

Report: Westshore Council of Governments (WCOG) meeting, Wednesday September 10, 2014

by LWV observers Susan Murnane (Bay Village) and Nikki Salupo (Fairview Park)

This report, which contains observations and selected highlights of a meeting of the WCOG, is not an official statement of the LWV. Official minutes are prepared by Mayor Patton's office.

Present: Mayors Patton (Fairview Park), Summers (Lakewood), Bobst (Rocky River) and Clough (Westlake)

Absent: Mayors Kennedy (North Olmsted) and Sutherland (Bay Village)

Also in attendance: Dave Greenspan, District 1 Representative, Cuyahoga County Council; outgoing Fiscal Officer Steve Presley; incoming Fiscal Officer and Bay Village Director of Finance Renee Mahoney; Cuyahoga County Director of Regional Collaboration Jennifer Scofield

Mayor Patton called the meeting to order 9:35 in the Birch Room at the Gemini Center in Fairview Park. It adjourned at 11:00. The minutes of the June 11, 2014 meeting were amended and approved. Renee Mahoney was appointed Finance Director of the WCOG, and Steve Presley was thanked for his service.

Cuyahoga County Director of Regional Collaboration Jennifer Scofield:

Ms. Scofield spoke for most of the meeting. She has been employed in the office of the executive since December 2010. Previously, she served as Cuyahoga County Deputy Fiscal Officer. Her prior experience with regional collaboration includes the County Health Alliance, LakeStat involving the Lake Erie watershed and the Cuyahoga River, and the Center for Excellence in Local Government. She replaces Ed Jerse, who retired in December, and she will continue his economic development initiatives.

Ms. Scofield provided a handout listing shared services currently offered by Cuyahoga County. Most of the services are in public safety and justice services, such as the MARCS radios that WCOG communities obtained through the county, joint training opportunities, facilitating jail and fire service regionalization, and the REDSS (Regional Enterprise Data Sharing System). Other shared services include public works such as sewer, road, and bridge maintenance; operations training and some service provisions for human resources; IT training and maintenance; grant writing assistance; and regional geographical information services (GIS). Mr. Greenspan presented a summary of the services used by each of the WCOG municipalities.

Mayor Summers asked whether REDSS was phasing out. REDSS is a criminal justice data network and warehouse service. It is replacing an older system

called CRIS (Cuyahoga County Regional Information Service), and Mr. Greenspan said that there has been confusion at the Northeast Ohio Regional Fusion Center because of the transition. Under the auspices of Ohio Homeland Security, the Fusion Center facilitates intelligence sharing about criminal activity and national security among federal, state, and local public and private entities. Norberto Colon, Deputy Chief of Staff, Justice, is currently in charge of REDSS, and it is expected to become more visible and effective soon.

Mayor Patton asked about the county's cyber security assistance program. Fairview Park is in the process of renewing its insurance contracts, and the city's general liability insurance does not cover cyber security. Even though Fairview Park employs RITA to collect local taxes and thus its computer systems do not include residents' personal information, the cost of a cyber security liability rider is high. Ms. Scofield promised to put Mayor Patton in touch with the appropriate expert. Ms. Scofield does not manage the county's various shared services; she has a small staff and is charged with facilitating utilization of shared services.

Mr. Greenspan said that the county GIS system aspires to include information from all municipalities and make it available to all without cost on the county's platform. The county envisions a comprehensive, multi-layered planning tool. On August 28, 2014, Dan Meaney and John Kable presented a free, all day symposium on the system. That symposium was fully subscribed, and they would be happy to do it again if the mayors so desire.

County Council Update:

Mr. Greenspan encouraged the mayors to have their road projects evaluated so they can be placed on the schedule for the next season. The project list will be compiled the first of the year.

He reminded the mayors of his upcoming Town Hall meeting to be held at the Westlake campus of Tri-C. The proposed charter amendments and the Tri-C levy will be discussed.

Mr. Greenspan also said that the county is considering demolition grants for blighted property that would be independent of the Land Bank but contain incentives to use the Land Bank. As envisioned, the grants would be in the form of interest free-loans to the municipalities. These loans would be repaid by dedicating half of the increase in property taxes on the demolished properties for the term of the loan. Any loan balance remaining at the end of the term would be forgiven. Only a small number of properties in the WCOG municipalities would be eligible for the grants. The mayors discussed problems involved in getting all stakeholders to agree to designating property "blighted."

NOACA:

NOACA was the only commission to warrant discussion. Mayor Summers asked

about the history of the agreement concerning the new interchange on Interstate 90 at Avon. Mayor Bobst said that she would try to find a copy of the agreement. Cleveland, Rocky River, and Bay Village signed the agreement; Lakewood and Westlake did not. Mayor Clough said that the interchange violated all of NOACA's professed principles. NOACA said that it would never support a new interchange where there wasn't already commercial development, but the Cleveland Clinic had the clout to change their position.

Lakewood has a permanent seat on NOACA, and Mayor Summers reported that the reorganization presents a challenge for Cuyahoga County. All of the other counties routinely send all eligible voting members and vote in a block, but if Cuyahoga County would also send all eligible members and vote in a block it could outvote the other counties. Unfortunately, Cuyahoga County has been very fragmented and has done a poor job of defending its interests. For example, Cuyahoga County rated 87 out of 88 counties in the amount of license fees that are returned to the county. Mayor Summers expressed the conviction that the most important initiative of the next county executive would be to spearhead a cohesive caucus in NOACA to defend Cuyahoga County's interests.

New Business:

The mayors began a discussion about exploring utilization of alternative fuels. Fairview Park had just removed a number of old, leaking gasoline tanks and was looking for alternatives to maintaining a traditional fuel depot. Some municipalities had deferred expenditures during the recession. They were beginning to buy again and wondered whether they should consider alternative fuel vehicles. Mayor Clough reported that RTA had announced that the next fleet would use alternative fuels. In his opinion, federal subsidies and initiatives make alternative fuels attractive. Mayor Summers reported that Clean Fuels Ohio could provide grant funding for a shared alternative fuel depot. Possibly a shared alternative fuel depot could also be opened to the public as an additional source of financial support.

Mayor Summers reported that Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC), a council of governments that negotiates with utilities, wants to expand its natural gas business. He asked whether WCOG wanted to take a position on this. No agreement was reached.

The Westshore Council of Governments was founded in 1971 "to foster cooperation between municipalities in all areas of municipal service." All meetings are open to the public. The next meeting will be October 8, 9:30-11:30 a.m., in the Fairview Park Gemini Center's Birch Room.

