

Minutes for Buffalo Niagara Coalition for Open Government July 11, 2019

Meeting called to order at 6:40 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present: Paul Wolf, Janet Vito, Larry Vito, Thomas Frank, Stephen Lyle, Joe Kissel, Kate Lepold, Richard Bertrand, Ed McKee, Austin Lebers.

Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes from June 6, 2019, were approved on a motion made by Ed McKee, seconded by Joe Kissel.

Treasurer's Report: Janet Vito reported our account balance as \$1,144.17. Twenty-one paid memberships have been received as of 7/10/19. Larry Vito made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report which was seconded by Richard Bertrand. Motion was unanimously approved.

Ethics Board Report: On June 12, we held a press conference releasing our report regarding local government Ethics Boards. Our new simplified rating sheet seemed to work well. Allowing the Boards to respond to our initial rating, which six out of the ten did, was helpful to the process. Some Boards in response to our initial rating made immediate changes to their website. The report was covered by WBFO Radio, West Seneca Bee, Orchard Park Bee.

Niagara County Financial Disclosure Forms & Speaking at Their Meetings: Paul Wolf has been reaching out to different organizations in an effort to obtain assistance with suing Niagara County regarding their local law which keeps disclosure forms filed before 2019 secret from the public.

Legislator Virtuoso has filed a resolution seeking to change when citizens get to speak to Niagara County legislators at their meetings. If you want to speak on an item that is not on the meeting agenda you have to wait until the meeting is adjourned to speak. People speaking on an agenda item get to speak at the beginning of the meeting. Virtuoso is seeking to have all citizens who sign up to speak to be heard at the beginning of the meeting instead of making some wait hours until the end of the meeting.

The item is in the Administration Committee and their next meeting is August 6th.

Lockport Housing Authority: A letter written by Coalition Vice President Richard Bertrand published in the Lockport Sun Journal was discussed. In his letter Richard who serves on the Lockport Housing Authority Board pointed out that at a recent meeting four resolutions were voted on that did not appear on the Housing Authority's published meeting agenda. According to Richard in 2018, less than 50% of all resolutions appeared on a Lockport Housing Authority meeting agenda prior to the meeting. A motion was made at our June meeting that we should send a letter expressing our concern as to how Lockport Housing Authority meeting agendas are being handled. On July 8th, a letter was sent to the Lockport Housing Authority.

Lockport School Board Committee Meetings: An article that appeared in the Lockport Union Sun paper was discussed. School Board member Kyle Lambalzer proposed that all Lockport School Board committee meetings be open to the public. Some school board members expressed

concern about having all committee meetings being open to the public and based on that the resolution seeking open meetings was tabled. Joe Kissel made a motion that we send a letter expressing support for open committee meetings to the Lockport School Board. The motion was seconded by Ed McKee and unanimously approved.

UB Foundation Lawsuit: Paul Wolf discussed that support from our organization was sought by individuals who have filed a lawsuit seeking to make the operation of the University at Buffalo Foundation more transparent and open. The UB Foundation, has taken the position that they are not subject to FOIL or the Open Meetings Law. Our organization has agreed to sign on to a friend of the court legal brief in support of the lawsuit as it presents important issues regarding non-profit organizations being subject to FOIL and the Open Meetings Law.

September Speaker Event: Mark Scheer from the Niagara Gazette & Lockport Sun, Deidre Williams, Buffalo News and Steven Brown, WGRZ Channel 2 News are confirmed to participate in our forum on September 25th, titled “Your Right to Know: The News Media and the Freedom of Information Law. The event will be held at the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site, 641 Delaware Ave. Buffalo from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.

FOIL Project Regarding Emails & Texts: Paul Wolf will be sending a FOIL request to local government officials seeking copies of email and text messages exchanged between elected officials. We will track whether FOIL is being complied with as far as properly acknowledging our request and providing the requested information.

New Business: No new business was discussed.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn made by Larry Vito and seconded by Ed McKee. Next meeting will be September 5, 6:30 pm at the Williamsville Library.