

## **Minutes for New York Coalition for Open Government January 14, 2021**

Meeting held via Zoom called to order at 6:35 p.m. Present: Paul Wolf, Janet Vito, Larry Vito, Maria Tisby, Ed Mckee, Steven Lyle, Suzanne Kelly, Michael Higgins, Dawn Jordan.

**Meeting Minutes:** The meeting minutes from December 10, 2020, were unanimously approved on a motion made by Janet and seconded by Maria.

**Treasurer's Report:** Janet Vito provided a written report showing our account balance as of December 31, 2020 being \$1,357.92. We currently have twenty-one paid members. Janet also provided information regarding our revenue and expenditures for all of 2020. Larry made a motion to accept the report which was seconded by Maria and unanimously approved.

**Board Elections:** A motion was made by Maria to nominate Steven Lyle, Suzanne Kelly and Alberta Roman for a two year term on our Board of Directors. The motion was seconded by Janet and unanimously approved.

**Board Officers:** A motion was made by Steve to nominate Paul Wolf for President, Ed McKee for Vice President, Joe Kissel for Secretary and Janet Vito for Treasurer, each for a two year term. The motion was seconded by Maria and unanimously approved.

**Niagara County Lawsuit:** Mike Higgins provided an update regarding our lawsuit against Niagara County. The Order signed by the Judge gave Niagara County until December 22, 2020 to provide the disclosure forms we requested. Now that the deadline has passed Mike has filed a Contempt motion seeking to punish Niagara County for their failure to comply with the Order. Niagara County responded to the motion stating they have been busy with other work and that they need to consult with each legislator to determine if they want to redact certain information from the forms before they are released. Mike has also submitted an application seeking \$18,000 in attorney fees for his work.

**FOIL Training Event:** On January 8<sup>th</sup> we held an event featuring Kristin O'Neil from the New York State Committee on Open Government and reporter Steven Brown via Zoom. Fifty-five people participated and a lot of positive feedback was received afterwards. Joe Kissel has posted the video from the event on our Youtube page.

**2021 Project Calendar:** Attached to the agenda is a calendar outlining our proposed goals and activities for the year.

- Increase attendance at our meetings from outside of Erie/Niagara
- Increase number of Facebook followers
- Zoning/Planning Boards – posting of meeting documents
- Villages – posting of meeting minutes
- Counties – live streaming of meetings
- School Districts – executive sessions
- FOIL – City Council Financial Disclosure Forms
- Sunshine Week – need to amend NY Open Meetings Law

- September Speaker event

**School Board Executive Sessions Project:** Paul is working on putting together the work everyone has submitted into a report. The plan is to hold a press conference the last week of January to release the report.

**Sunshine Week March 15-21:** Every March across the country the news media celebrates the importance of open government. For an event during that week, Paul has reached out to legislator Amy Paulin. At our request Paulin has introduced several bills. Paulin is open to the idea of doing a press conference with us during Sunshine Week to draw attention to the bills she has introduced.

**New Business:** Paul spoke about a joint letter he has been discussing with several other good government groups across NY State regarding the New York State Committee on Open Government. The ideas being discussed are to call for a process whereby applicants are sought for Committee board seats, with an open interview process. Another idea is to expand appointments to the Committee from other statewide elected officials such as the State Comptroller and Attorney General. The current Committee formation is almost completely controlled by the Governor, which should not be the case.

**Adjourn:** Ed made a motion to adjourn seconded by Steve, meeting adjourned at 7:27 pm. Next meeting will be February 11<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm, via Zoom.