

New York Coalition for Open Government Meeting Minutes Sept 9, 2021

Called to order 6:35 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present Sonia Dusza, Janet Vito, Lawrence Vito, Steve Lyle, Patricia Irving, Michelle Allen-Gregory, Maria Tisby, Mary Cebula, Russell Kirkwood, Louis F., VMFichera, Ed McKee, Casey Jones, Caitlin Curtin, Richard Bertrand, Sue, call in user 1, Paul Wolf, and Alberta Roman (Recorder)

Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes from August 12, 2021 were approved on a motion made by Mary Lou Cebula and seconded by Maria Tisby.

Treasurer's Report: Janet Vito provided a written report showing \$2,923.12 as of August 31, 2021. We now have 56 paid members. This is most we have ever had. Motion made by Larry Vito and second by Sonia Dusza to accept Treasurer's report.

Albany Legislation; For the first time this year, we have become involved in successful lobbying for these two bills sponsored by Legislator Amy Paulin. They are not perfect and are steps forward.

A.1108A/s04704A requires posting meeting minutes/transcripts, within two weeks of a meeting.

A1228/S1150 requires meeting documents to be made available at least 24 hours prior to public body meeting.

Both bills have passed the Assembly and Senate and will be forwarded to the Governor for signature. 500 bills are waiting for Gov. signature.

Report on County Board of Elections: Our report due soon, early October. Response has been limited and follow-up requests sent with some responses. Most ignored both requests. There is a lot of interest in reforming Boards of Election by Legislature.

Extraordinary Legislative Session Press Release:

Originally planned to extend time for eviction and open meeting law added. Good start by new Governor Kathy Hochul in calling Legislature to session and declaring transparency as a priority, however failed to execute. 36 pages of text did not give legislators and public reasonable and necessary time to read before hand. Our and other organizations sent letters to Albany to request they hold hearings and agree the hybrid model is optimal. We issued press release criticizing actions which got lots of good statewide press. When it is easy for citizens to attend meetings, more do (citing Buffalo Common Council meeting and Ogdensburg). Paul will send out a list of how every state does meetings.

Buffalo Bills Stadium Transparency: Discussion started by billionaire owners of Buffalo Bills about building new stadium for which taxpayers are asked to pay. 1.4 billion dollars estimated cost in study done by owners which is not being released to public. FOIL request denied. NO opportunity for public to be heard. County and State Legislators will vote on stadium cost to taxpayers. Paul will create Tues 10 am press conference focusing on release of study to public and the opportunity to be heard on stadium issue. Paul sent a letter to Erie County Legislators requesting statement of their position. No one responded. Two Legislators introduced bill to have discussion in public with doubtful success. There is a petition on line promoting signature in favor of those two issues. Paul would like to have 2000 signatures. Transparency by releasing this study to public is very important issue

that could produce clear law and VP Joe Kissel filed a FOIL request on our behalf so that we may be involved further.

Letter to Senate Committee on Investigations

Regarding the Open Meetings Law; We already discussed.

Several organizations including ours have sent letters to Albany to request (Oct.?) hearings on this issue. Opportunity for organizations to put forth important issues like inadequate enforcement. Expect a gathering of information. Paul will share link to website to make list of transparency issues that we can all work on. More to come on this. Also create annual meeting in March recognize great/not great actions.

Letter to Gov. Hochul Regarding Covid Data

Transparency: Joint letter with Reinvent Albany encouraging new Gov. to make more info avail to public than previous Gov.re covid.

Ithaca Council Vacancy; In response to notice of this elected office vacancy, Paul sent (and will send letters in future) email and letter to be sure interviews done in public, which now appears to be so.

National Freedom Of Information Coalition (NFOIC)

Online Summit, 9-29 to 30 for \$25: As mentioned last mo. this is great opportunity for members. They also do a monthly newsletter and Paul sent us a link to this where we got a mention.

Cuomo FOIL Policy: Empire Center uncovered policy that had FOIL requests from different sources were treated differently. A lot of news articles across State stated how bad this is...attached sample.

NY State Committee on Open Government Meeting 9-

21, 10 a.m.: Can join meeting at website. Committee has been reluctant to hear public speak at meetings. It should be reconstituted

without Governor control, along with Ethics Committee for same reason. Paul has spoken receptively with Legislator Krueger re this change. Committee on Open Government training thru website 9-16 10 to 11:30 am and monthly by Kristen ONeil re open meetings law.

New Business: Many comments about new Governor and our intention to press for open meetings and public access to gov.

Next Meeting October 14, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. on zoom:

Motion made by Maria Tisby and seconded by Sonia Dusza to adjourn meeting at 7:49 p.m.