

Allegheny County Council

*County of Allegheny
436 Grant Street
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Phone (412) 350-6490*



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 23, 2014

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Appointment Review

Jan Rea - Chair; Committee of the Whole

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

Invited Guests:

Invited Guests Present:

Austin Davis, Executive Assistant, County Executive's Office

Council Staff Present: Joe Catanese; Aaron Pittman; Stephanie Buka

II. Roll Call

Members Present: 6 - Rea, Jim Ellenbogen, Michael Finnerty, Heather Heidelbaugh, Bob Macey and Sue Means

Members Absent: 9 - Tom Baker, Barbara Danko, John DeFazio, Nick Futules, Amanda Green Hawkins, Ed Kress, Chuck Martoni, John Palmiere and William Robinson

III. Approval of Minutes

[8543-14](#)

Motion to approve the minutes of the Appointment Review Committee Meeting of Allegheny County Council held on September 11, 2014.

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

IV. Agenda Items

Appointments

[8492-14](#)

Approving the reappointment of Susan Davis to serve as a member of the Allegheny County Mental Health/Intellectual Disability Advisory Board, for a term to expire on December 31, 2015.

Sponsors: Chief Executive

Held in Committee

[8493-14](#)

Approving the appointment of Dr. Robert Gallen to serve as a member of the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee, for a term to expire on December 31, 2016.

Sponsors: Chief Executive

Dr. Gallen described his work as a Professor and Director of the Programs in Infant Mental Health at Chatham University. Councilwoman Means asked Dr. Gallen about ZERO TO THREE, and he explained the organization's mission. Chairwoman Rea recognized Mr. Austin Davis from the County Executive's Office, and he reported that this advisory committee provides Dr. Walter Smith, Jr., Deputy Director of the Office of Children, Youth and Families and Dr. Marc Cherna, Director, Department of Human Services, with recommendations pertaining to the Office of Children, Youth and Families. Councilwoman Means asked Dr. Gallen about identifying "red flags" in a child's

development, and Dr. Gallen stated that The Alliance For Infants and Toddlers, Inc., with the parents agreement, will provide any child, age birth to three years, living in Allegheny County, with a developmental screen. Per Dr. Gallen, if a delay is identified, this agency can make recommendations for appropriate services. Councilwoman Means and Dr. Gallen discussed the importance of promoting healthy interactions between parents and their children. Councilman Finnerty asked Dr. Gallen what he would consider a "red flag" and Dr. Gallen reported that a deficit in emotional regulation and problems in the social-emotional development of a child would be crucial. Councilwoman Heidelbaugh recused herself from voting on Dr. Gallen's appointment, noting that it had nothing to do with Dr. Gallen's credentials, rather it was because she serves as a Chatham University board member.

A motion was made by Macey, seconded by Means, that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion carried by the following vote:

Members Yes: 4 - Rea, Finnerty, Macey and Means

Members Abstain: 1 - Heidelbaugh

Members Absent: 10 - Baker, Danko, DeFazio, Ellenbogen, Futules, Green Hawkins, Kress, Martoni, Palmiere and Robinson

[8494-14](#) Approving the appointment of Rebecca Mercatoris to serve as a member of the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee, for a term to expire on December 31, 2016.

Sponsors: Chief Executive

Ms. Mercatoris reported that she is the Early Learning Network Director for the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), and she is responsible for the Early Learning Hub in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, where they encourage parents to take advantage of the programs and services available. Councilwoman Means asked Ms. Mercatoris to explain the purpose of the Keystone STARS program, and Ms. Mercatoris stated that Keystone STARS is a voluntary program, that child care facilities within Pennsylvania can participate in and earn up to 4 stars based on performance standards.

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

[8531-14](#) Approving the reappointment of Phillis D. Lavelle to serve as a member of the Property Assessment Appeals & Review Board for a three (3) year term to expire on December 31, 2017.

