

Allegheny County Council

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Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 23, 2006

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Budget and Finance

William Russell Robinson, Chair; Jim Burn, Susan Caldwell, Joan Cleary, Matt Drozd, Mike Finnerty, Brenda Frazier, Vince Gastgeb, and Rich Nerone

I. Call to Order

Summary: *The Meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM*

Invited Guests:

Jim Flynn, County Manager or Designee

Amy Griser, Director, Budget & Finance

Derek Uber, Assistant County Manager

Alex Wilson, Director, Shuman Center or Designee

Tom Donatelli, Director, Public Works or Designee

Summary: *Invited Guests Present: Mr. Flynn; Ms. Griser; Mr. Donatelli; and Mr. Wilson*

Recognized attendees: Pete Schepis, Budget Office

Council Staff Present: Jennifer Liptak, Joe Catanese, Jared Barker, Stephanie Buka, and Tracey Salsi

II. Roll Call

Summary: *Non Committee Council Members Present: Mr. Macey*

Ex Officio Present: President Rich Fitzgerald

Roll Call: Present: Joan Cleary, Matt Drozd, Michael Finnerty, Brenda Frazier, Vince Gastgeb, and Chair William Robinson
Absent: Jim Burn, Susan Caldwell, and Rich Nerone

III. Approval of Minutes

2596-06 Motion to approve the Minutes of the May 9, 2006 Budget & Finance Committee Meeting.

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

IV. Agenda Items**Resolutions**

2487-06 A Resolution of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, setting forth County policy regarding the construction of a tunnel, commonly known as the North Shore Connector project.

Sponsors: Matt Drozd

Action: **Held in Committee**

2591-06 A Resolution of the County of Allegheny amending the Grants and Special Accounts Budget for 2006 (Submission #04-06).

Sponsors: Chief Executive

Summary: *Ms. Liptak stated that this is an amendment to increase funds in the Grants and Special Accounts Budget and there is nothing unusual about this request. Chairman Robinson asked whether there were any questions; there being none, this was voted on and affirmatively recommended.*

Action: **A motion was made by Cleary, seconded by Frazier, that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion carried unanimously.**

Discussion Topic:

2005-2006 Budget Matters – Shuman

Summary: *Ms. Liptak said there is a binder in her office for Council Members to review.*

Ms. Liptak said the general problem at Shuman Center is personnel and fringe benefit costs.

Ms. Griser said part of the problem is due to occupancy issues. She said in 2005 Council did approve some budget transfers for some capital items as a result of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's (DPW) review of the Shuman facility. The DPW felt there were security concerns because of an inadequate amount of surveillance cameras. Ms. Griser said the Federal TANF (Temporary Assistance Program for Needy Families) funding stream has dried up. She added that there is funding available under State Act 148 but it requires a 50% match. She would appreciate any legislative action to help in trying to get the local match amount reduced. She said the money is coming from taxpayer dollars. In 2006, she feels the County needs to pay attention to costs since the match is only .50 cents to the dollar. She said in 2005 they increased their full time positions from 135 to 140, to provide sufficient staff and minimize overtime.

Mr. Wilson passed out a worksheet titled Shuman Center Populations which highlighted admissions, average daily population, overtime shifts and the average length of stay statistics from January through April, comparing 2005 to 2006. He said this data shows that they are not receiving additional youth, in April for example, from 2005 to 2006, admissions dropped from 303 to 282. But when comparing January 2005 to 2006, the average daily population increased from 99 to 129, or 30 percent. The average length of stay in January increased as well, from 10 in 2005 to 12 in 2006, with overtime shifts increasing from 137 to 306. Mr. Wilson said many variables come into play, some kids have mental health issues. He said that if a youth is a threat to him or herself or to others they use a one-on-one approach. He said sometimes there are 3 or 4 kids that require that level of supervision just in one day. He said there are other times when a child needs to go to the hospital, where a Sheriff will handle the transport, but a Shuman employee needs to accompany the child, further depleting staff levels.

President Fitzgerald asked Ms. Griser whether Shuman Center at the end of 2006 will possibly come in under budget? She replied in the negative stating that she expects them to be over budget and Allegheny County is responsible for 50 percent.

Mr. Wilson said Shuman Center's population is currently at 162 but they are only licensed for a capacity of 30 youth.

Councilman Gastgeb asked about union vs. non-union workers and who makes up the non-union staff? Mr. Wilson replied that only the management is non-union.

Councilwoman Cleary asked about the possibility of hiring additional staff. She asked what employee morale is like and how management of overtime is handled. Mr. Wilson said they sometimes have to issue mandatory overtime because they must maintain the state mandated ratio, which is one childcare worker per six youth. Ms. Griser said they've added 5 full-time staff members and they're considering raising the part-time wage, which is now \$8.50 per hour with no benefits. Mr. Wilson said when full-time staff would leave they wouldn't need to fill the position immediately, but with the large population now it's difficult. Ms. Griser said there are about 24 part-time staffers. Ms. Griser said she will follow-up with Ms. Cleary on this issue.

