

County Council Regular Meeting: Jan. 14, 2014

Observer: Marcia Goldberg

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 first County Council meeting of 2014 was called to order at 5:05 p.m. by Council President C. Ellen Connally. All were present except Council member Julian Rogers, who arrived at 5:10 (and who has announced he will resign from Council at the end of January).

II. Antecedents, Announcements or Public Comment

Before the meeting moved into the agenda, Ms. Connally and Mr. FitzGerald noted the death of political strategist Arnold Pinkney. Then they and Mr. Miller thanked Matt Rubino, who has been director of the county's Office of Budget and Management since 2010, for his years of service. Mr. Rubino is leaving to become finance director for the city of Shaker Heights. (Former Shaker Heights City Council member Lynn Ruffner attended this meeting; she is planning to run for the District 9 seat on County Council; Ms. Connally is not running for reelection.)

Mr. FitzGerald announced that his State of the County address will be delivered on Feb. 19 at the new convention center.

III. Business Transacted.

- Thomas Colaluca, a lawyer who practices in Chardon, was appointed to a spot recently vacated on the three-person Personnel Review Commission. Ms. Conwell, who heads Council's Human Resources committee, explained that Council had to move swiftly to find a replacement because if one of the other two commission members is ill or out of town, the commission has no quorum. An interview process open to all Council members was conducted, Ms. Conwell said, and Mr. Colaluca brings "extensive background and expertise" to the commission. Council voted unanimously to appoint Mr. Colaluca on first reading and as an emergency measure.
- Council considered a 20-year renewal of the sin tax on first reading. Council members want to get public input on the proposal to extend the county tax on tobacco and alcohol to pay for renovating and repairing sports facilities and to repay the county for construction costs. Public meetings are set for Tuesday, Jan. 21, at 3 p.m. (Committee of the Whole meeting and public hearing) and 5 p.m. (Special County meeting); on Thursday, Jan. 23, at 2 p.m. (Committee of the Whole) and Tuesday, Jan. 28, at 3:30 p.m. (Committee of the Whole and public hearing), before the regular County Council meeting. The tax has been in place since 1990. The renewal has to be approved by eight of Council's 11 members before the filing deadline of Feb. 5.
- An ordinance to add a definition of the word "nominee" in the County Code and restricting any nominee's political contributions and fund-raising activities was on first reading and was referred to the Council Operations Committee. This ordinance was initiated following an IG investigation into a contribution made to the county executive by a nominee to a county board.
- A resolution amending the 2014-15 biennial operating budget for 2014 that included what Mr. Miller called "mostly routine" appropriations and transfers was passed 10-1 on first reading under suspension of rules and as an emergency. Mr. Greenspan voted against this, explaining after the meeting that he opposes the county's ownership of the Hilton Hotel to be built near the

new convention center. He said he is continuing to fight the proposal and so will vote against any budget resolution that refers to the hotel's current funding proposal.

- Resolutions passed unanimously on second reading as emergencies under suspension of the rules included :
 - resurfacing an additional section of Turney Road in Garfield Heights and Cleveland for \$800,000;
 - resurfacing East 222nd Street in Euclid for \$3.26 million;
 - purchasing property (just under \$25,000 for rights of way) to improve Bagley Road in Middleburg Heights and Parma;
 - leasing space (for \$534,500) on Brookpark Extension Road in North Olmsted for a regional auto title office near a state BMV office;
 - awarding Reliastar Life Insurance Co. a \$2 million contract for stop-loss insurance services (which protects the county from the harm of especially large claims—Ms. Conwell said this is a new vendor charging a lower price than the previous vendor);
 - authorizing a \$1.28 million Economic Development Fund loan to SWP Acquisition, an investment firm, for the purchase and renovation of the building at 3750 Park East Dr. in Beachwood;
 - adjusting contracts with various providers of HHS case management; and amending universal pre-kindergarten contracts with the Cleveland City School District.
- Various other resolutions and ordinances were referred to Council committees. Some relate to appointments to boards, others to fee schedules, appropriations and transfers, Economic Development loans, work on lakefront development, a property lease, a sewer and water maintenance agreement with Warrensville Heights, agreements with the County District Board of Health, the city of Fairview Park and the village of Walton Hills for participation in the county Benefits Regionalization Program, changes to the Non-Bargaining Classification Plan, the Small Business Enterprise program, educational and occupational training programs, and residential treatment and shelter care services.

IV. Notes.

Mr. Greenspan said that the Council Operations and Intergovernmental Relations Committee will meet at 9 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 27, to continue discussion of three proposed Charter Amendments that 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 appointed Law Director. League members will follow this process closely.