Sponsors: Council Member Green Hawkins and Council Member Robinson

Ms. Lavelle told members that she served as chair from 2009 to 2013. Councilwoman Means asked Ms. Lavelle about her career change, and Ms. Lavelle replied that she gained an interest in real estate after she married a realtor. Councilwoman Means commented that some property owners are experiencing a 4-month delay from the time the Board reviewed the case to when the homeowner receives a disposition. Ms. Lavelle stated that this could be accurate and described the process involved with reviewing cases. Ms. Lavelle noted that the Board controls a portion of this process, however, they do not control the Office of Property Assessments (OPA). Councilwoman Means asked Ms. Lavelle if serving on this board is a paid position, to which Ms. Lavelle affirmed that it is a paid position. Ms. Lavelle stated that the Board can only render a decision based on

what the property owner presents as evidence. Ms. Lavelle explained to Councilwoman Means that the best item to present would be a current appraisal of the property, and the next best item, would be recent sales of comparable properties within the neighborhood. Ms. Lavelle provided an explanation to Councilwoman Means regarding the Board's decision, with Judge Wettick's approval, to accept agreements between a school district and property owner on the value of a home. However, Ms. Lavelle stated that although the Board was saving time and money for the Board of Viewers (BOV), Allegheny County Council objected and the Board did stop this practice. Councilman Ellenbogen commented on a homeowner's representation before the Board, and Ms. Lavelle explained that the Board saw many laymen, not attorneys or professional real estate appraisers, charging up to \$300, resulting in many homeowners losing their case. She said the Board tried to prevent individuals with no skill base from presenting cases. Councilwoman Heidelbaugh stated that she introduced legislation to prohibit individuals claiming to have special expertise and charging a fee, although the issue did not garner any support. Councilwoman Heidelbaugh noted that she has no philosophical disagreement with a property owner bringing in their child for support. Councilwoman Heidelbaugh asked Ms. Lavelle if she would be in favor of a yearly reassessment, and Ms. Lavelle reported that she is in favor of a reassessment every three years. Councilman Finnerty asked Ms. Lavelle why homes that are exactly alike are assessed differently, and Ms. Lavelle said she would submit that there are no "cookie cutter" homes, and it's important to remember that the role of the OPA is to place value on property, while the Board is discharged with hearing appeals.

A motion was made by Heidelbaugh, seconded by Rea, that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion carried by the following vote:

Members Yes: 2 - Rea and Heidelbaugh

Members No: 1 - Means

Members Absent: 12 - Baker, Danko, DeFazio, Ellenbogen, Finnerty, Futules, Green Hawkins, Kress, Macey, Martoni, Palmiere and Robinson

[8546-14](#) Approving the reappointment of Ed Sperling to serve as a member of the Property Assessment Appeals & Review Board for a three (3) year term to expire on December 31, 2017.

Sponsors: Council Member Means

Mr. Sperling reported that the delay in recording home sales by the Office of Property Assessments (OPA) can be problematic, but the Board has no control over that portion of the process. Mr. Sperling stated that he is in agreement with Councilwoman Heidelbaugh, in so far as attorneys' should be representing individuals that come before the Board. Mr. Sperling explained to Councilwoman Means that, in his opinion, the Board never should have accepted agreements made between two parties (i.e. school district and homeowner). Mr. Sperling responded to a question from Councilwoman Means reporting that he did not believe term limits should be established for hearing officers. Councilwoman Means asked Mr. Sperling if he thought a homeowner could be at a disadvantage when appearing before the Board due to a friendship between the attorney's representing a school district and a municipality. Mr. Sperling said that has never happened, and he's been serving in this capacity since 1999. Councilwoman Means noted that the County Executive has a vacancy to fill on this Board. Mr. Sperling stated that he is interested in serving to remain active in the real estate field, but he would imagine that it would be difficult to find someone to serve due to the time involved. Councilwoman Means asked Mr. Sperling if he thought the compensation should be increased, and Mr. Sperling replied that each member receives \$9,000 for the year, and

he would recommend that the compensation be increased.

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

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.