

County Council Regular Meeting: July 22, 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 meeting was called together by Council President Connally at 5pm, with all 11 members present. Introductory remarks revolved around today's marking the last time that Council will meet in its temporary Justice Center chambers. County Executive FitzGerald described the new headquarters in glowing terms, especially its natural light, its uplifting environment for workers, and its local public art.

II. Antecedents, Announcements or Public Comment.

In the preceding Committee of the Whole session, Council moved the remaining two charter amendment proposals out of committee -- the Voting Rights amendment and the Inspector General amendment. League statements were made in support of both. Voting Rights passed on a partisan 8-3 vote, after an attempt by Mr. Greenspan and colleagues to reduce it to an aspirational right without authorization for legal action to protect that right. The IG amendment passed also, with one amendment by Ms. Simon to reduce the size of the Council majority required to remove the IG. The vote was 9-2, with Ms. Connally and Ms. Conwell in opposition, but with two others saying their Yes vote was to "move it onto the Agenda." Mr. Greenspan cautions that those two votes may not hold, which would deny the measure the 8 votes needed to send it to the voters. Other CoW action was a lengthy discussion, including numerous public statements, regarding the establishment of a Demolition Fund to help with removal of derelict buildings.

III. Business Transacted.

* All 7 proposed charter amendments received second reading and will appear at the August 12 meeting for third reading and final action. They deal with:

- residency requirements for the County Executive and County Council members
- added independence for the office of Sheriff
- a more generous timeline for subsequent Charter Review Commissions
- the Agency of Inspector General
- changes in the composition of several ex-officio boards & commissions
- filling a potential vacancy in the office of County Executive
- protection of the rights of County voters

A previous proposal for nonpartisan, top-two elections and another proposal were dispatched at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, so the above 7 are the survivors. More detail to follow.

* An ordinance was passed on third reading to provide financial assistance to municipalities for the routine maintenance of County roadways.

* The usual item appropriations transfers etc. was divided this time, because it contained three large capital projects deserving of separate attention. The most interesting of these is the proposed pedestrian bridge to the lakefront. The remainder was approved as usual.

* Council expedited the passage of \$2.9 million for the repair and resurfacing of Madison Avenue in Lakewood. The Mayor of Lakewood thanked the Council, explaining that this stretch of the street will be turned into a vibrant business district.

* Adopted on 2nd reading, under suspension of the rules, were these items --
-- \$1.4 million for operational support to job training centers
-- \$3.6 million for transportation services
-- amendments to 29 contracts with various providers of Universal Pre-Kindergarten services, changing time frames and adjusting amounts an average amount of \$100,000 each.

* The 2014 Economic Development Plan required by the charter was adopted.

* A wellness program for County employees was extended to three years, at a cost of \$1.6 million.

* Passed on a close vote was an ordinance establishing a Social Impact Financing Fund, for the purpose of funding contracts to improve outcomes and lower costs for contracted government services.

* Two proposed ordinance received 2nd reading and will be acted upon on August 12:
-- establishing procedures for setting the Sheriff's fee schedule for background checks
-- extending the hotel bed tax for capital improvements. During the citizen comment period, Will Tarter spoke in favor of a 20-year extension, but Council members did not agree, setting it instead at 40 years. Mr. Miller explained that the bed tax is paid exclusively by out-of-town visitors and will be an increasing source of County revenue due to the current uptick in Cleveland's attractiveness as a destination city. His 40-year amendment was passed.

IV. Notes.

The new County Administration Building at 9th and Prospect is complete and departments are gradually moving in. From now on, that is the location of all Council committees as well. The next regular County Council meeting will be in the new Council Chambers, which will be a challenge for our next several observers until we figure out exactly where it is and how one might best park. There is a large garage across Prospect, with a walkway bridge to the County Building, so one should allow time to head there first and then ask directions to the chamber.