

## County Council Regular Meeting: Dec. 10, 2019

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

### I. Introduction

President Dan Brady called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. All 11 Council members were present; County Executive Armond Budish walked in about one minute late. The meeting ended at 6:15 p.m.

### II. Public Comments and Announcements

Peter Corrigan, the Republican who ran against Mr. Budish in 2018, asked Council members to consider asking for a smaller increase than 0.8 mill when they vote today on the 2020 Health and Human Services levy. He said he thinks the county's population is declining because of the high tax burden, although he understands the county's need for ever more extensive social services. Mr. Budish's sole comment was to praise county employees who work in the Dept. of Senior and Adult Services for their initiative and generosity. A group of DSAS employees created a program called "Elves for Elders," using their own money to purchase and deliver holiday gifts to seniors served by the department's programs.

### IV. Business Transacted

\* Approved for the March 17 primary election ballot: Council agreed (9-2) to place the HHS levy up for a vote. The levy request includes the replacement of the current 3.9 mill levy plus an additional 0.8 mill, increasing the levy to 4.7 total mills. The levy, if passed, would last for eight years. This is one of two county HHS levies; the other expires in 2024. All eight Democrats voted for the levy, with Dale Miller, Yvonne Conwell, Pernel Jones, and Dan Brady explaining in detail the need for the levy replacement and increase -- funding shortfalls, inflation, the county's high poverty rate, the expansion of universal Pre-K, and the growing number of children in its care. Republicans Nan Baker and Jack Schron urged Council to decrease the size of the additional levy. Ms. Baker considers it a "big ask," and complained that it should be on the November general election ballot rather than the March primary ballot. Mr. Schron said he's worried about a "lack of planning" for various county programs, so he won't support the additional levy until he sees better planning taking place. But Michael Gallagher, the third Republican on Council, said he's willing to let the county's voters decide. The additional 0.8 mills will cost a county property owner \$41/year for each \$100,000 of property valuation; it will raise an additional \$35 million/year.

#### \* Other items, unanimously approved:

-- The 2020-2021 biennial budget, which Council members and the executive have been working on for months. Mr. Miller explained that Council has held nine public hearings on the budget, considered countless alternative requests, and eventually agreed to fund the county's highest priorities, including additional money for jail operations.

-- A \$1.5 million Economic Development loan to the nonprofit ARC Impact Program, to ensure that the 64 Opportunity Zones designated in the county (part of the 2017 tax cut) will, as stated in Council's resolution, "create well-paying jobs accessible to county residents, improve access to basic services, or otherwise have positive social impact." The 10-year loan's annual interest rate will be 2% per year, and Mr. Schron said that some of its risk will be "back-stopped by the Kresge Foundation." Council anticipates that investment in the county's Opportunity Zones could total about \$10 million and wants to make sure that county residents share in any benefit. [The worry is that real estate investors will make money and save taxes by putting money into apartment buildings and similar projects that create few jobs].

-- A \$15 million budget transfer of general fund monies to the current shrinking HHS levy fund, part of the otherwise routine amendment to the county's current operating budget. Mr. Miller said this is one of the reasons the HHS renewal-and-increase levy is needed soon.

-- Refinancing a total of \$34.5 million in county economic development revenue bonds to take advantage of current lower interest rates. Mr. Miller said the refinancing of the bonds could save the county \$3.3 million over 10 years; Mr. Schron added that using similar "financial vehicles" to repackage other county bonds could save even more money.

-- \$4.5 million for various road improvements, including work on Cleveland's Irishtown Bend and 150<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge.

-- \$4 million to Hanna Holdings, Inc., for property management at the county's Medical Examiner building. Mr. Tuma explained that the building requires "management that knows what it's doing."

\*Various other executive appointments, contracts, employee insurance programs, requisition awards to obtain better pricing, and infrastructure improvement projects were approved, referred to committees, or moved to third reading at Council's next regular meeting on January 14.