

County Council Regular Meeting: Jan, 28, 2014

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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 regular meeting of the County Council was called to order by President C. Ellen Connally at 5pm, with all members present. During the meeting, Council accepted the resignation after 3 ½ years of District 10 Councilman Julian Rogers, who will become Director of Partnerships at Cleveland State University. Many words of farewell and tribute were spoken. There was no discussion of how his successor will be chosen.

II. Antecedents, Announcements or Public Comment.

The regular meeting was preceded by a 3:30 Committee of the Whole meeting which was dominated by an entire room full of citizens urging or expressing reservations on a proposed extension of the “sin tax” to pay for upkeep of the 3 major-league sports facilities in Cleveland. Then, at 4:45, an official public hearing on the same topic also took place. Notable among the comments were the pleas that any agreement with the 3 franchises include requirements that the teams perform services for the county and its people’s needs. Several Cleveland City Councilmen spoke in favor of the tax, explaining that the stadiums are owned by the public, as determined by prior referenda, and as such, must be maintained by their citizen wners. If the sin tax does not pass, the County will be obligated to pay for upkeep from its General Fund instead, thereby taking money away from the County’s other vital social and infrastructure needs.

In the regular meeting, Mr. FitzGerald spoke also to the obligation to maintain the facilities and the trivial nature of the upcharge residents and visitors would pay when purchasing a pack of cigarettes or a drink. Repeatedly, speakers recited a litany of the economic impact of these three new stadiums to the increasing vitality of downtown and of the dire consequences if the teams should decide to move out of the County or to a rival city elsewhere.

III. Business Transacted.

* After hearing reasons for the votes of 7 Council members (Germana, Schron, Simon, Greenspan, Conwell, Miller & Jones), the Council voted unanimously to put the question of the May 6 Primary Election ballot, so that the voters (who own the stadiums) can decide.

* New members were appointed to the RTA Board, the Planning Commission, and several other boards.

* \$27 million for the new County Administration Building was removed from the routine budget adjustment item, so that it could be scrutinized separately.

* Eighteen Resolutions were passed on Second Reading, with suspended rules, including the following large or especially interesting ones:

-- \$153 million was authorized for awards over the next biennium to 35 providers of child placement services. Department Chair Rick Warren explained that this is a Master Services Agreement which will, over the next 2 years, need occasional adjustments.

-- A \$2 million Economic Development loan was authorized for the purchase and rehabilitation of a facility on Highpoint Drive in Beachwood.

-- The Master Contract for residential treatment services was amended to increase the total amount to \$3.85 million and to change the amounts to 6 approved providers. Additionally, the Master Contract for the Youth and Family Community Partnership Program was amended to increase the total amount to c. \$4.6 million.

-- \$2.1 million and \$1.2 million were awarded to two providers of Staff Secure Shelter Care Services for the coming biennium.

-- Three contracts (\$1.2 million, \$5 million and \$3.55 million) were awarded to Starting Point, the company that administers professional development programs, the special needs child care program, and a part of the Invest in Children program, respectively.

* Also passed on second reading were a number of agreement by area municipalities and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to join in the County's new Benefits Regionalization Program. This County-initiated regionalization initiative is the biggest of about 12 that the County has offered, in order to permit greater efficiencies and savings to collaborating communities. The municipalities named today are Fairview Park, Walton Hills, and soon-to-be University Heights and Highland Heights -- others have been named at previous meetings, and at least 6 more are in the works thus far.

* An \$8.4 million award for the reconfiguration of the troublesome 5-Points intersection in Shaker Heights was given first reading, as was an \$12 million Economic Development bond issue to refinance the Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center project at 11635 Euclid Ave. uptown.

* Two ordinances are at various stages in the legislative process: one amending policies and procedures for the County Procurement Card program and the other amending policies and procedures for the Small Business Enterprise program.