

Minutes for Buffalo Niagara Coalition for Open Government July 19, 2018 meeting

Meeting called to order at 5:35 p.m. by Paul Wolf. Present: Janet Vito, Lawrence Vito, Richard Bertrand, Ed McKee, Sonia Dusza, Jonathan Manes, Michael Kless, Jim Tricoli, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, Richard Taczkowski, Nancy Correa, Karen Lyle, Steve Lyle, Jim Lawson.

Meeting Minutes: Mike Kless made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 7, 2018 meeting, seconded by Larry Vito. Minutes unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: Ed McKee reported our account balance as \$1,079.57. Jim Tricoli made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report seconded by Jonathan Manes. Treasurer's Report unanimously approved.

Partnering with the Partnership for Public Good (PPG)

Andrea Ó Súilleabháin from PPG spoke about the organization's work and the benefits of partnering with them. Several hundred organizations have partnered with PPG. Being a PPG partner gives access to their email distribution for events, access to their research library, access to researchers and interns, use of their downtown Buffalo meeting space.

After a lot of questions and discussion, Jonathan Manes made a motion for our organization to become a PPG partner, seconded by Mike Kless. The motion was passed with Jim Tricoli voting No.

Website/Logo: Paul handed out some sample logos that he created on a website for feedback. Thanks to the efforts of Tom Fish we have a totally new website online.

Becoming a 501(c)(3) Organization

Paul Wolf discussed the benefits of being a 501(c)(3), tax exempt organization. It was agreed that we should take the steps necessary to do this.

Niagara County Legislature Financial Disclosure

Paul Wolf discussed our continuing effort to have the Niagara County Legislature amend their local law which makes their financial disclosure forms confidential and secret from the public.

Clarence Town Board & Senior Center / West Seneca Town Board Meetings

As discussed at our June 7th meeting, on June 8th, Paul Wolf sent an email to the Clarence Town Board asking them to put back on their meeting agenda a time for citizens to speak. A few months ago this item was removed from the meeting agenda.

An email was also sent to the Clarence Senior Citizen Center objecting to their elimination of citizens being allowed to speak at their Board meetings. The Senior Center now only allows for written comments from the public.

Gary Dickson in West Seneca has led the charge to change how West Seneca conducts their Town Board meetings. West Seneca unlike most Towns only allows citizens to speak at the end of their meeting after Town Board votes have occurred. Gary started a discussion on Facebook about this issue, which we addressed in our review of Town websites. It appears that Gary's efforts have resulted in West Seneca Town Board member Gene Hart seeking to change the meeting agenda.

Sweet Home School District FOIL

On July 16th, Paul Wolf forwarded a FOIL request to the Sweet Home School District seeking to obtain a copy of a teacher resignation that was approved by the Board. The resignation generated media coverage due to parents being upset and wanting to find out what happened. Many governmental bodies assume that resignations must be kept confidential which is not true.

Paul will provide an update at our next meeting regarding the response to our FOIL.

Executive Sessions Report/FOIL Log Report

The next reports according to our established schedule are an update to the executive sessions report we did last year. After this meeting, Paul will forward rating sheets and assignments for local governments to review.

Paul will also send out requests for FOIL logs to start that project.

September Speaker Event

The event will be held Wednesday September 26th, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm at the Theodore Roosevelt Museum, 641 Delaware Ave. in Buffalo. Susan Lerner from Common Cause and John Kaheny from Reinvent Albany have agreed to speak about open government issues at the state level. A meeting agenda for the event was reviewed and discussed.

BMHA Letter Regarding Disclosure

In response to a recent Buffalo News article that revealed \$400,000 in BMHA contracts went to a relative of a BMHA employee, Paul proposed that we send a letter to the BMHA with a copy of our recent financial disclosure report and suggestions for improvement at the BMHA. It was agreed to send such a letter.

New Business:

It was suggested that perhaps we could work on a best practices document to assist local governments and citizens with understanding FOIL and the Open Meetings Law.

Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at 6:30 pm. Next meeting will be September 20th, 2018, 5:30 pm at the Williamsville Library.