

New York Coalition for Open Government

Thursday April 11, 2024, 6:30 pm

Via Zoom

Email paulwolf2@gmail.com for the meeting link

Public Comments Are Welcome At Any Time During Our Meetings. Don't Be Shy To Ask A Question Or To Make A Point!

AGENDA

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1) Meeting Minutes from March 14, 2024 | PG 3-4 |
| 2) Treasurer's Report – 50 total paid members
Balance as of 3/31/24 \$4,951.16 | 5 |
| 3) Draft calendar for 2024 | 6-8 |
| 4) Social Media Policy | 9 |
| 5) Axel Reimbursement for 2 Sunshine Week Lunches \$296.30 | |
| 6) Public Relations/Education Committee | 10-12 |
| A) Albany Lobbying Trip – What lessons did we learn to make next year better? | |
| B) Member Recruitment & Outreach 2024 – Can we get members to reach out to neighborhood groups to get on a meeting agenda to talk about the Coalition? | |
| C) Coalition Annual Meeting – See attached | |
| D) Fundraising Work Group | |
| 7) Open Meetings Law Committee | 13 |
| A) Working on revised public comment report | |
| B) Planning a training session on how to make public comments at a meeting | |

8) Freedom of Information Law Committee

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- A) Final FOIL project report regarding state agencies close to being completed
- B) Did a training session on March 28 at 5:30 pm regarding the need for an independent hearing officer system
- C) Annmarie is getting things together for our next FOIL project where we will request public comment policies from City Councils of which there are 61

9) New Business

10) Next Meetings

Open Meetings Law Committee March 21, at 6:30 pm

Freedom of Information Law Committee March 28, at 6:30 pm

Public Relations April 4, at 6:30 pm

Board Meeting April 11, at 6:30 pm

Annual Meeting sometime 2nd week of May at 6:30 pm

3-14-24 NY COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT BOARD MEETING

PRESENT ON ZOOM; Michelle Allen, Suzanne Kelly, Ken Guarino, Annmarie Reeb, Darlene Bolsover, Susan, Robert, Jarrett Steffen(first Board Meeting from NF), Maria Tisby, Robyn Gray, Janet Vito, Patricia Irving, Axel Ebermann, Paul Wolf.

NY COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT BOARD MEETING; Called to order on zoom at 6:32 pm 3-14-24 by President Paul Wolf.

BOARD MEETING MINUTES FROM LAST MONTH; Motion by Janet Vito to approve minutes from last month Feb.8;second by Axel E.; Motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT; Motion made by Annmarie Reeb to approve Treasurer's report; Second by Maria T.;Motion carried. Available funds are \$5,697.81.

CALENDAR 2024; This calendar is for informational purposes.

BUFFALO OPEN MEETING LAWSUIT UPDATE; Motion made by Michelle A. to not Appeal re: City of Buffalo Article 78;Second by Axel E.; Motion carried. Report by Paul that the Article 78 Lawsuit against City of Buffalo was dismissed with Judge stating that the case was not filed within the required 4 months and the Buffalo Board of Review was not a Public Body, contrary to our opinion. Merits of case were not addressed and we may file a new case if the same circumstances arise. To appeal this case would require \$4,000 filing fees and attorney fees additionally. We received a lot of publicity from filing the lawsuit, including 14,000 twitter views on a post about the case which is most we have ever had.

REIMBURSE PAUL FOR FUNDS SPENT OUT OF POCKET; Motion made by Janet V. to approve new amount for reimbursement of court filing Fees; Second by Maria; Motion carried. The amount is \$360.47.

PUBLIC RELATIONS/EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING; Report by Axel E. re Albany lobbying day, where we made an energetic ruckus....with sunshine suit, folders, cookies and balloons. Second day a press conference held with over 30 organizations signed on in support of several bills. Everybody had a good time after a lot of work by many people. We highlighted 6 bills re FOIL package. Paul will email links out from Newspaper publicity and press conference is on YouTube. Facebook (our public) live on Friday at Noon has been going well.

Fundraising work group co-Chair Sue and Annmarie who will step back with invitation to Darlene to take over for her. Jarrett S. states he would step into co-chair at future date.

OPEN MEETING LAW COMMITTEE MEETING; Report by Michelle A. Chair re planning session on how to make public comments at regular meetings and public hearings.

And we just sent out letters to 177 Towns that identified as not allowing public comments. An amended report will reflect new information per Annmarie R. To do a report on 933 towns with a 5% error rate is a tremendous undertaking, per Paul.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION LAW COMMITTEE; Report by Maria T. Chair re final FOIL project of data from FOILing 70 State Agencies with probable release date after budget April 1. We were delayed due to including replies trickling in to get as much data as possible in report (on 7th version).

