

Baltimore City Council wants say on school board members

By Justin Fenton, The Baltimore Sun, August 15, 2011

In its last meeting before the September primary election, the Baltimore City Council unanimously passed a resolution calling on state legislators to give the council input in the selection of school board members.

Councilman Bill Henry, the resolution's lead sponsor, said Monday that the council has a say in executive appointments to most city commissions and boards, and it should be involved in the selection of school board members. City school board members are appointed jointly by the governor and mayor of Baltimore.

The council rarely, if ever, rejects an executive nominee. And Henry said the resolution is not an attempt to wade into issues such as whether board members should be elected or whether the city should have greater control of its schools.

But officials say that having prospective school board members face scrutiny from the council would help foster more dialogue. Such a move would require General Assembly approval, and it wasn't immediately clear if the idea has support among the city's Annapolis delegation.

The resolution was among a number of measures introduced at Monday's meeting; others focused on topics including parking taxes and animal cruelty.

Those who make money selling parking spots on Ravens game days may feel the squeeze from the city. Councilman William H. Cole IV said the city is missing out on tax revenue from "rogue" parking operators who sell spots around M&T Bank Stadium, and he wants the city to crack down.

Cole estimates that there are as many as 20 to 45 such lots on any given Sunday, and claimed one such operator makes \$100,000 per season.

"They're not registered, they're not paying any city parking tax and they're not following the rules," he said. "It's not fair to those who are."

Councilman Robert Curran introduced what he calls an overhaul of the city's animal control regulations. The bill appears to broaden the scope of potential violations and extends regulations to exotic and farm animals, though the proposed changes would not increase existing fines and penalties.

Curran, however, vowed that before the bill is passed, it will include tougher penalties. "Bottom line: Animal cruelty will cease in Baltimore, and justice will be served," he said.

The bill will be presented to the city's animal abuse task force Wednesday.

The city Health Department, which oversees animal control, was unable to comment Monday on the potential changes, a spokesman said.

Councilmembers Helen Holton and William "Peter" Welch sought stable funding for the city's YouthWorks program and an expansion from six weeks to a year-long program. Welch said participants will be able to further hone their skills in a longer program.

An "anti-gang" commission would be created under a bill introduced by Councilwoman Belinda Conaway, with the goal of preparing a five-year strategic plan to fight violence. "We need to find ways to connect young people with appropriate resources," she said.

Conaway also introduced a bill aimed at eliminating speed cameras. She said revenue from the cameras has been increasing, which she said indicates that the cameras are not deterring speeding in school and work zones.

Instead, she proposes that the cameras be used to target those who are illegally dumping refuse.

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