

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

Meeting called to order at 5:33 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present: Ken Foit, Ed McKee, Janet Vito, Lawrence Vito, Jim Tricoli, Brian Hellner, Sonia Dusza, Mike Kless, Joe Kissel, Brian Nowak, Jonathan Manes, Tom Frank

Meeting Minutes: Ed McKee made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 1, 2018 meeting, seconded by Mike Kless. Minutes unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Ed McKee reported BNCOG's balance as \$528.36. There were no expenses since the last meeting. Brian Hellner made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report seconded by Jim Tricoli. Treasurer's Report unanimously approved. We ask our members to contribute \$20 annually every March to help with finances. Now is the time to encourage annual contributions, Paul will send an email out.

Update to 2017 Local Government Website Evaluations: Paul Wolf sent an email to the top elected official and clerks of the websites evaluated last year. The email included a copy of the score received last year, evaluation form used and encouraged each local government to rate themselves in order to obtain points for any improvements made to their sites since last year's report.

To date only the Town of Amherst has bothered to complete an evaluation. Lancaster, W. Seneca, N. Tonawanda and the Town of Lockport responded with emails.

Authority Website Evaluations: Paul Wolf thanked people for helping to evaluate websites and encouraged people who have not turned in their evaluations to do so. March 13th at 10:00 a.m. at Williamsville Village Hall was set for holding a press conference to release our report.

Regional Economic Development Councils: A motion was made by Mike Kless, seconded by Jim Tricoli to go on record as supporting NY Assembly Bill A05405. The legislation requires members of the 10 regional economic development councils to follow the financial disclosure requirements and the code of ethics in the public officers law. The motion was unanimously approved.

Wheatfield Local Development Corporation: Paul Wolf passed out an article from the Niagara Gazette pointing out that the Wheatfield Local Development Corp. does not post meeting agendas on their website. This organization has been added to the list of local websites we are evaluating.

Erie County Sheriff FOIL Lawsuit: Paul Wolf passed out an article regarding a lawsuit filed by the Buffalo Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild and students from the UB Law School. Jonathan Manes spoke about his involvement in the lawsuit. A year ago a FOIL request was submitted to the Sheriff's Office for records, and the requested records have not been provided.

New Business: Ken Foit is assisting with the paperwork to incorporate the Coalition as a NY State Non-profit organization.

Ed McKee brought up identifying a guest speaker for a September event. Paul has identified some possible names as ideas, which he will email to everyone.

Mike Kless asked if there are other organizations like ours around NY State. Paul mentioned Reinvent Albany, NYPIRG, League of Women Voters that do some open government work. In most states it appears that organizations like ours have a statewide focus and not a local focus. In the Annual Report Robert Freeman releases every year he lists the organizations that he has spoken in front of. Paul will review Freeman's list.

Paul Wolf mentioned the possibility of trying to meet with the New York State Comptroller, Attorney General and WNY Legislative Delegation to discuss the need for more oversight regarding the Open Meetings Law and the need to amend the law. The State Comptroller in addition to performing financial audits has done reports regarding water quality, bridges, noise ordinances, why not an audit focusing on compliance with the Open Meetings Law. The Attorney General could be more involved in this issue as well. Assemblymember Crystal People's chairs the Assembly's Local Government Committee, which could hold a hearing on these issues as well.

Joe Kissel mentioned creating a t-shirt with a logo that we could sell for fundraising purposes. Once we receive some logo designs from our student designer we will see if the design would work for a t-shirt.

Brian Hellner shared an article written by the Mayor of Lockport highlighting her support of open government issues, yet we have not received any positive response regarding our concerns with open government issues at the Lockport Housing Authority. Paul pointed out that the members of the Lockport Housing Authority are appointed by the Mayor.

Brian Nowak a member of the Cheektowaga Town Board spoke about his efforts to get Town Board meetings video-taped and posted online. Brian has also pushed for getting other meeting minutes posted online such as the Planning Board.

Tom Frank mentioned a television show he saw with Robin Schimminger and Brian Kulpa and suggested that this may be a good show to get on to discuss open government issues.

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