

Allegheny County Council

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Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 24, 2016

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Budget and Finance

Mike Finnerty, Chair

Members; Sam DeMarco, Nick Futules, Paul Klein, Ed Kress, Bob Macey, Chuck Martoni, Sue Means, John Palmiere

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:03.

Invited Guests:

Mr. McKain was present from the Office of the County Manager.

Ms. Soroka was present from the Department of Budget and Finance.

Ms. Jenkins was present from the Library Association.

Mr. Barker, Mr. Szymanski and Ms. Roka were present from the Office of County Council.

II. Roll Call

Members Present: 4 - Nick Futules, Finnerty, Sam DeMarco and Sue Means

Members Absent: 4 - Paul Klein, Ed Kress, Chuck Martoni and John Palmiere

Members Phone: 1 - Bob Macey

III. Approval of Minutes

[9781-16](#)

Motion to approve the Minutes of the Budget and Finance Committee Meeting held on July 6, 2016.

A motion was made by DeMarco, seconded by Means, that this matter be Passed. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

IV. Agenda Items

Ordinances

[9746-16](#)

An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, establishing new fees for the County Fire Marshal's administration and enforcement of the Commonwealth's Combustible and Flammable Liquids Act's rules and regulations.

Sponsors: Chief Executive

At the request of the Chair, the clerk read the title of the bill and Mr. McKain provided a brief overview of its provisions, noting that the last time that these particular fees had been adjusted was in 1976, while the costs incurred by the County in its inspection activities relating to flammable liquids storage tanks and pumps have been increasing each year. Mr. McKain summarized the fee increases that would be authorized by the bill, and briefly described how the amounts of the respective proposed increases were derived. Mr. McKain also compared the proposed new fees to those assessed by the City of Pittsburgh and surrounding counties for similar activities, noting that the proposed new County fees are broadly comparable or lower.

In response to a question from the Chair, Ms. Soroka noted that the inspections are mandated by Commonwealth law, but that the respective counties can choose to do the inspections themselves or let the Department of Environmental Protection perform them.

In response to questions from Ms. Means, Mr. McKain noted that the proposed above ground storage tank installation and underground storage tank installation fees are both lower than the City's fees for those same inspections, and indicated that he does not believe that the County's fees are imposed in addition to the City's fees. The Chair noted that the ordinance itself indicates that both fees would not be imposed.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Mr. McKain noted that the cost of inflation was taken into consideration in deriving the new fees, but that it was not the only factor and that the actual costs of the inspection program were the primary factor.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Mr. McKain indicated that his belief is that the increase is not overly burdensome given the fees assessed by other municipalities and the number of hours involved in each inspection, the staff time involved, and the like.

In response to questions from Mr. DeMarco, Mr. McKain indicated that a ballpark estimate of the additional revenue to be generated by the fee increase would be roughly \$250,000 to \$300,000, and that this amount would go to the general fund, rather than into a special account.

Mr. DeMarco noted that the County's recent bond refinancing had saved the County approximately \$26 million, and inquired about whether the fee increase is absolutely necessary given those types of savings. Mr. McKain noted that the increasing costs of the program cannot be sustainably borne indefinitely, and that a 40 year gap between fee adjustments results in an inequitable fee.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Soroka noted that there are 5 fire marshalls who undertake inspection activities.

The Chair noted that salary inflation may very well also have exceeded the general rate of inflation since 1976, and that this likely played into the calculation.

Mr. Futules suggested that fee increases are a means of reducing the dependence upon property tax increases.

A motion was made by Macey, seconded by Means, that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

Resolutions

[9753-16](#)

A Resolution of the County of Allegheny amending the Grants and Special Accounts Budget for 2016 (Submission #07-16).

Sponsors: Chief Executive

At the request of the Chair, the clerk read the title of the bill and Mr. Szymanski summarized its provisions, noting that the new grant is \$3.4 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for remediation of lead based paint in housing units.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Mr. McKain noted that, because the funding is federal, HUD's funding conditions will apply and that these must be complied with to

the extent that they require prevailing wage or other labor or contractor conditions.

Mr. DeMarco asked that the administration provide data regarding how many housing units had been positively impacted by the program. Mr. McKain suggested that, since the program duration is three years, an annual update may be appropriate. The Chair and Mr. McKain discussed the County's reporting obligations to the granting agency, and noted that the committee could simply be provided with a copy of these annual reports.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Mr. McKain noted that the grant covers lead based paint remediation, but that the Health Department will be undertaking its own drinking water analysis activities hand in hand with this program. Mr. McKain and Ms. Soroka noted that the Health Department receives its own grant of about \$500,000 per year to undertake lead remediation in drinking water.

The Chair expressed his support for the program.

A motion was made by DeMarco , seconded by Means, that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

Discussion Topic

Ms. Jenkins gave a brief presentation regarding the Library Association's activities and key personnel, and highlighted the Association's receipt of a grant from the Buncher Corporation to assist with youth services. Ms. Jenkins also discussed the Association's youth services programs in the County parks, which are aimed at increasing reading among children in the County. Ms. Jenkins noted that the Association's primary funding stream is the Regional Asset District, with important additional funding made available through the County budget. Ms. Jenkins noted that the bookmobile program serves those communities that have no access to a brick and mortar library, and briefly described the services that the association offers as part of the Head Start program.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Jenkins described the old bookmobile that had been operated by the Association until it was recently retired.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Jenkins noted that the old bookmobile had required that senior citizens come out of the various senior centers and physically get into the vehicle, but the new one does not, and this has increased senior bookmobile usage by about 30%.

In response to questions from Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Jenkins discussed some of the challenges that the Association faces, highlighting technological impacts on library usage patterns and services and noting that the evolution of technology has also changed how libraries allocate the funding that they use for technology hardware purchases. Ms. Jenkins also indicated that the various libraries facilitate the use of online services to access materials to the extent possible, but that these services tend to be used by younger library users, and that older users tend to rely on older technologies, and noted that it can be a challenge to span the range of users' technological preferences.

Ms. Means suggested that the Foundation may want to explore working with the Dolly Parton Foundation, which provides books to children. Ms. Jenkins noted that there is an apparent correlation between vocabulary size at age five and late grade school success. Ms. Means and Ms. Jenkins discussed the importance of emphasizing the impact of parents or other caregivers reading to children.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Ms. Jenkins described how some libraries do work with hospitals and pediatrician's offices to undertake outreach activities in their areas.

Ms. Means and Ms. Jenkins discussed some of the more creative, nontraditional reading programs that libraries have begun undertaking, including STEM kits that include circuit wiring experiments, iPad based reading activities, and the like.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Jenkins noted that the expansion of internet usage by younger individuals has actually increased their usage of the library, as the libraries provide wi-fi and other internet access.

The Chair expressed his own support for the libraries and the encouragement of reading activities.

Mr. Macey noted that the libraries have undertaken modernization activities that have facilitated and encourage usage.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:54.