

Minutes for Buffalo Niagara Coalition for Open Government April 4, 2019

Meeting called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present: Janet Vito, Larry Vito, Steve Lyle, Joseph Kissel, Mike Kless, Ed McKee, Sonia Dusza, Ed McKee, Gary Dickson, Richard Bertrand.

Meeting Minutes: Ed McKee made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 7, 2019 meeting, seconded by Mike Kless. Minutes unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: Janet Vito reported our account balance as \$1,154.17. Thirteen paid memberships have been received. Larry Vito made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report seconded by Richard Bertrand. Treasurer's Report unanimously approved.

FOIL Log Report: Our FOIL log report was not selected as one of the top papers received by the National Freedom of Information Coalition. We will have to determine when to release the completed report.

Report Regarding Colleges & Universities: The press conference releasing the report at UB went well. Several student newspapers wrote about the report and it was covered by the Buffalo News, Lockport Journal, Niagara Gazette and Spectrum Cable News.

Best Practices Sunshine Week Event: We did not receive any press coverage for this event, which was disappointing. The elected officials who made an effort to support our best practices did not receive the media attention they deserved.

UB Council: A letter was sent to the UB Council expressing concern as to how their March meeting was conducted. The Chair of the meeting incorrectly made a motion to go into executive session.

Community Action Organization (CAO): A letter was sent to Congressmen Higgins and members of the State Legislature regarding the CAO using armed guards to prevent the public from attending their Board meeting. It was suggested that new legislation be considered to make it clear that an agency whose budget is 99% public funds is subject to state and federal open meetings laws.

Niagara County Financial Disclosure Forms: We are still waiting for new legislation to be filed and for a public hearing date to be scheduled.

School District Report: Our next report to be done is regarding school districts. As school board elections are in May, we need to get this report out in April. Paul will contact Board members about completing rating sheets.

New Business: Joe Kissel brought up doing a candidate questionnaire on open government issues. Paul Wolf mentioned that this was raised as a possible project for this year but did not make it onto our list of scheduled projects. There are many logistical issues with doing such a questionnaire. Finding out the names and contact info for all candidates is difficult, especially

those not currently in office. Once we have completed questionnaires, how do we make them available to the public? We have to be careful about being too political as far as getting involved with elections.

Sponsoring debates was raised as well. There are a lot of logistics involved in doing debates as well. Which elections do you focus on, having contact info for inviting candidates, rules have to be established in advance etc.

Sonia Dusza raised the issue of having the assistance of community minded pro-bono attorneys. Where can citizens turn when legal assistance is needed on open government issues. Paul Wolf mentioned that he has thought about this issue as well. Paul has thought about reaching out to a group of attorneys to see if they would be interested in assisting on open government issues. It would be great to have a list of interested attorneys to contact when needed and to perhaps work together on filing lawsuits to enforce FOIL and the Open Meetings Law. This could be done by forming a committee through the Bar Association separate from our organization or as a committee of our organization.

Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm., on a motion by Ed McKee seconded by Gary Dickson. Next meeting will be May 2, 2019, 6:30 pm at the Williamsville Library.