Councilwoman Cleary asked about the psychological evaluation demands, and Ms. Griser said that because of TANF funding cuts, the state is pushing for Medicaid eligible recipients to have the courts conduct psychological evaluations. Mr. Wilson said Shuman uses a psychiatrist that is contracted through Juvenile Court to conduct psychological evaluations. Councilwoman Cleary noted that The Academy doesn't have evaluations, so she's interested in who really does this work. Mr. Schepis said the court is responsible for the psychological evaluations and is reimbursed with Medicaid dollars.

Councilwoman Cleary asked about placement availability. Ms. Griser has requested information from the Courts, and they've seen an increase in the severity of the offenses. A judge must hold a hearing within 10 days of the juvenile being held in the detention center. She said more and more kids are being referred to another facility and the court is searching for availability. They're working with the courts to see what's holding up the process.

Councilman Drozd asked whether there are any occupants from outside of Allegheny County. Per Mr. Wilson this is very rare and Shuman Center will bill accordingly if this happens. He asked whether any families get counseling help and if the County can look at billing third party payers. Mr. Schepis said we already bill third party payers and the child welfare system is very defined. Mr. Wilson said we do provide medical services and they bill the provider. They contract with Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and then Children's sends a claim to Medicaid for reimbursement.

Mr. Wilson said a unit holds 13 kids, but now there are 17 or 18 kids in a unit, so those extra kids are sleeping in cots, and the ratio of staff to kids is what they are concerned with, so they have an extra staff person on duty at that time. Mr. Wilson said they are looking at all possibilities.

Councilwoman Frazier asked whether the parents are involved in the process and whether they have looked into parental resources as an option. Ms. Griser said they don't have the authority to release the youth back to the family. Councilwoman Frazier asked whether they have thought about partnering with other counties. Mr. Wilson said there is a May 25th meeting scheduled to take a comprehensive look at this problem because there are so many variables, and to take a strategic standpoint. Councilwoman Frazier asked whether these children are recidivists and Mr. Wilson said yes. He said "Failure to Adjust" is a term they use to describe a child that does not comply with

Shuman and so then an alternative placement is decided upon. The child is moved to the new facility, but courts and probation have more control over this decision than Mr. Wilson does.

Councilman Finnerty noted that in February 2005-2006, the number of admissions decreased, average daily population increased, overtime increased, and average length of stay increased, so he asked whether or not these children are more severe in behavioral problems. Mr. Wilson said yes, and the severity of crimes is a factor. The regulation is that a child must have a detention hearing within 72 hours but there are more kids being detained as opposed to being released.

Councilwoman Cleary said she didn't understand the "failure to adjust" term since it is Shuman's responsibility to help them get better. Mr. Wilson said if there is a problem with a child, for example, harming staff members, private providers have the ability to kick them out of the program but state programs don't have that ability.

Councilman Drozd said that considering the overtime numbers, it doesn't balance out and he asked that someone take a look at that issue. Ms. Griser said the one-on-one approach drives that and they are looking into overtime issues and possible solutions.

Chairman Robinson said that Council will have the opportunity to address these issues again. He thanked Mr. Wilson and Ms. Griser for their time.

2005-2006 Budget Matters – Public Works

Summary: *Chairman Robinson said that Mr. Donatelli can only speculate on funds that may be available for public works projects concerning leftover North Shore Connector monies.*

Ms. Liptak said they're looking at a 33% target for the end of April 2006, compared to 38% last year. Right now it's at 35% which is more reflective of their needs and the Department has a grasp on their budget.

Ms. Griser said that \$1 million was transferred into the Department of Public Works for fringe benefits and personnel, stating that the fringe benefits is a tricky area with health care coverage. They've improved the process for fringe benefits, budgeting for actual enrollment and now the contract with Highmark is finalized. For personnel, in the Comprehensive Fiscal Plan, workers' comp tends to be higher due to the nature of the work and so the cost is higher. Although their budget was exceeded, expenditures were \$500,000 less in 2005.

Councilman Drozd identified specific roads that he was concerned about in his district. He received accolades about Mr. Donatelli in his area and was pleased with the response concerning those road problems.

Mr. Donatelli said in 2005, it was very difficult to work with the budget that Council approved. Gasoline prices were estimated at \$1.50 and right now he said it's at \$2.89 a gallon, so that was underestimated. The 2005-2006 winter was mild, but the 2004-2005 winter season was costly, and purchasing rock salt played a major part. He said they wanted to bring workers on workers' comp back to work to save money. They did tighten up and control items that they could and he said they will make whatever corrections are necessary to improve matters.

Council Members Cleary and Finnerty offered praise to Mr. Donatelli for all of his good work.

Chairman Robinson said that 4% of the total budget goes to the Department of Public Works and it's the area that we depend most upon for the County to work day-to-day. The Chair thanked Mr. Donatelli.

V. Adjournment

Summary: *The meeting adjourned at 5:05 PM*