

New York Coalition for Open Government Meeting Minutes June 10, 2021

Meeting held via Zoom called to order at 6:42 p.m. Present: Paul Wolf, Maria Tisby, Alberta Roman, Sonia Dusza, Joseph Kissell, Susan Kelly, Stephen Lyle, Patricia Irving, Casey Jones, Jim Meaney and Caitlin Curtin.

Before opening the meeting Casey Jones from Allegany County, Patricia Irving from Suffolk County and Caitlin Curtin from Columbia county introduced themselves and spoke about their interest in open government issues.

Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes from May 13, 2021, were approved on a motion made by Sonia Dusza and seconded by Joe Kissel.

Treasurer's Report: Janet Vito was not able to attend the meeting but provided a written report showing our account balance as of May 31 2021 being \$2,188.12. We now have 39 paid members. Paul pointed out that we now have paid members from 17 counties. Maria Tisby made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report seconded by Sue Kelly, motion approved.

Assemblymember Paulin Bills

A1108/S04704 – requires posting meeting minutes/transcripts, within two weeks of a meeting

A.1228/S04704 - requires meeting documents to be posted online at least 24 hours prior to the public body meeting.

Both bills passed the Assembly on May 4th and on June 8/9, both bills passed the Senate. Paul Wolf explained how A1108 has been amended to state that meeting minutes do not have to be kept if not ordinarily done and that in lieu of posting minutes a recording of a meeting can be posted.

A discussion occurred as to whether we should send a letter to the Governor opposing A1108/S04704 or in support. While the legislation is not exactly what we wanted it is a step forward as it does mandate the posting of written minutes or a video within two weeks of a meeting. Most local governments will probably find it easier to post written minutes.

A1228/S04704, made two of the three changes we were seeking. The law currently states:

- 1) That meeting documents should be posted online prior to a meeting to the extent practicable
- 2) As determined by the agency or department

The legislation that has been passed deletes the as determined by the agency/dept but still continues the to the extent practicable language. The current law does not specify a time period for posting documents. The 24 hour language is a good addition.

We can seek to make additional changes in the future and build momentum from getting two bills passed. The last time the Open Meetings Law was amended was ten years ago. It is a great accomplishment for our organization to have two bills passed with the assistance of Assembly Member Paulin and Senator Kaplan. Hopefully we can build upon the partnership with Paulin and Kaplan.

Planning Board Report: Our Planning Board report released in may received media coverage in Buffalo, Binghamton, Dunkirk, Hudson Valley, Water Town, Schenectady and Long Island.

Next Report on Counties: Our next report is to review counties across NY State. Paul suggested that we may want to focus on Board of Elections, which each county has. Paul has been remiss in getting this report going but will send an email out soon.

Philmont, NY: The village Board in Philmont by a vote of 3-2 eliminated the live streaming of meetings and posting video recordings online. We sent a letter to the Village Board objecting to their action, which was done without notifying the public or giving the public an opportunity to be heard. Our letter received media coverage in a local newspaper and will hopefully bring some pressure for change.

Filling Vice President Position: Vice President Ed McKee submitted his resignation from the Board as he is moving to Florida. Maria Tisby made a motion to nominate Joe Kissel for Vice President, Alberta Roman seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved. Joe will fill the balance of Ed's term, which expires in January 2023. We now have a vacant Secretary position to fill and a vacant Board seat to fill for the next meeting.

Foundation Grant Request for New Website: Paul submitted a grant request to the Knight Foundation for \$2,700 for purposes of creating a new website. A response regarding our request has not been received yet. Paul mentioned that we received a \$500 donation from a local attorney.

Guest Speaker Jim Meaney: The Founder and editor of Geneva Believer, an independent citizen watchdog news outlet in Geneva, NY spoke. Mr. Meaney spoke about he has used FOIL requests to bring to light information the public was not aware of. Jim discussed how he stayed on top of his FOIL requests by following up after the five day deadline and following up again if the request is acknowledged without setting an expected date when the information will be provided. Jim always requests to receive documentation electronically and requests that all communication be by email so that there is a written record of everything stated. The template Jim uses for his FOIL requests he obtained from the New York State Committee on Open Government website.

New Business: No new business was brought up.

Adjourn: Next meeting will be July 8th at 6:30 pm, via Zoom. Motion to adjourn by Sonia Dusza, seconded by Sue Kelly. Meeting adjourned at 7:54 pm.