

County Council Regular Meeting: March 27, 2018

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.

Tuesday's County Council meeting was called to order at 5pm with all members present. By 6:10 pm the meeting had not yet concluded, due to the many visitors who addressed Council during Public Comment at the end of the agenda, but this observer had to leave.

II. Antecedents, Announcements and Public Comment.

County Executive Armond Budish expressed his outrage at the failure of county systems in place which somehow did not prevent the protracted parental abuse and death of 4-yearold Aniya Day-Garrett. He announced appointment of an independent review panel of local experts to examine how the county's procedures could have failed and can be improved. In addition to comments by the Rev. Pinckney-Butts and Miss Lu, a Mrs. Walker-Brown spoke to an item relevant to that issue.

The meeting was also crowded with activists and relatives or supporters of little Aniya who held Council accountable and challenged it to take action. Among the 9 speakers I was able to observe were three students, a spokesman for Black Lives Matter and a candidate for Governor from Dayton. Several applauded Mr. Budish's action, while lamenting that it comes too late to save Aniya. Mrs. Walker-Brown urged that Council members fire the officers or caseworkers she believes responsible, on pain of future election defeat, while Ms. Roz McAllister insisted that some stakeholders also be named to Mr. Budish's review panel. There were likely several more attendees in line to speak.

III. Business transacted.

* Adopted: A \$2 million Economic Development loan to "Project 29 Partners" to help develop a mixed-use housing complex in a vacant lot at 2850 Detroit Ave. in Cleveland. Mr. Schron said that it will bring 156 housing units, some retail, a veterinarian and a pharmacy to the space, all of which will contribute to the school districts revenue base despite tax abatements by the city. Ms. Conwell added that there had been ample community input for the project. Until now, the PD reports, the county had been reluctant to lend funds to housing projects.

* Additional items approved included the following:

- Two appointments to the Child Abuse and Child Neglect Regional Prevention Council of the Ohio Children's Trust Fund. This item attracted one public comment, expressing the hope that this panel would study why "so many of our babies are dying."
- A \$1.1 million award to a provider of printer paper for various county departments.
- A \$1 million award for replacing Bridge Box Beams on two deteriorating county bridges.
- A \$1.9 million award for improvements to the perimeter roads around the new Amazon complex in the Chagrin Highlands, in order to facilitate traffic flow.
- A \$2.7 million contract for the maintenance of electronic security networks at various county buildings.

- \$11.7 million in agreements with several county entities providing child support services – Juvenile Court, Domestic Relations Court, the Prosecutor’s office and the county Treasurer.
- Declarations of need to resurface 7 roads, for a total cost of c. \$3.7 million.

* Also adopted: An ordinance substantially revising the Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual for all employees, hammered out between the Human Resources Department and the Personnel Review Commission and resolving several issues involving overtime and other jurisdictional concerns of the two entities. Four additional amendments were appended during the meeting itself: one to protect whistleblowers as required by the Ethics Code, one to guarantee that any overtime pay be both limited and temporary, one to set limits on the use of “telecommuting,” and one to give the administration time to implement the changes.

* A companion ordinance updating the Civil Service Code received second reading today.

* Other notable actions either introduced or being considered were the following:

- A \$3 million award for the 2018 Sewer Rehabilitation Program.
- Retraction of a previous declaration requiring the resurfacing of Coventry Road through Cleveland Heights and as far as Shaker Blvd in Shaker Heights. No explanation was given.
- \$3.8 million in additional funds for changing the scope of residential treatment services by 17 providers such as the Glen Mills Schools, Bellfaire Jewish Children’s Bureau and the Cleveland Christian Home, Inc.
- A \$533,000 agreement with the Ohio Auditor’s office for its annual audit of the 2017 books.
- A \$1.9 million award to the YWCA for operation and case management for the Norma Herr Women’s Shelter at 2227 Payne Ave downtown.

IV. Notes.

Many members of the public were assuming that Council members have the power to intervene in the way the Department of Child and Family Services operates. Only the County Executive and his administrative heads are tasked with doing that, and “ward-healer” activity by legislators is prohibited by the county charter. However, the County Executive was present and listened to all the public comments. It was easy, amid all the comments directed at Council members, to lose sight of the fact that the mother and her boyfriend actually stand accused of the child’s abuse and murder, not the daycare center or the county workers who failed somehow to prevent it.