

HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes (revised 4/12/07; approved 4/16/07)

Monthly Meeting

April 9, 2007

The chair called the meeting to order at 8:33 on April 9, 2007.

Members Present on call to order: Calvin Ball, Greg Fox, Courtney Watson, Jen Terrasa. Mary Kay Sigaty arrived at 8:38 a.m.

Charlene Gallion, Director of the Howard County Department of Social Services, briefed the Council on the agency. She explained that it is a State agency, but that the County supplements the State's funding. She described the functions of the department, the administrative structure, and highlights of several specific services and programs.

Donna Wells, Executive Director of the Mental Health Authority, and the Board's president, Joseph Raiti, presented a briefing on the Mental Health Authority. This also is a State agency with County support, and it serves as the county's agency for mental health. Ms. Wells explained that the percentage of people with mental illness who receive services through the Authority is small, as most people in the county are insured. She described a number of services the Authority would like to institute or expand: respite care for parents of mentally ill children and an increase in the mobile crisis center. Because Howard County's numbers served are small, the State does not fund crisis beds in the county, which increases demand for the mobile crisis center. She explained that the mentally ill are the largest disabled group in Howard County.

Council Chairman Ball summarized the process to be used for requesting and receiving information related to the budget. Ms. Watson confirmed that members will have the option of asking for confidential replies, although the Chair encouraged members to share the information they receive with other members.

Courtney Watson asked the Chair to follow-up with the County Executive to determine how the overpayments to the directors of Housing and Technical Services, noted in the exit audit reports, were handled. Also, Mary Kay Sigaty asked the Chairman to get clarification on the Executive's plan to pay the costs associated with unused leave paid to the County Solicitor.

Ms. Terrasa reported that the General Assembly will conclude its work for this session today.

Sheila Tolliver reported on staff activities and summer flexible schedules for staff. Ms. Terrasa suggested that this might be a good time to revisit the back-up policy for secretaries so as not to overburden any individual secretary. She also explained the constant yield tax rate and the required advertising and hearing that would be forthcoming. She requested ideas for the agenda of the meeting with the Board of Education on April 25. Ms. Watson suggested two items: an update on the status of the Mt. Hebron project and the feasibility study and the Board's responses to the Planning Board's recommendations on the capital budget. The council agreed that Ms. Tolliver should keep a consolidated list of people attending high school graduations.

County Auditor Haskell Arnold reported on projects in progress and explained that the bids for the county-wide audit have come in and are higher than the current year's costs. A discussion followed about possible ways to accommodate the growth in cost. Mr. Arnold will follow-up with a memo to members explaining the actual bids and making recommendations. The Council affirmed that the policy regarding answers to budget questions will be confidential unless otherwise authorized by a member. Ms. Watson asked for a breakdown of prior years' funding for capital projects, and Ms. Sigaty asked for expenditure as well as prior appropriation detail.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 a.m.