

County Council Special Meeting, March 16, 2020
Virtual Observer, via internet: 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 special meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.; it ended at 3:20 p.m. All Council members were present. This special meeting (not regularly scheduled until March 24) was called to conduct business that could not wait while Council’s regular meetings are delayed because of the coronavirus crisis.

II. Announcements

Both Mr. Brady and County Executive Armond Budish said that Council members and county employees would continue to work during the crisis, although often from home.

III. Business Transacted

All but one (third bullet below) of the resolutions and ordinances before Council passed unanimously, two on third reading and the rest after suspension of the rules:

*A \$14 million Economic Development incentive grant to Sherwin-Williams Co. for its downtown headquarters and its Brecksville research and development projects. Councilman Dale Miller said he would vote for the ordinance, but that the amount of the grant seems too high and that he’s disappointed the company switched from a union to a nonunion janitorial service. He also said he has “equity concerns” about the future closing of the Sherwin-Williams site in Warrensville Heights. He wants the company to find a new use for that site. Mr. Brady said that all Council members shared Mr. Miller’s concerns.

*An amendment to the ordinance on Emergency Contracting Authority to allow the County Executive to make purchases in excess of \$500,000 during the crisis without approval of Council or the Board of Control, provided the Council President approves. Mr. Budish explained that this ordinance would “allow him to deal with whatever comes our way.” Mr. Brady said he would contact all Council members when purchases this large are contemplated and asked reluctant members to “get this done today—we’ll deal with other details later so the authority is not abused.”

*Paid emergency administrative leave for county employees through Dec. 19, 2020, and allowing the County Executive to temporarily expand the use of existing paid sick leave and unpaid personal leaves of absence. Any employee who has exhausted accrued sick leave may receive 80 hours of paid emergency administrative leave if the employee becomes ill or must stay home (without telecommuting) to care for family members who are ill or affected by the crisis. The vote on this ordinance was 10-1, with Mr. Schron dissenting; he thinks the ordinance could serve as a work disincentive.

*Five fiscal appropriations for budget transfers, two in response to emergencies: \$1 million for purchases needed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis; and \$1.2 million for the county prosecutor's office to help pay for outside counsel handling active or pending cases.

* \$500,000 from the county's Educational Assistance Fund to College Now Greater Cleveland. The money funds scholarships, grants, loans, and other financial assistance for county residents pursuing various sorts of post-secondary education.

*Conversion of a \$2.5 million economic development loan into a grant to the Friends of Historic Variety Theatre for the benefit of the theater's revitalization project on Lorain Avenue between West 110th and West 123rd streets.

*A \$25,000 Community Development Fund grant to the Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope to help fund a full-service grocery store in East Cleveland. The goal is to eliminate East Cleveland's "food desert" and to increase access to healthy, fresh foods in the city.

* \$11 million in cooperative agreements with various providers for 2020 child support services. All of the funds help in the collection of cash child support payments. The county can later recover much of these expenses via federal government reimbursement.

*Extending the appointment of David Merriman as interim director of the Dept. of Health and Human Services. Mr. Brady said he would have preferred to hold committee hearings so that Mr. Merriman could be permanently appointed, but hearings are on hold.

* \$1.4 million to rehabilitate Bishop Road Bridge over the east branch of Euclid Creek in Highland Heights.

* \$4 million to resurface East 116th Street from Miles Road to Union Avenue.

* \$2.5 million to resurface Ridge Road from Memphis Avenue to Denison Avenue in Cleveland and Brooklyn.

* \$3 million for the 2020 Sewer Rehabilitation Program in various county sewer districts. The contract is for lining sewer pipes rather than replacing them.

* \$3.2 million in 2019 Community Development Block Grant municipal grants to 21 communities for municipal improvement projects. The grants range from \$100,000 to \$150,000.

* \$1.6 million in 2020 Community Development Supplemental grants to municipalities and nonprofit organizations to fund 31 improvement projects. The grants range from \$15,000 to \$50,000.

*A \$1.5 million Economic Development Loan to Saucy Brew Works Independence for a project at 5810 Rockside Woods Blvd. North in Independence. It will create a large production and entertainment complex and create 60 permanent jobs. Councilwoman Sunny Simon

complained that “we keep giving money to Independence.” She wants to hold more committee meetings to better vet projects like this.

*A \$1 million U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfield Loan to Saint-Servan Centre Ltd. for an asbestos-remediation project at 4291 Richmond Road in Warrensville Heights. A former nursing home sits on the site just north of Emery Road. Once the asbestos is removed, the building will be demolished so the site can be developed.

*A \$1.24 million two-year state contract with Great Lakes Petroleum for the purchase of fuel for county buildings.

The meeting ended with comments from Council members. Ms. Simon bemoaned the loss of yet another airport manager, the third lost since 2011. Mr. Miller warned that the coronavirus will have a big impact on the county budget. And Councilwoman Nan Baker wants Council to save money by considering a pause in work on the county’s over-budget ERP (Enterprise Research Planning) project.