resubmit the plan to the council.

Turner said that setup will safeguard against individual groups lobbying for or against specific spending items before either the council or board.

If the council does not approve the entire resubmitted plan, then the council will adopt its own plan. The county will enter into contracts recommended by the committee and approved by the city.

The whole process will be re-assessed after a year.

Cynthia Wells, executive director of Early Head Start Family Center of Portland, said the process needed a citizens committee to give advice on priorities and the committee makeup.

Cogen said the two governments needed to negotiate their working arrangement before opening up the process.

Discord between the city and county first surfaced last month over the oversight committee itself.

Disagreement over panel size

Saltzman and Linn disagreed over the county chairwoman's request to expand the committee beyond five members. The City Council voted 3-2 for a resolution that included a five-person committee Saltzman wanted.

Saltzman, who led the successful campaign to pass the levy, is the council's representative on the committee.

County Commissioner Lisa Naito will represent the county, and a slot saved for the Portland Business Alliance will be filled by Ron Beltz.

Beltz considers the struggle between two governments to be typical and said, "Once we get rolling, everything will be fine."

The other two citizen appointments on the committee may come before the council when it considers the agreement at its meeting Jan. 29.

The agreement assigns half the \$10 million in annual spending to after-school and mentoring programs. It also sets a goal of 40 percent for early-childhood programs, and 10 percent for child abuse prevention and intervention.

Wells criticized those spending targets as misplaced.

"That's sure not the mix I would have come up with," Wells said. "You've got the highest risk children receiving the least amount of money."

The exact mix was not on the ballot question, but Turner and Cogen said that was the blend proponents touted during the campaign.

The breakdown is a set of goals that does not preclude more money going toward one category if there are strong enough proposals, Cogen said.

"We don't want to be hamstrung by what's out there," Cogen said.

Henry *Stern*: 503-294-5988; henrystern@news.oregonian.com.

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