

State may combine city, county public safety services

■ Changes to legislation would allow governor to implement local sales tax if voters reject property tax levy

By Jane Stebbins

Pilot staff writer

The Curry Coastal Pilot learned late Tuesday that House Bill 3453, legislation that would allow the state to combine Curry County's public safety services with those of the cities, had been amended after languishing in committee for about six weeks.

The changes:

- Governor's office could negotiate with county and cities to provide public safety services. Cities and other governmental agencies could participate at their own discretion.
- Work done on behalf of the state would be limited to 18 months, giving the county time to develop a plan for fiscal sustainability.
- The governor's office, with approval from the county, could implement a sales tax to cover half of the work the state provides. The other half would be paid for by the state.

The original bill was proposed after Curry County "self-declared" a public safety emergency and put on the May 21 ballot a tax proposal meant to avert a fiscal crisis.

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“This substantially changes the bill,” said Brookings City Manager Gary Milliman of the new legislation. “If the amendments go through, there’s every indication that the governor’s office supports it.”

The House bill would likely only go into effect if Curry County’s public safety levy (8-71) fails May 21, forcing the county to make ends meet with a \$2.1 million budget.

The major changes in the bill would allow the governor, on

behalf of the county, to negotiate agreements between Curry County and its three cities — Brookings, Gold Beach and Port Orford — to provide public safety services. The original bill indicated the governor’s office could force these “mergers,” but the amendments indicate the cities can work with the county or state to provide services at their own discretion.

Under the latest terms in the bill, the agreements between the cities and county would be sunsetted after 18 months, in which time the county is hoped to have devel-

oped a financial plan to end the crisis created when federal timber revenues ended.

Another amendment in HB 3453 indicates the cost of providing those services and creating the intergovernmental agreements would be funded equally by the state and county.

In the original bill, the cost of performing those services was to be billed to the county. And because the county collects property taxes from all the special taxing districts, each would have been affected if the county took a certain percentage of

the taxes it collected.

The county is still not off the hook.

The amended bill would allow the county to enact an income tax surcharge to enable the county to pay for the work provided by the state. The governor’s office, it is believed, would likely be involved in the discussion of that rate, Milliman said.

“I think it’s a good compromise to the bill,” Milliman said. “The League of Oregon Cities is still reviewing it; they might change their position from opposing it to supporting it.”