

County Council Regular Meeting: Sept. 12, 2018

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

President Dan Brady called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. All Council members except Dale Miller, who was out of town, are present. The meeting ended at 7:15 p.m.

II. Antecedents, Announcements and Public Comment

More than 30 people attended this meeting to comment on Council's proposed anti-discrimination ordinance, introduced in June and set for a final vote on Sept. 25. The ordinance was not on this meeting's agenda, but interest groups had obviously rounded up members to speak about the ordinance at this meeting—specifically about the ordinance's protections against discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The proposed ordinance would establish a Commission on Human Rights to receive and investigate complaints involving any sort of discrimination. More than 20 speakers, including a few men who said they were pastors, opposed both the ordinance and a section of a proposed charter amendment that would add the same gender identity protections to those seeking county employment. Eleven speakers, including the Anti-Defamation League's regional director, Anita Gray, spoke in favor of the legislation.

Those who opposed the proposed ordinance focused mainly on their belief that it would endanger women and little girls using public restrooms. Their fear centered on a theory that men dressing as women would enter women's restrooms with molestation as a goal. Some argued that anyone whose sexual orientation or gender identity did not conform to conventional norms were breaking "God's law," and one man urged Council to require that two of the three members of the proposed Human Rights Commission be Christian. Others complained that the Commission would create a "hostile environment" for businesses, especially small businesses that could not afford to defend themselves against legal action based on charges of discrimination. A Brooklyn councilman complained that the county was violating the right of municipalities to legislate local matters, otherwise known as "home rule"; another man argued that the three members of the Commission should not be required to be attorneys; and a few people urged Council to put the creation of the Commission on the ballot rather than passing it as a county ordinance.

Public comments went on until 6:40, when Council took a break. The meeting resumed at 6:55.

III. Business Transacted.

* An ordinance establishing a Division of Children and Family Services Advisory Board was passed unanimously. The ordinance was in direct response to the death last March of 4-year-old Aniya Day-Garrett, whose abuse by her mother and her mother's boyfriend had been investigated three times before her death—yet Aniya was never removed from her home. The Advisory Board will comprise up to 10 members and will serve as a link between the community

and the Department of Children and Family Services—providing DCFS with “independent perspective and feedback.”

* A usually routine budget resolution contained a \$1.6 million appropriation transfer also related to the death of Aniya Day-Garrett. A panel of experts that began meeting last spring made recommendations that called for additional appropriations from the Department of Health and Human Services levy funds to cover the hiring of 10 former police officers, 12 additional social workers, and the formation of a neighborhood collaborative to give support to parents and others in the community.

* A \$1 million resolution to support employment training of residents will move to third reading September 25th. It includes a three-year county contract with Fund for Our Economic Future, fiscal agent for a collaborative of public-private funders, and targets three industry sectors: healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology. The other funders for the collaborative are required to provide \$1.5 million in funding.

* Several items were introduced and referred to committees:

- A \$10 million construction loan for the \$138 million 34-story Lumen apartment building at Euclid Avenue and East 17th Street in Playhouse Square. Others involved in financing the project are the Port Authority, the State of Ohio, the City of Cleveland, the Richard J. Fasenmyer Foundation, and a group of banks.
- A number of grant applications for funding under the Clean Ohio Fund Green Space Conservation Program
- Appointments to boards and commissions
- Contracts for sewer projects
- A parking lot renovation
- Road construction
- A contract for family therapy services
- An amendment to an agreement with Cleveland’s Department of Public Health for expansion of the MomsFirst Program, which focuses on reducing infant mortality.