

County Council Regular Meeting: August 27, 2013

Observer:s Lesley Hahn

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:

All Council members were present for the meeting, which began promptly at 5:00 p.m. but did not adjourn until 7:48 p.m. A large part of the meeting concerned 13 Charter amendments that the Charter Review Commission recommended be submitted to the electors of the County in November. Approval by at least eight of the eleven Council members was required to get on the November ballot. As it turned out, only four resolutions were so approved. Regarding those that will not appear on the November ballot, some were favorably regarded, but Council members felt that too many items on the ballot would turn off the voters. If the proposed amendment was not time sensitive, usually it was not approved.

Four residents addressed the Council concerning sale of the Archives Building (See R0213-0169 below), despite being advised that their comments could be made at a future committee-of-the-whole meeting. Tony Thomas spoke briefly as representative of the buyer, Welcome House, Inc. Apparently the Archives Building consists of two Ohio City structures that are former historic homes. If sold to Welcome House, they will be used in part as a residence for young people who have aged out of the juvenile system and for staff members who will live on site. The residents spoke of their concerns with the sale price, the effect that these low-income residents will have on the neighborhood and whether a better use of the property could be achieved.

Bruce Akers, chairman of the Charter Review Commission, also addressed Council with his hope that several specific proposed Charter changes be put on the ballot, foremost among them being the Inspector General amendment, for which the League of Women Voters also advocated for at the previous Council meeting. Council members thanked him extravagantly for the CRC's hard work.

II. Business Transacted:

* Approved: (first reading, suspension of rules) appointment of Christina Culek as Council Office Assistant. She was selected out of 200 applicants.

*Also approved was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Prosecutor and the County's Law Director, governing the duties, powers and responsibilities of their respective offices. Although this agreement had been in the works for months, a "final" draft was agreed upon only last Friday and final details were worked out only late this afternoon! LD Makhlouf and a representative of the Prosecutor were present to explain the MOU, which required compromises on both sides. Language in the current County Charter is conflicting, and a Charter amendment on this topic was proposed for the November ballot. (See below) The agreement was approved by a 9 to 2 vote.

* Several Board appointments received first reading and were referred to committee: the Cuyahoga Arts and Culture Board, Group Plan Commission, and various individuals to serve on the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging.

* Each of 13 proposed Amendments to the County Charter was discussed and voted on separately, each needing eight Council votes in order to be placed on the ballot. The four issues that were unanimously approved concern:

1. An amendment clarifying the role of the Board of Revision and its Hearing Boards;
2. Specification of actions of Council that do not require Executive approval to be binding;
3. Establishment of a Personnel Review Commission under authority of Council to ensure fairness and due process for employees; and
4. Establishment of Executive appointing authority that extends confirmation time to 60 days.

A proposed Amendment that LWV supported was the inclusion in the Charter of an Agency of Inspector General. As Councilman Schron stated, “this goes to the very core of charter reform.” Having an Inspector General would prevent or discourage the corruption that existed in the three-commissioner system. Although this Amendment was approved by a majority, it did not achieve the necessary eight votes to be placed on the ballot. Those voting against it were Council President C. Ellen Connally and Councilpersons Brady, Conwell, Jones and Miller. At present an Office of Inspector General is established by ordinance; but it would be guaranteed if it were enacted as an amendment. Other proposed amendments failed to receive eight votes because they were not “deemed time sensitive,” and the amendment allocating duties between the County Prosecutor and the Director of Law was obviated because of the approved memorandum of understanding discussed above.

* Several resolutions were sent to committee for hearings, including

- Fixing the 2014 storm and sanitary sewer rates and \$1.67 million for cleaning and televising sanitary sewers;
- A \$4.4 million master services agreement with MetroHealth System for toxicology services and pediatric foster care;
- An shared services award of \$333,000 to the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council of Governments for their 9-1-1 consolidations;
- A \$537.5 million award to Salvation Army for managing rental assistance program for homeless men;
- An award of \$992,000 to Ohio Works First for the work requirement for those receiving assistance

* As referred to earlier, an award to Welcome House, Inc. in the amount of \$650,000 for sale of the County Archives Building received second reading but was sent to the Committee of the Whole for further deliberation.

* Lastly, one day after National Dog Day, an ordinance establishing dog license fees was approved as an emergency measure. Council President Connally informed us that \$15,000 to \$20,000 of the fees collected go to the Ohio State University Department of Veterinary Medicine, and she has written to them requesting services for our dog pound, the largest in the state.