Mike Franklin will talk about how appeals could work in a forum an hour before next meeting at 5:30 for March 28th 6:30 meet. There will be taping for future training. Next project will be FOILing City Councils re their public comment policy. Volunteers needed.

NEW BUSINESS; Next Board meeting on zoom 4-11-24 6:30 pm.

ADJOURN 7:35 PM on motion by Pat Irving and second by Maria Tisby; motion carried.

Zoom Meeting April 11, 2024

NEW YORK COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT

Treasurer's Report March 31, 2024

Paid Members = 50 as of 3/31/2024

Bank Balance - as of February 29, 2024		\$6,057.81
Deposits - Bank - Mail-In - 3/19/2024 - \$100.00 (\$30.00 dues + \$70.00 Donation)		100.00
Deposits - Direct Online Deposits - 3/4/2024 - \$130.00		<u>130.00</u>
	Total	\$6,287.81
Expenses: Ck #174 - P. Wolf, Esq - Atty Fees (Bflo)	\$360.47	
Ck #175 - P. Wolf - Albany Event 3/11/24 (\$256.18 Dinner - \$120.00 Travel)	\$376.18	
Ck #176 - C. Fallon - Albany Event 3/12/24	\$120.00	
	Total	<u>- 856.65</u>
	Bank Balance - 3/27/2024	<u>\$5,431.16</u>
	(Restricted Donations)	<u>-360.00</u>
	<u>NYCOG Available Funds 3/27/2024</u>	<u>\$5,071.16</u>
<u>Larry Vito Memorial Fund (Givebutter)</u>		
	(2023 Restricted Donations)	\$360.00
		<u>360.00</u>
	<u>Check Book/Bank Balance 3/27/2024</u>	<u>\$5,431.16</u>
	NYCOG Available Funds 3/27/2024	\$5,071.16
	Outstanding Ck #177 M. Gregory-Allen \$120	<u>- 120.00</u>
	<u>NYCOG Available Funds 3/31/2024</u>	<u>\$4,951.16</u>


Janet Vito
Treasurer



New York Coalition for Open Government 2024 Goals

Internal Goals

- Increase membership (93 as of 12/10/23)
- Start Sharing Our Stories Through Videos
- Increase Facebook followers (684 as of 12/10/23)
- Increase Twitter followers (421 as of 12/10/23)

Project Goals

- Increase training sessions on OML & FOIL
- FOIL report regarding public comment policies
- Sunshine Week Event Albany Day
- Annual Meeting
- In person Meetings/Events

January

Board Appointments

Membership Renewals

Op-Ed regarding open government resolutions for New Year

January 1, 1977, anniversary of Open Meetings Law

Plan Sunshine Week Event for March (Albany Day)

Contacting State Legislators

February

Plan Sunshine Week Event for March

Draft Op-ed for Sunshine Week

Plan May Annual Meeting

Contacting State Legislators

2/23 Student Press Freedom Day

March

1st Tuesday in March, National Town Meeting Day

Sunshine Week Op-ed

Sunshine Week Event (March 11 to 15 Sunshine Week)

Forum Re Hearing Officer bill 3/28, 5:30 pm

Plan May Annual Meeting
OML Forum

April

Planning for Annual Meeting
Start gathering info for new FOIL report

May

Annual Meeting

June

July

Op-ed regarding anniversary of Freedom of Information Act
Continue gathering info for FOIL report
July 19-20, 1848 Anniversary of Seneca Falls Women's convention

August

Continue gathering info for FOIL report

September

FOIL report press conference
Sept 1, 1974, anniversary of FOIL
Sept 15th, Democracy Day
Sept 17th Constitution Day, 17-23 Constitution Week
Sept. 28th universal access to information day
Plan member in person meeting for November
Live Streaming Meeting Forum

October

October 17th, School Board Recognition Week
Plan Member in person meeting for November

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November

In person member meeting in Albany

December

End of year review, 2025 goals
Plan Board and Officer elections for 2025

****Facebook Community Guidelines for the
New York Coalition for Open Government****

As a non-profit dedicated to government transparency, we aim to foster a respectful, constructive online community. Please follow these guidelines on our Facebook page:

1. ****No Name-Calling****: Avoid personal attacks and name-calling. Let's maintain respectful discourse, even during disagreements.
2. ****No Foul Language****: Refrain from offensive language to keep our environment courteous and professional.
3. ****No Political Partisanship****: We are a neutral, non-partisan organization. Please avoid posts that endorse or oppose any political entities. Focus discussions on transparency and accountability.
4. ****No Advertising or Spam****: Keep content relevant and free from spam or promotional material.

