

County Council Regular Meeting: Oct. 10, 2017

Observer: Lynda Mayer

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 County Council was convened at 5pm and concluded at 5:50pm. Council President Brady presided, and Councilman Schron was absent but excused. The agenda was full of significant and/or weighty items.

II. Antecedents, Announcements and Public Comment.

From 1pm to 4pm there had been a Committee of the Whole meeting to hear an overall introduction and presentation of the administration's 2018/2019 Biennial Budget proposal. This observer arrived just as the session ended, but information from William Tarter of the Center for Community Solutions shared the gist of the thorniest issues as well as copies of the summary by the Office of Budget & Management. Hearings are scheduled over the next weeks, before Council must pass its adjusted final version. See "Notes" below for more.

Mr. Brady, moved by the machine-gun massacre in Las Vegas, made a weary plea for "common sense gun control," which he said he was tired of having to repeat so often. Subsequently, County Executive Budish reported that all of the bonds for the "Q-project" were sold last week. As a part of the process, the County's favorable bond ratings were reaffirmed.

A spokeswoman for the Solid Waste District and six members of environmental nonprofits spoke in support of a proposed ordinance charging a fee for single-use plastic and paper carryout bags in stores and markets. Plastic waste has been shown to clutter Lake Erie as well as landfills and landscapes everywhere. After the meeting, other advocates addressed homeless policy, ongoing problems at the YWCA Women's Shelter, a lawsuit claiming verbal sexist abuse by a Council member (no names mentioned), and a lawsuit alleging employee pay injustice by the previous administration.

III. Business Transacted.

ADOPTED:

* A loan and a grant from the Casino Revenue Fund totaling \$750,000 were awarded to the New Eastside Market Project at St. Clair and E. 105th in Cleveland. Mr. Hairston said that this is a "big deal," eradicating a former "food desert" by providing a major source of fresh produce to East Side communities. Council members Simon and Jones also extolled the action.

* The County approved the applications to the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program for two local green-space projects by the West Creek Conservancy and the City of Brook Park.

* \$2.3 million was awarded to various providers of review and appraisal services in connection with the 2018 Sexennial Reappraisal project coming up next year.

* \$12.2 million in additional funds were authorized for group healthcare benefits for County employees and dependents as well as for those in other local jurisdictions that participate in and pay into the Benefits Regionalization Program..

* The 2017 County Sustainability Plan was read for the second time and is due for a final vote on 10/24. This plan outlines 7 strategies that reduce local greenhouse gas emissions, increase green energy practices, increase alternative transportation options, spread environmental know-how, employ green strategies, collaborate on water quality and enhance responsible land use.

* A newly proposed ordinance would authorize a “Carry-Out Bag Fee” of 10¢ per bag, to decrease the county’s blight caused by disposable bags and help pay the costs of environmental remediation. The ordinance defines “carry-out bag” and sets the fee to begin July 1, 2018. This ordinance was sponsored by Ms. Simon and Mr. Miller and was applauded by 7 members of the public during the Public Comment space on Council’s agenda. Announced committee hearings will follow..

* The Budget Committee submitted its proposed Tax Budget for the next fiscal year, which was referred to the Finance Committee.

* The administration’s proposed 2018-2019 Biennial Operating Budget and Capital Improvements Program was introduced and referred to the Committee of the Whole. Mr. Miller immediately submitted an amendment by substitution, adding actual numbers to the original document. This passed, and a series of hearings over the next several weeks was announced.

IV. Notes.

This meeting was almost an hour long and featured lively public comment, some issue advocacy by the Council President, and much explanatory interaction by Council members. The proposed budget apparently grapples with the hard facts of reductions in state and federal support at the same time as costs related to the opioid epidemic are soaring. State Law requires that county budgets be balanced, so reserves must either be slashed or new revenues/reductions found. On a happier note, some of the above-mentioned environmental initiatives merit attention and support, in this observer’s view. LWV observers missed the September 26 County Council meeting, but a short summary of measures adopted, as per approved minutes, is posted separately.