

## **Minutes for Buffalo Niagara Coalition for Open Government June 6, 2019**

Meeting called to order at 6:38 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present: Paul Wolf, Mike Kless, Janet Vito, Larry Vito, Sonia Dusza, Thomas Frank, Stephen Lyle, Joe Kissel.

**Meeting Minutes:** The meeting minutes from April 4, 2019, were approved on a motion made by Mike Kless, seconded by Sonia Dusza. The meeting minutes from May 2, 2019, were approved on a motion made by Larry Vito, seconded by Mike Kless.

**Treasurer's Report:** Janet Vito reported our account balance as \$1274.17. Nineteen paid memberships have been received as of 5/31/19. Mike Kless made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report which was seconded by Sonia Dusza. Motion was unanimously approved.

**Ethics Board Report:** June 12, 11:00 was set as the date to hold 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.

**Niagara County Financial Disclosure Forms:** Paul Wolf spoke at a public hearing that was held on May 7<sup>th</sup>, which several of our members attended. Paul addressed the fact that while disclosure forms filed in 2019 will be released to the public through a FOIL request, the previous forms still on file with the Niagara County Board of Ethics will not be subject to FOIL. Paul encouraged the legislature to make on disclosure forms on file subject to FOIL and to go beyond that by posting the disclosure forms of elected officials online for the public to see. Other elected officials including members of the Niagara Falls City Council have posted their disclosure forms online. While making the 2019 forms available to the public is a big victory for the Coalition, the legislature in the end did not make all disclosure forms on file available to the public. Our next step may be to file a lawsuit over this issue.

**Orchard Park Confidential Agreement:** As discussed at our May meeting a letter was sent to the Orchard Park Town Board expressing concern that the Board tried to keep an agreement entered into with their Police Chief confidential from the public.

**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 by Mike Kless that we should send a letter expressing our concern as to how Lockport Housing Authority meeting agendas are being handled. The motion was seconded by Joe Kissel 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:** Paul Wolf has contacted several local media members about participating in a forum on September 25<sup>th</sup>, titled “Your Right to Know: The News Media and the Freedom of Information Law.

**New Business:** No new business was discussed.

**Adjourn:** Meeting was adjourned at 7:23 pm. Next meeting will be July 11, 2019, 6:30 pm at the Williamsville Library.