

County Council Regular Meeting: August 13, 2013

Observer:s Lynda Mayer & Susan Troia

This report contains member observations and selected highlights of a meeting of the Cuyahoga County Council and is not an official statement by any League of Women Voters in the county. For the official disposition of all agenda items, consult the Cuyahoga County Council website at council.cuyahogacounty.us

I. Introduction.

The meeting convened at 5:25pm, due to a late conclusion of the preceding Committee of the Whole meeting, which these observers did not attend. Councilman Gallagher was absent and excused. The meeting adjourned at 6:40pm.

II. Antecedents, Announcements or Public Comment

The previous CoW meeting concerned the sale of the County Archives Building and the possible re-leasing of it by the County for the coming year. Space was also to be leased in the Halle Building, for an anticipated period from 2014 to 2024

The Public Comment period featured a formal statement by the League of Women Voters urging the Council to put the proposed Charter amendment enshrining the Inspector General position onto the November 2013 ballot for the voters to decide.

Both Council President Connally and County Executive FitzGerald addressed the issue of whether tax revenue from Horseshoe Casino will be used for downtown or for cash-strapped inner-ring suburbs as well. Some suburbs have lost up to 25% of their property tax base and are even unable to borrow further. Councilman Schron of the Investment Advisory Commission expressed interest in making loans available to suburbs which have exhausted their credit for vital municipal projects. Up to \$80 million could possibly be available for such loans.

At the end of Mr. FitzGerald's remarks, he took time to express his agreement with the points made by LWV in support of the proposed IG Charter Amendment.

III. Business Transacted.

* A number of appointments to 4 boards and commissions were approved, but not until Council discussed at length some solutions to the difficulty of getting qualified applicants for such positions.

* Seven proposed Charter amendments were up for 3rd reading passage (ballot placement). They were simply deferred to final decision on Aug 27. The seven are these:

0136 (Bd. of Revision clarification); 0137 (Council actions not requiring Exec sign-off); 0139 (Redistricting impact on Council seat retention); 0140 (residency requirement for CoExec); 0143 (clarifying CoExec vacancy provision); 0144 (clarifying Council vacancy provision); and 0145 (performance audit of the judiciary).

* Six proposed Charter amendments were up for 2nd reading consideration. All were moved along to third reading at the next regular meeting on August 27, but not without discussion of several. These six are one reading behind the above seven, because they are Council re-writes of original versions submitted by the Charter Review Commission. The six are these: 0158 (clarifying

the Human Resource Commission's duties); 0159 (clarifying appointing authority of the CoExec); 0160 (distinguishing between the Prosecutor and the Law Director); 0161 (adjusting the timeline of future Charter Review Commissions); 0162 (increasing independence of the Sheriff) and 0164 (establishing the "agency" of Inspector General). There were no further motions to substitute. Items 0160 and 0164 are of keen interest to the LWV.

* Eight of the Charter Review Commissions's originally worded recommendations were NOT-recommended for positions on the November ballot. Six of them had already been reworded by Council and have thus survived in somewhat different form until the August 27 final decision.

Among the six original versions deleted was the CRC version of an Inspector General proposal, to which most Council members spoke. Councilpersons Miller, Connally and Schron agreed with the majority that the original version had been too specific. Others including CP Greenspan and Simon emphasized that they intend to vote for the pared-down version on August 27. Several referred to points made in the LWV testimony earlier.

Of the two original CRC recommendations defeated entirely, Council also discussed the Campaign Finance proposal at length. Almost all agreed with CP Miller and Rogers that the issue needs to be revisited, but that the original's language had been unacceptable. CP Simon said, however, that she will vote for it in the future only if it similarly handicaps "one-percenter" candidates who can fund their own campaigns with no limits. The other rejected proposal was one requiring administrative judges to advise on future Clerk of Courts appointments.

* Council adopted a directed the Executive to develop a program for environmentally and economically efficient employeee public transportation to and from work.

* Some resolutions read for the first time and referred to committee included 1) \$3.4 million for the sale of county buildings, to then be leased back again to the County, and 2) almost \$1 million for a Work Experience Program for recipients of Ohio Works First cash assistance.

* Some resolutions adopted on second reading included 1) \$1.5 million to an architectural firm working on a new convention hotel near the new facilities; and 2) 24 contract amendments with providers of placement services for the County's abused and neglected children. These revisions contained a near-equal amount of decreased and additional funds.

* \$44.5 million for phase one of the Opportunity Corridor (the widening and reconstruction of E. 105th Street from Chester to Quincy Avenues) was approved, after three readings. CP Jones spoke of big economic development and job opportunity potential. No special assessments will be either levied or collected for this project, and Council expressed confidence that Phase One is a good deal, even if Phase Two never comes to pass.

IV. Notes.

Copies of LWV remarks were given to all officials, but it could not be determined whether press was present, so an e-copy was sent to PD reporter Laura Johnston. Final votes on ALL Charter amendments will be held on Tuesday afternoon, August 27.