Failure to comply may result in content removal or restricted access. Thanks for contributing to a positive community!

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New York Coalition For Open Government
Public Relations and Education Group Committee Minutes
Thursday, April 4, 2024 via Zoom

Meeting called to order at 6:33 pm by the Chair: Axel

Members in attendance: Axel, Darlene, Michelle, Maria, Janet, Susan, Sue, Stuart, Julie and Annmarie.

1. Approval of Minutes March 7, 2024 – Motion by Michelle, seconded by Maria; All in favor; None opposed; Motion carried.
2. Albany Lobbying Trip – What lessons did we learn to make next year better?
 - Maria suggested bios (Assembly/Senate) on members; a good pair of sneakers. Michelle suggested that the leaders do this.
 - Axel suggested a mentor – teaming people who did this before with people who hasn't done it. Others supported a mentor. Maybe a checklist. Axel suggested WhatsApp instead of endless email chains; organization needs to be improved; also avoiding last minute items.
 - Annmarie suggested a Mock Zoom – role playing on meeting with legislator; everyone should have all the information at the beginning.
 - Axel. Darlene commented on WhatsApp and the email chains.
 - Darlene suggested forms for a checklist of information; folders for legislators. Both are good for congruency.
 - Michelle suggested that flexibility was so important and we need to be more flexible.
 - Maria suggested we keep the (Albany legislative) open house.
3. Fundraising Work Group – Axel provided some tips for the Fundraising Work Group. Axel requested that Darlene the Chair pend this until the group can meet via zoom. Axel/Darlene will work on putting this invite together.
4. Member Recruitment & Outreach 2024 – Can we get members to reach out to neighborhood groups to talk about the Coalition? Axel provided a detailed overview of what we can do.
 - Axel suggested we put a list together of other organizations that we can reach out to and do active outreach
 - Annmarie suggested holding an informational meeting at local libraries; ask people that contact us with questions if their residents would be interested in training.
 - Annmarie asked if we should inform the organization before we agree to training? Axel said this would be good to inform the organization.
5. Coalition Annual Meeting – 2nd week of May – Guest speaker Mark Mahoney and John McDonald. Axel asked for feedback on the Larry Vito Award – Axel suggested we not honor our own. Annmarie and Axel suggested that Janet Vito and Paul should work together on this. Janet had several questions that she will discuss with Paul regarding this award.
6. New Business - Michelle informed on the NYS Press Association Conference that we are speaking at. Annmarie gave status updates on projects and informed about invites. Maria raised an OML concern.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 7:40 pm by Annmarie, seconded by Maria, All in favor; None opposed; Motion carried.

Our next meeting is Thursday, May 2, 2024 at 6:30 pm, via zoom. Minutes prepared by Annmarie Reeb.

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Coalition Annual Meeting

From Paul Wolf

At this meeting Paul will provide a brief history of the Coalition and review accomplishments from 2023.

Last year we had reporter Mark Mahoney as a guest speaker.

This year to keep the focus on getting our bills passed in Albany, I suggest inviting Assemblymember John McDonald, who serves as the Chair of the Government Operations Committee. All of our bills with the exception of one are in his Committee.

If McDonald is unwilling to do it then second choice could be Senator Gianaris who is second in charge in the Senate.

Looking to do the Annual Meeting via Zoom the second week of May at 6:30 pm. If people agree to go with McDonald, I will offer him any night that week and see what he says.

At the meeting, we also usually recognize people for their open government work. A few ideas:

Rod Watson – Buffalo News reporter, who recently retired. Rod wrote the first article about the Coalition back in 2017, which helped bring 20 people out to our first meeting. He has been very supportive ever since with articles over the years.

In honor of Larry Vito, a recent board member of ours who passed away we should create an annual Larry Vito award.

People deserving of recognition whether as a Larry Vito awardee or in general in my opinion are:

Axel – This past year he redid our website, changed how we do emails, led the charge on our Albany trip, does our Friday Facebook Live, handles distributing meeting notices and videos.

Annamarie – Has really improved our reports by managing volunteers, tracking and checking information, adding graphics, does most of our meeting minutes, assisted greatly with our Albany trip.

Cory – For taking on open government lawsuits

Mike – For filing his own Article 78 and winning

NY Coalition for Open Government
Open Meetings Law Committee
Thursday, March 21, 2024, at 6:30 pm via Zoom

Meeting called to order by the Chair, **Michelle** at 6:32 pm

Members present: Michelle, Justin, Janet, Pat, Jarrett, Mary, Darlene and Annmarie

Motion by Pat to approve the minutes of February 15, 2024 and seconded by Annmarie – All in favor; Motion carried.

