

# **Allegheny County Council**

*County of Allegheny  
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## **Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, March 20, 2007**

**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 William E. Lestitian -  
Members***

**I. Call to Order**

**Summary:** *Meeting was called to order at 4:00 pm*

**Invited Guests:**

**John Weinstein, County Treasurer**

**Jim Flynn, County Manager or Designee**

**Amy Griser, Director, Budget & Finance**

**Derek Uber, Deputy County Manager**

**Summary:** *Invited Guests Present: Jim Flynn, County Manager; Amy Griser, Director of Budget and Finance; Derek Uber, Deputy County Manager; John Weinstein, Treasurer*

*Council Staff Present: Jennifer Liptak; Jared Barker; Stephanie Buka*

**II. Roll Call**

**Summary:** *Non-Committee Members Present: John DeFazio; Bob Macey*

*Ex-Officio Member Present: Rich Fitzgerald*

**Roll Call:** Present: Jim Burn, Susan Caldwell, Joan Cleary, Matt Drozd, Michael Finnerty, Vince Gastgeb, Chair William Robinson, Council Member John DeFazio, Council Member Bob Macey, and Council Member Rich Fitzgerald  
Absent: Brenda Frazier, and William Lestitian

**III. Agenda Items****Ordinances****2748-06**

An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, amending Division 1 of the Allegheny County Code of Ordinances to include a new Section 5-905.04, entitled "Allegheny County Professional Services Review Committee Reporting Obligations."

**Sponsors:** William Russell Robinson

**Summary:** *Chairman Robinson said this legislation will clarify what the Professional Services Review Committee does and what it is required to do. This would amend the County Code. This bill has been in the Budget & Finance Committee since August of 2006.*

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

**3036-07**

An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, amending Ordinance No. 14-01, approved February 6, 2001, broadening the qualifications of the Longtime Senior Citizen Owner/Occupant Tax Relief Program, by providing for a thirty percent (30%) discount on the gross or face amount of Allegheny County real property taxes.

**Sponsors:** Susan Caldwell, Vince Gastgeb and Matt Drozd

**Summary:** *Councilwoman Caldwell explained that this legislation came about from her many*

*encounters with senior citizens and their concerns over property taxes. Caldwell said if this bill were to pass, in 2008, senior citizens that have already applied for property tax relief, would remain at the same amount of taxation, as long as they continue to reside at that property. If for whatever reason they would be reassessed, or the county millage rate would go up, their tax amount would be fixed.*

*County Treasurer Weinstein noted that the legislation was incorrect by listing 10% relief, because it's actually 30%. In regard to the proposed legislation he recommended increasing the income level to \$35,000. He suggested using the adjusted gross income line on the Federal Tax Return. He said he'd like to expand the definition of "owner/occupied" to include households now owned by all types of family trusts and/or family members as long as the senior(s) still reside in the home and pay taxes. He also requested that the Property Assessment Department accept the Homestead exemption automatically for these senior citizens. And finally, he would like the language for the ownership requirement to change.*

*Chairman Robinson said they would reconvene next Tuesday at 4:00 pm to discuss this legislation further.*

**Action:** Held in Committee

## **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

### **Summary:**

*Councilman Drozd said it's important to conserve funds both at the county and state level to help save and support our mass transit system. Although monies have been committed, he recommended directing those funds towards saving our mass transit system, rather than spending them on the North Shore Connector Project.*

*Councilman Gastgeb wanted to know if this was the first time the County has put money into this project and Ms. Liptak said, technically no, adding that there is a very small amount allocated.*

*Councilman Macey asked what the loss would be if they cancel the project. The Chair said the project is 80% federally funded and the County has about \$3 million to invest in the project. The Chairman said they can address this issue at the next budget process.*

*Councilman Drozd said within a two year period, an \$88 million dollar loss will occur. He said the \$84 million exceeds the loss and would forego the deficit that we're going to experience in two years. He said the priority should be to save mass transit and he would rather do what's right for the people of Allegheny County.*

*Chairman Robinson noted that the local match for the Port Authority does not specifically require Allegheny County to provide one.*

*Councilman DeFazio said he would like to hear from an expert because they are getting*

*many different opinions.*

*Councilman Finnerty said it is a critical issue. He believes Council should make the commitment to the Port Authority for the North Shore Connector, a commitment which was made some 12 years ago. He said the County does have other needs, but they are not permitted to take that money and move it to another project.*

*Councilman Drozd said the estimate is that \$14 million will come from the County, and in 2 years the Port Authority will be \$80 million in debt. Drozd said \$84 million can be diverted to another project. He said if there are legal ramifications, they would need to know, but mass transit is far more important than a tunnel.*

*Councilman DeFazio expressed that the proper people need to join in the discussion because there's a lot of money involved in this project. He said there will be a ripple effect, jobs will be lost if they don't move ahead with the project.*

*Councilman Finnerty agreed that experts are needed to discuss this with Council. He said \$80 million is not a fact, but rather a projection. He said it could range anywhere from a \$50 to an \$80 million dollar loss.*

*President Fitzgerald said if Council could move this money to another project they would do so, but they can't. He said they'll lose this federal money if they don't act on it and jobs will be lost. He added that they may cost taxpayers money if they don't move ahead with the project and it would be irresponsible to vote against this project.*

*Councilman Gastgeb said the question is whether or not we oppose the use of County funds for the North Shore Connector Project, the \$14 million. He asked whether this money could go towards operating costs of the Port Authority and the Chairman responded in the negative.*

*Councilman Gastgeb asked whether Council could use the \$14 million for other county improvements and Ms. Liptak said yes, as long as the agreements were not signed. Ms. Liptak said there were 8 budget blocks passed by Council and they would need to check whether the contracts were signed with the Port Authority.*

*Councilman Drozd said there are other county projects, roads, bridges, etc. that they could put that money towards. He said if Members don't vote for this legislation, then they are taking a stance against supporting a mass transportation system.*

**Action:**      **A motion was made that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion failed by the following vote:**

**Votes:** Yes: 3 - Caldwell, Drozd and Gastgeb  
No: 3 - Cleary, Finnerty and Chair Robinson  
Absent: 2 - Frazier and Lestitian  
Not present: 1 - Burn

### **3070-07**

A Resolution of the County of Allegheny amending the Grants and Special Accounts Budget for 2007 (Submission #04-07).

**Sponsors:**      Chief Executive

**Summary:**      *Ms. Liptak said there are two budget blocks in this legislation, both of which are new*

*grants. One grant is for KidsVoice and extended family foster care, while the other is for the Workforce Investment Act Career Advancement Account Demonstration Program.*

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

#### **IV. Adjournment**

**Summary:** Chair recessed the meeting at 4:45 pm and will reconvene at 4:00 pm on March 27, 2007.