



Summary of AWC/WSAC Cost Savings Legislation

Background:

In anticipation of legislative debate about which state-shared revenues may be subject to reduction and the possibility that some state responsibilities may be passed down to local governments, AWC and the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) have introduced HB 2641 and SB 6372. Both associations have been gathering ideas for months on possible cost-savings opportunities (and revenue enhancement ideas, introduced in a separate bill) that could potentially offset at least some of the anticipated losses in revenues, and/or enhanced responsibilities.

These bills aim to generate discussion and debate among legislators and other interests and to help make the point that many of the “easy” things like delaying various mandates, have already been done (like our Fiscal Relief bill from last year). Many of the issues addressed in this bill are controversial and will receive strong opposition. If we are to make progress on these issues, legislators need to hear from their cities that true cost-cutting measures are needed.

Bill Summary: HB 2641/SB 6372 - Cost savings for cities and counties

Extends the time between mandatory financial audits

Under current law audits occur annually. This bill specifies that audits would occur only once every three-years unless the audit is:

- To address suspected fraud or irregular conduct;
- At the request of the local government;
- Required by federal laws or regulations; or
- If the county or city had a finding involving a significant violation of state law or weakness in internal controls in the preceding year.

Adds new criteria and guidance for binding interest arbitration

Arbiters could not rely on or give undue consideration to past arbitration decisions but must consider the following criteria:

- The constitutional and statutory authority of the employer;
- The budget priorities, as determined by the governing body;
- Financial and budgetary constraints;
- Internal equity within the organization among employee pay and benefits;

The bill gives additional guidance on what constitutes a comparable agency when looking at wages, hours and conditions of employment. Like departments would be “determined by factors including, but not limited to, population size, geographic location, financial conditions, population demographics, workforce size, assessed valuation, and labor market conditions.”

Enhances the ability to use volunteers

Restricting the use of volunteers may not be part of a collective bargaining agreement

Provides for greater use of impact fee waivers for low-income housing (not included in SB 6372)

Under current law when a city or county grants impact fee waivers for low-income housing, the local government must pay the waived fees from their own general fund. This bill removes that requirement. The bill also adds conditions for properties that may qualify for the exemptions and defines low-income housing.

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Provides legislative direction on requirements in new Phase II municipal stormwater permits

The Department of Ecology has issued draft municipal stormwater permits that contain, for Western Washington, extensive new requirements for Low-Impact Development (LID) techniques to be used in new development and redevelopment. The bill directs Ecology to develop a permit that emphasizes training and voluntary incentives rather than across the board requirements to utilize LID.

For Eastern Washington the bill directs Ecology to develop a collaborative monitoring program over the course of the next permit rather than the onerous top-down monitoring requirements in the current draft permit, and calls for Ecology to measure the effectiveness of public education and outreach techniques rather than requiring each jurisdiction to do so.

Specifies that non-use of car seats or seatbelts to be admissible evidence in civil actions

Under current law non-use of child car seats or seatbelts is NOT admissible evidence in civil actions. The bill reverses current law.

Creates workgroup to explore public health efficiency recommendations

The bill directs the Department of Health to convene a work group of public health partners including counties and cities to develop recommendations to the legislature on preferred funding and service delivery methods that ensure a cost-effective, nimble, responsive, and sustainable public health system throughout Washington. The work group is to submit their recommendations to the legislature by January 1, 2013.

Reduces ordinance publication requirements

This bill would allow cities to publish a 50-word summary of adopted ordinances in the newspaper. The full text of the ordinance must be available on the cities website, and as a hard copy upon request.

Changes other notice provisions for counties

The remaining sections of the bill relate to changed public notice provisions for counties. If legislators deem it appropriate, the bill can be amended to also include notice changes for cities.

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