

County Council Regular Meeting: December 10, 2013

Observer: Lynda Mayer

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.

This final County Council meeting of 2013 was called to order at 5pm by Council President C. Ellen Connally. All were present except for Council member Julian Rogers, who has announced his resignation for early in 2014. During the initial portions of the meeting the microphones were dead, so some detail may be lost.

II. Antecedents, Announcements or Public Comment.

Ms. Connally announced the upcoming resignation of Sister Joanne Gross, a major Council aide since 3-Commissioner days and transition to Charter government. County Executive FitzGerald commended Council for producing a budget which reflects the moral values of the community. He credited the new government with having invested in such efficiencies and created such fiscal soundness that we are unmatched by any other county in Ohio and matched by only a very few counties in the United States. He also gave great credit to voters who roundly approved the Health and Human Services levy in a time of increasing personal hardship for many.

At a Committee of the Whole session before the general meeting, Council members heard from David Gilbert of the Greater Cleveland Sports Commission and Positively Cleveland. He presented information underscoring the fact that this County in 2013 held more major athletic events than any other metro-area in the country but one. And so far, year 2014 expects to improve on that record, all of which has had and will have a large impact on economic activity.

III. Business Transacted.

* A two-year, all-funds budget, amounting to c. \$1.3 billion in the first year, was approved. It's revenues do not quite meet expenditures, so the budget calls for withdrawal of \$600,000 from the County's reserve fund. Council members accept this, several somewhat grudgingly, because the reserve fund ("rainy day cushion") is considerably larger than prudent policy deems necessary, or because they believe the withdrawal will not be necessary. Budget Committee Chair Dale Miller spoke highly about each Council member's biggest contributions during 11 hearings and over 30 hours of public work.

* Council also formally terminated the agreement with Merchandise Market Properties Inc. for the management of the County's new convention center and medical mart.

* Council supported all but two of the applications by local or regional Land Conservancies to the Clean Ohio Fund Green Space Conservation Program for the conservation of ecologically significant areas around the County, as reported here on November 26. Two received no support (for areas around the Dunham Tavern and the Irishtown Overlook). There was no

discussion, even though the E.D. of the Planning Commission was present to field questions. The Clean Ohio Fund will act upon these applications at a later date.

* A number of roads projects were adopted on second reading. The most expensive were:

- \$2 million to resurface E.250th St. from Lakeland to Lake Shore in the City of Euclid;
- \$450,000 to resurface and re-do streetscape on Huron Road from Prospect to Euclid downtown (adjacent to the new County Headquarters);
- \$2.8 million to resurface Woodhill Road from Quincy Ave. to Kinsman in Cleveland; and
- \$3.6 million to resurface Belvoir Blvd. from Fairmount to Mayfield in the Cities of Shaker Heights, South Euclid and University Heights.

* Another such project got first reading: \$3.2 million to resurface E. 222nd St from Tungsten to Euclid in the City of Euclid.

* A resolution was withdrawn that would have authorized an Economic Development Fund Large Scale Attraction Loan to a Euclid senior care facility on Bluestone Blvd. to relocate and expand.

* A huge list of 34 child placement agencies, to cost the County up to \$153.6 million over the next 3 years, was read for the first time and sent to the Health & Human Services committee. Ms. Connally explained to the audience that this enormous item actually represents the major function of the County.

* Over \$2 million in contract amendments was awarded to 9 providers of In-School and Out-of-School Youth Training programs. These amendments extend the original time frames of the original contracts for one additional year.

* \$6 million in County Taxable Economic Development Bonds were authorized to be issued and sold to support the Westin Cleveland Hotel Project. That hotel, together with existing hotels and the new Hilton on the site of the old County Administration Bldg. will comprise the room numbers needed to support the expected attendance surrounding the new Convention Center.

IV. Notes.

Mr. Greenspan reported that the Rules Committee will convene on Monday, January 13, to take up promised action to work on three proposed Charter Amendments which were withheld from the November 2013 ballot because 4 of the 11 Council members thought they could have been better drawn. Those amendments would 1) increase the independence of the Sheriff, while keeping the office appointive; 2) write the office of Inspector General into the Charter; and 3) distinguish between the jurisdiction of the elected Prosecutor and the appointive Law Director. League members will follow this process closely.