

Minutes for Buffalo Niagara Coalition for Open Government February 1, 2018 meeting

Meeting called to order at 5:35 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present: Ken Foit, Richard Bertrand, Ed McKee, Janet Vito, Lawrence Vito, Jim Tricoli, Brian Hellner, Sonia Dusza, Mike Kless.

Meeting Minutes: Ed McKee made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 4, 2018 meeting, seconded by Jim Tricoli. Minutes unanimously approved.

Board of Director's Positions: The one year terms of Jonathan Manes and Mike Kless expired in January of 2018. Both have expressed an interest in serving a two-year term. Brian Hellner made a motion to re-appoint Jonathan Manes to a two-year Board term expiring January 31, 2020, seconded by Jim Tricoli. Motion unanimously approved.

Jim Tricoli made a motion to appoint Michael Kless to a two-year Board term expiring January 31, 2020, seconded by Brian Hellner. Motion unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Ed McKee reported BNCOG's balance as \$448.36. There were no expenses since the last meeting. Mike Kless made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report seconded by Brian Hellner. Treasurer's Report unanimously approved.

Lockport Housing Authority: Following up on the concerns raised by Richard Bertrand, Paul Wolf sent a letter to the Lockport Housing Authority in November and to the Mayor of Lockport in December requesting a meeting. A response has not been received to either letter. At our January meeting it was decided to send a letter to the Lockport City Council, requesting that any appointments to the Housing Authority not occur until our open government concerns can be addressed.

On January 10th, Paul Wolf emailed a letter to all members of the Lockport City Council. The Mayor of Lockport left a voice message for Paul; Paul returned the call and left a voice message for the Mayor. Two Councilmembers responded to the email and stated that the Mayor was looking into our concerns.

The Lockport Housing Authority's website will be evaluated as part of our first report being released in March. After the report is released we will forward it to the Lockport City Council and ask to be heard at a City Council meeting.

Goals for 2018: After our discussion at the last meeting, Paul Wolf prepared a calendar for 2018 of several projects to complete. The projects we will focus on in 2018 are:

Project Goals

- Report regarding Authority Websites (Housing Authorities, Erie County Water, Niag Falls Water, NFTA, Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, etc)
- Update 2017 Website Report to document improvements made by local governments
- Report regarding Financial Disclosure forms used by local governments
- Update 2017 Executive Sessions Report to document if changes have been made

- Report regarding status of local government FOIL requests (how many FOILs received, for what, timeliness of response)
- September speaker event
- Report regarding School Districts (posting of agendas, minutes etc.)

New Business: A Daeman College Instructor has assigned a student to assist us with designing a logo. As things move forward, Paul will keep us posted.

A Buffalo News article titled “Zemsky says regional council members’ finances not public records” was shared. According to the article, the 200 members of the regional councils complete a financial information form but Zemsky says the public should not be allowed to review that information. The council members recommend which economic development projects should receive hundreds of millions in state aid.

Paul Wolf explained that state and local employees are required to complete financial disclosure forms that anyone can view through a FOIL request. In Amherst members of a town board or committee are also required to complete a disclosure form that anyone can view through FOIL. In Paul’s opinion, the regional council members should not be treated differently.

The article notes that the Buffalo News has filed a FOIL request seeking the “statement of interest” filings by members of the 10 regional councils. State legislation has also been filed seeking to make it clear that regional council members filings are subject to FOIL. Paul stated that we may want to review that legislation and take a position of support at our next meeting.

Sonia Dusza mentioned the importance of budget hearings and that this is an area we should look at in the future.

Janet Vito mentioned her experience with the Clarence Ethics Board and that this is an area we should look at in the future.

Ken Foit mentioned incorporating our organization. As a first step we could incorporate as New York State non-profit very easily. Incorporating as a federal 501(c)(3) is much more involved.

Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at 6:35 pm. Next meeting will be March 1, 2018, 5:30 at the Williamsville Library.