

Allegheny County Council

*County of Allegheny
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Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 22, 2009

5:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Government Reform

*Rich Fitzgerald, Chair; Jim Burn, Jim Ellenbogen, Mike Finnerty, Nick Futules,
Vince Gastgeb, Amanda Green, Bob Macey, and Chuck McCullough - Members*

I. Call to Order

Summary: *The meeting was called to order at 5:28.*

Invited Guests:

Jim Flynn, County Manager or Designee

Barbara Mistick, President & Director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Summary: *Invited Guests Present: Dr. Barbara Mistick and Carolyn Voss from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.*

Council Staff Present: Jared Barker and Jennifer Liptak

II. Roll Call

Roll Call: Present: Jim Ellenbogen, Nick Futules, Chuck McCullough, and Rich Fitzgerald
Absent: Jim Burn, Vince Gastgeb, Amanda Green Hawkins, and Bob Macey
Non-Member: Michael Finnerty, and John DeFazio

III. Approval of Minutes

5151-09 Motion to approve the Minutes of the October 1, 2009 Government Reform Committee meeting.

Action: **A motion was made by McCullough, seconded by Ellenbogen, that this matter be Passed. The motion carried unanimously.**

IV. Agenda Items**Motion**

5127-09 Motion expressing the Sense of Council of Allegheny County urging the General Assembly to reform the real estate property tax and provide a Safe Harbor Alternative for counties from periodic countywide reassessments by permitting counties to adopt a state established schedule of values per square foot for designated land and improvement types in lieu of property assessments.

Sponsors: Chuck McCullough

Action: **Held in Committee**

Discussion Topic:**Carnegie Library Branch Closings**

Summary: *The Chair gave a brief overview of the purpose of the meeting as it relates to the Carnegie Library's decision to close several branch libraries, and Dr. Mistick provided a summary of the process used by the library in order to reach the decision to close branches and alter the library's existing operations and facilities, and a short discussion of funding levels and revenue that is available to the library.*

In response to questions from the Chair, Dr. Mistick discussed the library's relation to

ACLA, some other budgetary scenarios that could have come to pass had the Commonwealth funded the library at different levels, and possibilities for the library beyond 2010.

In response to another question from the Chair, Dr. Mistick discussed the relative merits of keeping one or more branches open on a part-time basis in order to avoid outright closures.

Mr. Futules asked about maintenance and utility costs for older library buildings and about the effect of the internet on library usage, and Dr. Mistick indicated that library usage is at an all time high, in part because libraries provide internet access to people who do not have computers at home. She noted that the decision to close branches is tied to decreasing funding levels, rather than decreasing usage.

In response to questions from Mr. Ellenbogen, Dr. Mistick described the library system within Allegheny County. Mr. Ellenbogen expressed concerns about five of eight facilities that are to be closed or disrupted being located within his district, and Dr. Mistick noted that branch closings were the last option for the library after hours and staff had been cut.

Mr. Finnerty asked about branch operation costs, and Dr. Mistick described the integrated nature of the system and noted that, because of this, a single branch cost is difficult to derive. Mr. Finnerty asked how closing two branches in favor of building a new one works out to be cost-effective. Dr. Mistick noted that it saves operating costs and increases costs on the capital side, and the library has had a strong capital campaign. Mr. Finnerty expressed concern about the wisdom of closing libraries primarily in the communities that need them the most, and Dr. Mistick indicated that the library is extremely dependent on public funding.

Mr. DeFazio expressed a belief that, in the face of a \$55 million capital campaign, he would expect that finding \$1 million or so in operating revenue should not be overly difficult. Dr. Mistick described the ongoing nature of the state funding shortfall and repeated the need for a long term dedicated funding stream, perhaps in the form of a library district.

In response to Mr. Drozd, Dr. Mistick described the library's long term planning process and facility sharing potential.

Mr. McCullough noted that neither he nor Mr. DeFazio was present for the library board's discussion of the branch closings, and indicated that he would like to receive more information from the library going forward.

The Chair asked about the comparative funding levels of the City of Pittsburgh in relation to those of other municipalities, and Dr. Mistick talked about RAD and its effectiveness.

Mr. Ellenbogen noted that he would have preferred to have had earlier notice of the funding issue rather than finding out about it after the closing decision was made.

In response to a question from Mr. Futules, Dr. Mistick discussed the upcoming RAD

performance audit.

V. Adjournment

Summary: *The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.*