1. Public Comment Report – Michelle provided an overview of what this amended report is based on. Annmarie addressed the details of the amended report and maybe we could have our report include tips for the public. She asked what do we think about doing tips on what is proper public comment and how to get your point across?
 - Michelle would like public hearings vs. regular meetings
 - Jarrett thinks tips and guides
 - Janet supports the tips, such as your demeanor, courtesy and respectful. Sometimes the boards already have their minds made up. Honey vs. Vinegar approach.
 - Justin – Best practices for the public and the officials – talking at these meetings is nerve wrecking.
 - Pat – sometimes we don't realize that the board doesn't have to respond. Leave a friendly note after speaking.
 - Jarrett offered insight regarding public comments on public hearings.

A discussion ensued with several members offering their insights. Justin said that people don't know what to expect when they are done speaking. The official minutes were also discussed.

2. Open Meetings Law Forum – Michelle provided an overview.
 - Annmarie posted and discussed information pertaining to public hearings/public meetings. She reviewed both links which were on two cities. We should look at all municipalities.
 - Michelle provided in depth information on what we should gear this meeting to, what we want people to learn, the laws, who is subject to OML, etc.
 - Justin – Would this be via zoom? Michelle stated it was a zoom w/PowerPoint. How will we get this information out? Michelle informed how we will disseminate that information.
 - Darlene said we could do workshop nights, where the public can bring in information (done by the municipality).
 - Annmarie suggested this as a library workshop; create a list of all the clerks as touched on by Justin.

A discussion ensued. Darlene suggested seminars by the organization. Michelle suggested we send a link to the libraries. Pat suggested including the press. Michelle suggested partnerships due to lack of resources in rural areas. Justin brought up how public comment is different from town to town and how standard rules would be good. Robyn will take the lead and this is our brainstorming.

3. New Business –
 - Annmarie requested volunteers for an upcoming FOIL project on Cities.
 - Michelle addressed and provided updated information on the bills we are supporting.
 - Annmarie has the Coalition's business cards if any members want them. You can email your request to a50reeb@gmail.com
 - Justin explained how great his town was regarding public comment and then the town took it away due to legal counsel. Justin shared our report: Silence is Not Golden to support public comment.
 - Darlene informed about how she asked for her City's policy and how she got public comment and how you can address it.

Motion by Pat to adjourn the meeting at 7:58 pm and seconded by Darlene. All in favor. None opposed. Meeting adjourned.

Next OML meeting is **April 18, 2024, at 6:30 pm, via Zoom**. Minutes prepared by Annmarie Reeb.

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New York Coalition for Open Government
Freedom of Information Law Committee Meeting - Minutes
Thursday, March 28, 2024 6:30 PM via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by the Chair, Maria at 6:33 pm.

Attended by: Maria, Pat, Stuart, Grace, Darlene, Jarrett, John, Michelle, Sue and Annmarie

Motion by Annmarie to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2024 meeting and Seconded by Sue. All in favor. None opposed, Motion carried.

1. State Agency FOIL Project: Annmarie provided an overview of the current status. The report is expected to be released in April. Michelle expressed the importance of our projects and how we do our due diligence at the time we do the reports. Maria expressed her support.
2. Hearing Officer System Forum on 3/28/24 at 5:30 pm. How did it go? Maria provided an overview and asked people to share their thoughts on this forum.
3. John expressed his thoughts regarding Legislative week and feedback from the Legislators he met with. He explained the importance of follow-up and what we might do.
4. Meeting with NYS Assembly Member Carrie Woerner and Legislative Director Nicole Clarke – Feedback on the meeting from earlier today? Maria and Annmarie provided an overview, including our legislative agenda and a bill on public comment that never made it out of draft form.
 - Annmarie said Darlene was well prepared and did very well in answering Nicole's questions.
 - Michelle provided detailed information on all the bills we are supporting and all the Legislative members that we have gained as sponsors do to our efforts.
 - Maria provided some insight into those members who contributed.
5. Status of upcoming City FOIL Project and Volunteers – Annmarie provided an overview of this project. We still need two more volunteers and expect to begin in April. Michelle and Annmarie informed on the time commitment needed and how we can contact you during the project.
6. New Business – John informed of the Legislative calendar (short window) and its importance with our plan on the Bills. Darlene expressed when we might do another meeting in Albany. Michelle informed that a mid-trip has interest of 3 to 5 people, there is also a large outside group, possibly end of May or June. John will send the details to Paul.
7. Feedback – Maria addressed how we can provide positive feedback.

The next meeting is April 25, 2024 at 6:30 pm via Zoom.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 7:23 pm was made by Pat and Seconded by Sue. All were in favor, none opposed, **Motion carried.**

Minutes prepared by Annmarie Reeb

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