

County Council Regular Meeting: October 22, 2013

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:

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. with all members present and adjourned after 7 p.m.

II. Public Comments, Presentation and Announcements:

William Clarence Marshall, secretary of the “Carl Stokes Brigade,” and Charles Bibb Sr. of the Eighth District Black Caucus, urged Council to make sure black residents of the county share “full participation” in the demolition of the county administration building and construction and operation of the Hilton Hotel to be built on the property. They said that since one-third of the county’s population is black, at least one-third of the workforce should be black.

Michelle Asher spoke on behalf of Graystone Properties, which owns the Halle Brothers Warehouse at East 40th Street and Chester Avenue. She wants to meet with Council members to urge them to lease the building to store county archives (more on this below).

Jeffrey Appelbaum, a lawyer with Thompson Hine and the director of Project Management Consulting, made a 45-minute presentation on the convention center’s hotel project, a Hilton Hotel going up at Ontario and Lakeside avenues. Appelbaum, consultant on the project, said that the design and programming process has already begun and that the hotel will have 665 guest rooms, including 65 suites, two ballrooms, a restaurant, bar/lounge and retail space. A presentation on the design will be made at the Nov. 12 Council meeting. He reviewed the choices of project architect (Cooper Carry of Atlanta) and design builder (Turner/Ozanne/VAA), then went over the required contract approval schedule for the city/county/port project. A document presentation is also scheduled for the Nov. 12 meeting. He explained that “inclusion goals” for the project were: 40 percent workforce from the county; 20 percent from the city; 4 percent low-income, 25 percent SBE (small business enterprises), with voluntary goals to be set for MBEs and FBEs (minority and female business enterprises). Mr. Jones praised the idea of voluntary goals, since the county cannot mandate them; he wants to vet ideas about reaching the goals.

County Executive FitzGerald discussed his concerns about two issues: the collection of municipal court fees compelled by the state to fund CRIS (Cuyahoga Regional Information System), and Council’s upcoming decision on where to consolidate and store its archives. The court fees are not collected in a uniform way and on a case-by-case basis, and Ohio’s attorney general and the county’s law director agree that they should be. So unless the municipal courts come to an agreement, this problem itself may head to court. As for county storage, Mr. FitzGerald wants Council to lease the Halle Brothers Warehouse at East 40th Street and Chester Avenue, a \$33 million investment, rather than build a new \$59 million facility. He implied that Council preferred the latter choice and said that made “no logic.” He wants Council to defer its decision (the resolution to lease the Halle warehouse was on second reading tonight). Council members do not usually directly respond to Mr. FitzGerald at this point, but Mr. Brady,

obviously upset, said that Council was nowhere near making a decision on this and that the choices were not as stark as the executive presented them.

III. Business Transacted

* By a vote of 8-3, Council approved the College Savings Program, which sets up a \$100 savings account for every kindergartner in the county. Funding in the current operating budget is \$1.95 million. The three Republicans on Council, Messrs. Gallagher, Greenspan and Schron, voted against the resolution, complaining that 25 percent of the budget was going for administration and that Ohio's 529 plan already provides for college savings accounts. The other eight said that the 529s help middle-class families, while this county program would help the less-advantaged. Ms. Connally said she was willing to give the program a try but that it should come under a "serious review" in three years.

* Council unanimously approved amendments to NOACA's code of regulations. The amendments deal mainly with giving Cleveland as much authority on the board of directors as the five member counties, clarifying the board's activities, and making sure the board realizes it operates under Ohio's ethics laws.

* Council also unanimously approved the following:

- a wastewater treatment agreement between North Olmsted and Olmsted Township; the purchase of sewer trucks and parts that will be shared with 34 communities in the county;
- a \$1 million Economic Development Redevelopment Loan to the Fairmont Creamery Leverage Lender for renovation of the building at 1720 Willey Ave.;
- a \$1.8 million "revenue generating agreement" with Cleveland and its municipal court, hiring the county's public defender to represent indigent defendants appearing in Cleveland's court.

* On third reading, resolutions were passed unanimously approving economic development loans of \$1 million for Parmatown Station (a mall) and \$680,000 for Playhouse Square's property at 1317 Euclid Ave. (rental-pool property).

* Final votes, following third readings, will be taken on Nov. 12 regarding Economic Development bonds for the Flats East development (\$17 million) and for the Westin Hotel project (\$6 million—this was Bond Court/Crowne Plaza on St. Clair Avenue).

* Various resolutions and ordinances were referred to committees, the most significant being the referral BACK to the Committee of the Whole the resolution about leasing the Halle Brothers Warehouse. Mr. Gallagher said, "Let's discuss this fully and do it right, as Mr. FitzGerald suggested." The resolution will be brought back for a final vote on Nov. 12.

Other resolutions referred to committees involved the Hilton Hotel construction project, road and bridge repairs, funding MetroHealth and social services.