

## **County Council Regular Meeting: Sept. 25, 2018**

Observer: Audrey Morris

*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](http://council.cuyahogacounty.us).*

### **I. Introduction**

President Dan Brady called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. All Council members were present. Due to the large number of public comments, there were two short breaks. The meeting, the longest on record, adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

### **II. Antecedents, Announcements and Public Comment**

County officials estimated that at least roughly 220 people attended the meeting. Approximately 80 people commented on Council's proposed anti-discrimination ordinance, introduced in June and set today for a final vote. The business of the meeting did not commence until 9:05 p.m. Interest groups were out in full force and it was standing room only inside and outside Council's chambers.



Many spoke passionately 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, composed of 3 commissioners to be appointed by the County Executive, and will receive and investigate complaints involving any sort of discrimination. The ordinance offers protections to people on the basis of the already-protected classes of race, color, religion, military status, national origin, disability, age, ancestry, familial status or sex, and adds sexual orientation and gender identity or expression to that list. The majority of speakers, some from the ACLU, CWRU and Baldwin Wallace, spoke in favor of the legislation by sharing personal stories and arguing that the legislation is needed to ensure equality and civil rights in Cuyahoga County. Proponents also said the measure will attract business and talent.

Some opposing comment came from religious groups and small business owners, asking Council to oppose both the ordinance and a section of a proposed charter amendment that would add the same gender identity protections to those seeking county employment. Some demanded a religious exemption. The majority focused on religious arguments, fears about transgender people using bathrooms that don't correspond to their biological sex, and concerns about small businesses navigating new regulations. Small businesses feared that they could not afford to defend themselves against legal action based on charges of discrimination. A Brooklyn councilman complained that the county was violating home rule rights of municipalities to legislate local matters; 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.

### **III. Business Transacted.**

\* Passed: The ordinance described above, establishing a three-person Commission on Human Rights to ensure equal opportunity and treatment for all citizens of Cuyahoga County. The ordinance protects individuals from discrimination and creates a commission with the power to level fines if it finds discrimination did occur. The measure passed by an 8-3 vote along party lines. Republicans Baker, Gallagher and Schron voted against the legislation, while Democrats Brady, Tuma, Brown, Simon, Houser, Conwell, Miller and Jones all voted in favor.

\* Passed: application for funding under the Clean Ohio Fund Green Space Conservation Program on behalf of Tinker's Creek Watershed Partners for the conservation of areas in the Bear Creek Stream Restoration in Warrensville Heights.

\* Passed: supports for other applications for funding on behalf of

- the West Creek Conservancy for the conservation of ecologically significant areas of Dusty Goldenrod, which is a rare species of goldenrod;
- the West Creek Greenway in the City of Parma;
- the Western Reserve Land Conservancy for the conservation of important areas in the Brecksville Upland Preserve Extension; and
- conservation of ecologically significant areas in the Lower Big Creek Trail Connector in Cleveland.

\* Passed: A \$2.8 million award for the Bradford Road Relief Sewer and Pump Station Elimination Project in Brecksville.

\* Passed: A \$1.4 million award for construction of future Amazon site perimeter roads – Euclid Ave., Babbitt Rd., Lakeland Blvd., St. Claire Ave., East 260<sup>th</sup> St. and Bluestone Blvd. in Euclid

\* A \$5.9 million agreement of cooperation with the city of Independence to replace the Old Rockside Road Bridge over the Cuyahoga River in Independence and Valley View was moved along to final action at the October 10 meeting.

\* Among other items introduced and referred to committees were the following:

- An ordinance that provides for modifications to the Cuyahoga County Human Resource Personnel Policies and Procedure Manual.
- Authorization for the necessary tax levies for 2018, as determined by the Budget Commission.
- A \$2.2 million revenue generating agreement with Cleveland's Municipal Court for for legal services for indigent people.

### **IV. Notes:**

This was a meeting for the ages, and this observer is grateful for the opportunity to witness history being made in Cuyahoga County!