

Allegheny County Council

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Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Budget and Finance

Paul Klein, Chair; Patrick Catena, Samuel DeMarco, Nick Futules, Ed Kress, Bob Macey, Charles Martoni, Sue Means and John Palmiere, Members.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:08.

Invited Guests:

The Honorable Chelsa Wagner, County Controller
William D. McKain, CPA, County Manager or Designee
Mary C. Soroka, County Budget Director or Designee

Controller Wagner and Ms. Chirdon were present from the Office of the Controller.

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

Mr. Tyskiewicz and Mr. Wolosik were present from the Department of Administrative Services.

Mr. Szefi was present from the Law Department.

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

II. Roll Call

Members Present: 5 - Patrick Catena, Sam DeMarco, Paul Klein, Sue Means and John Palmiere

Members Absent: 4 - Nick Futules, Ed Kress, Bob Macey and Chuck Martoni

III. Approval of Minutes

[10082-17](#)

Motion to approve the minutes of the Budget and Finance Committee Meeting held on March 15, 2017.

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

IV. Agenda Items

Motions

[10074-17](#)

Motion of the Council of Allegheny County urging the Board of Elections of Allegheny County to provide an increase in compensation to District Election Officers in Primary and General Elections.

Sponsors: Council Member Ranalli-Russell and Controller

At the request of the Chair, the clerk read the title of the bill and Ms. Wagner briefly summarized its provisions, noting that her office had issued a report regarding election staffing and had conducted an audit on the subject, which is available on the Controller's website. Ms. Wagner noted that the current pay equates to about \$8.00 per hour for most election workers, and noted that the group of individuals who currently work at polling places has been doing so for a number of years and suggested that replacing them could prove to be difficult. Ms. Wagner suggested that a 25% increase would cost the County approximately \$175,000 per election (or \$350,000 per year) and would

raise the average hourly rate to something in the vicinity of \$10.00 per hour.

In response to a question from the Chair, Ms. Wagner indicated that her hope is that current poll workers would regard the increase as a reward for good service and that prospective new poll workers would see it as an incentive to give their time. Ms. Wagner also noted that there is an equity component in her view, as the cost of spending a day at the polls increases as the cost of living increases, and the pay rate had not been increased since 2008.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Ms. Wagner indicated that the full compliment of poll workers for the County is approximately 7,000 and noted that she fully recognizes that there are logistical challenges to essentially integrating a wholly new workforce each election day which her office often encounters in the context of processing the pay for the workers.

Ms. Means expressed support for the notion of reimbursing people for their service, but wondered about how to go about budgeting for the increase. Ms. Wagner indicated that, in her view, the budgeting decision is entirely within the discretion of the Council.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Wagner gave a brief discussion of how the audit she had referenced played into the creation of the report she had distributed.

Mr. DeMarco noted that he serves on the Board of Elections, and asked why the Controller did not first approach the Board. Ms. Wagner noted that she opted to approach the Council rather than the Board of Elections because she regards the issue as fundamentally budgetary in nature, which places it within the purview of the Council in her view.

Mr. DeMarco noted that poll workers are also paid for training, and asked how the Controller determined that a 25% increase would be appropriate. Ms. Wagner noted that her office had benchmarked other jurisdictions when the audit was conducted, and concluded that a 25% increase would be relatively modest and would not be an onerous cost to bear, but that it would be significant enough to function as intended. Ms. Wagner also noted that the poll workers' pay is not adjusted annually, so it is comparatively difficult to determine an equitable amount.

Mr. DeMarco expressed a desire to have an increase be effective in incentivizing qualified, new poll workers, but also noted that he would not want to create an increase that does not meet that goal, but still would result in a significant expenditure for the County. Ms. Wagner indicated a willingness to discuss the increase amount in additional detail and with an eye to possibly selecting a different amount, but suggested that the perfect should not become the enemy of the good, and that she selected the amount of the increase because she believes that it is an amount that the County can absorb and that it is consistent with the year to year growth in other departments' budgets.

In response to a question from Mr. Catena, Ms. Wagner expressed a willingness to provide the Committee with a copy of the full audit.

Mr. Catena expressed agreement with Mr. DeMarco, noting that a 25% increase is significant and that he would like to have additional information on the matter before deciding. Mr. Catena also expressed some reservations about how the incentives will play out, because his impression is that many of the current poll workers are not really performing the function for the pay, and suggested that the full audit may improve his ability to make a decision.

Mr. Palmiere suggested that even a \$10.00 per hour pay rate would likely not really incentivize someone to work at the polls in and of itself, and wondered whether there may be other things that can be done that are not monetary in order to provide effective incentives. Mr. Palmiere suggested that there may be wisdom in gathering more data regarding how busy and well staffed the polling places are individually.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr. Szefi indicated that the Board of Elections sets the pay rate for poll workers entirely within their own discretion.

Ms. Means suggested that the motion is not binding, and that she regards it as more of a request to the Board of Elections to evaluate the notion, rather than pick a specific number or take a specific action. Ms. Means suggested that there may be wisdom in looking at what other counties do, but also expressed a desire not to let the matter sit for another nine years before taking it up again.

Mr. McKain suggested that there may be wisdom in assembling additional data and presenting it directly to the Board of Elections, as the final decision rests with the Board. Mr. McKain also summarized some of the efforts that the County is undertaking in order to try to arrange for additional assistance at the polls.

Ms. Wagner noted that the current administration has expressed a desire to have all County employees earn at least \$15.00 per hour.

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

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:36.