

**Report: Westshore Council of Governments (WCOG) meeting, Nov. 13, 2013
by LWV observers Conda Boyd and Susan Murnane (Bay Village chapter)
and Mary Warren (Lakewood)**

This report, which contains observations and selected highlights of a meeting of the WCOG, is not an official statement of the LWV.

Present: Mayors Bobst (Rocky River), Clough (Westlake), Kennedy (North Olmsted), Patton (Fairview Park), Summers (Lakewood)

Absent: Mayor Sutherland (Bay Village)

Also in attendance: Dave Greenspan, District 1 Representative, Cuyahoga County Council; Steve Presley

Meeting called to order 9:34; Mayor Kennedy left at 10:38; meeting adjourned 11:10

Guest: William Denihan, CEO, Alcohol, Drug Addiction, & Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County

Mr. Denihan gave a brief history of mental health services. The Community Mental Health Act of 1963 provided federal funding for mental health centers. With a philosophy of placing people in the "least restrictive environment," it led to deinstitutionalization of large numbers of people with mental health problems; unfortunately, "the money never followed the people." Medicaid covers only seven of 25 essential services for this population, and in general only for 90 days. Mayor Summers noted that on day 91, some people end up on the street.

Because county-wide property values have declined, the November 2013 mental health levy only restores funding to 2011 levels. ADAMHS (Alcohol, Drug Addiction, & Mental Health Services) distributes funds to the agencies that provide the services. For example, the county psychiatric center is St. Vincent Charity Medical Center. A 24x7 crisis hotline operates at 216-623-6888. Emerald Development and Economic Network (EDEN) operates group homes in the county. (A recent court case established that information on group homes cannot be released to cities. The mayors expressed concern about this: individual privacy must be protected, but the individuals who live in group homes may benefit from fire and police officers knowing where the homes are located.)

Medicaid expansion would cover "transitional youth" -- 18-26-year-olds -- but only if they live at home. Other important populations in need include widows and widowers who lose benefits when their spouses die, new parolees who may lose benefits after 90 days, and adults who are too young for Adult Protective Services (which helps those over 60 years old). The mayors cited this under-60 group as a growing concern, along with hoarders.

Regarding ex-prisoners, Mr. Denihan stated that the recidivism rate for those with untreated mental health issues is 60%, vs. 5% for those who receive treatment. The annual cost to keep someone in prison is \$36,000; annual treatment in the community averages \$3,500.

The mayors were unanimous in noting city senior centers and licensed social workers as vital resources, along with support from friends, neighbors, and churches. It is not realistic to expect the mentally ill to navigate a complex system alone. Eligibility requirements, the legal system, even obtaining transportation to seek help are barriers. More case managers are needed. Ideally, social workers should visit clients in their homes to identify issues such as cut-off utilities, lack of food and medication, and hoarding, but this does not happen because state funding does not pay for travel time.

ADAMHS provides several services to cities. In some areas of the county (although not in the WCOG cities), licensed social workers work in the schools. Over the past six years, 680 police officers have received crisis intervention training. Training can also be arranged for social workers and other professionals. The mayors will seek a joint crisis intervention training session for westshore safety forces and social workers in the spring.

Mr. Denihan encouraged the mayors to call him directly with any issues and asked to return in three months to review progress. He also encouraged participation in the Cleveland Clinic Heroin Summit on November 21 <http://ohiohidta.net/heroin-summit-112113>

Westshore Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) Proposal

The Westshore FIU was informally established in 1998 to provide a pool of fire investigators who could be called out through the WestCom dispatch center. The team is used about 15 times a year. Lakewood Fire Chief Scott Gilman presented a draft proposal by the WCOG cities' fire chiefs to formalize operating procedures and allow for a budget of \$500 per community per year for equipment and training.

The proposal was placed on the December agenda. The mayors asked that the fire chiefs finalize their recommendation, vote a resolution of support, list individuals who are candidates for the team, and itemize costs and proposed equipment. Meanwhile, the mayors will talk to their chiefs individually and ask their law directors to review the proposal. Mayor Bobst noted that it is vital to understand the overtime implications, both for individuals on the team and for the firefighters who backfill when a team member is on an investigation.

Other Topics

Mayor Patton reported that 34 people attended the County Planning Commission training in October.

Tricia Granfors, Westshore Regional Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Coordinator, reported that 21 individuals from seven communities graduated in the recent CERT class. Westshore CERT now has 292 members.

Dave Greenspan, District 1 Representative, Cuyahoga County Council, presented checks for \$2,000 to CERT representatives. The money was raised through a charity baseball tournament.

Future Topics

Tentative topics include the Fire Investigation Unit, the cost allocation formula for the Westshore Enforcement Bureau, an update on narcotics, and Share Ohio, an inventory system that could provide a basis to track and share public works equipment.

The Westshore Council of Governments was founded in 1971 "to foster cooperation between municipalities in all areas of municipal service." All meetings are open to the public. The next meeting will be December 11, 9:30-11:30 a.m., at the Lakewood Women's Pavilion. Official minutes are prepared by Mayor Summers's office. In 2014, Mayor Patton will chair the WCOG.