

ERIE COUNTY DIVERSE ERIE COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, July 20, 2023

Diverse Erie Headquarters

1128 State Street, Suite 300, Erie, PA 16501 at 6:00 P.M.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85845458689?pwd=akZrMHE4QVpiWGh4QWx3MXJnVEtBUT09>

Meeting ID: 858 4545 8689

Passcode: 819381

Invitees: Tiffany LaVette; Dr. Sarah Carter; Gwendolyn White; Brandy Cortes; Jonathan Atkinson; Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo; Marie "Mia" Wells; Saeedullah Taraky; Paul Kokhanevich; Timothy Wachter; Gary N. Lee

1. **Call to Order/Roll Call** 6:01PM
(a) Paul Kokhanevich-Not Present

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

A Motion was made by Jonathan Atkinson, and seconded by Marie "Mia" Wells, to approve the May 18, 2023, agenda as presented. All commissioners present voted in favor.

3. **Hearing of the Public**

- (a) None

4. **Approval of the May 18, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Motion to approve May 18, 2023, meeting minutes, was made by Brandy Cortes and seconded by Mia Wells. Commissioner Gwendolyn White abstained from voting to approve the minutes because she was not present at the last meeting. All other commissioners present voted in favor.

5. **Presentations:** Parker Philips (see attachment)

6. **Report on Chief Administrative Officer:**

Operational Matters:

Personnel:

- (a) No issue for discussion

Budget:

- (a) The Finance Committee has received the June 2023 Financial reports, which include the budget versus actual updated budget overview, banking statement, expense file, and supporting documents. As per the review, our expenses are within the appropriate budget for this year. However, the only area of concern raised previously to the Commission is the legal services budget, which currently stands at \$56,700, exceeding the allocated budget of \$40,000 by nearly \$17,000. Mr. Lee said that the Finance Committee is well aware of this issue and will closely monitor it.
- (b) Mr. Lee informed the commission board members that all necessary financial documentation has been submitted to the commission's accountants, Buseck, Barger, Bleil & Co., Inc, to prepare the second-quarter financial report. The quarterly report has also been submitted to the Erie County Planning Department, Community

Development Department, and County Council. These reports are crucial in ensuring everyone is informed about the Commission's financial status.

- (c) Looking ahead, Mr. Lee said that the Finance committee will be working on the 2024 financial budget report, and the County Council will continue to scrutinize the budget to ensure operations remain within the specified parameters.

Media and Presentations:

- (a) Mr. Lee said that tomorrow, July 21st, there will be a Small Business Mini Grant event, He kindly requested all commissioners to be present if available. Mr. Lee said that additionally, some local politicians will be attending.
- (b) Mr. Lee mentioned collaborating with Kate Phillips and her team on an Op-Ed that focuses on the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs. He has shared his feedback with them, and they are currently working on finalizing the piece. He said that he believes it is crucial for him to have a voice on this matter, especially considering the challenging times we are facing. Mr. Lee spoke in line with President Obama's sentiment, we must take responsibility for the change we seek. Mr. Lee asked the commissioners to stay tuned for the upcoming Op-Ed, as he is eager to share it with the people of Erie County.

Grants Development:

- (a) Mr. Lee gave an update on the Generational Impact Grants Round 1: The organizations, Mercy Center for Women (MCW), Eastside Renaissance (ESR), and Minority Community Investment Coalition (MCIC) have received their full investment funds totaling \$600,000 from the Commission. They are highly satisfied with the reimbursement process. Initially, there were concerns about the time it would take, but after effective communication and providing the necessary documentation required by the County and the US Department of Treasury, everything went smoothly.
- (a) Greater Area Economic Development Corporation (GEEDC), there are still pending legal issues related to their reimbursement funds, and the Commission's attorney from Quinn Law firm is overseeing this matter. The Executive Committee is being consistently updated on the progress.
- (b) Mr. Lee stated that the recipients for the Generational Impact Grants Round 2 are, Erie's Black Wall Street (EBWS), Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT), and Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) of Erie have received the contract agreement and will have a meeting scheduled on July 27th with Attorney Wachter and Mr. Lee for review and signing.
- (c) The Small Business Mini-Grant Initiatives have been progressing well. The Commission received forty-three applications, totaling \$951,200 for consideration. The grant review committee has recommended twenty-nine small businesses for funding, totaling approximately \$300,800. The Grants Review Committee has done an excellent job, and we appreciate their efforts.

- (d) Mr. Lee expressed his gratitude to the team for investing a lot of time and effort into this process, ensuring its proper execution. He said that their support and assistance in the application process were invaluable.

Website Development and Branding:

- (a) Mr. Lee said that during her presentation, Kate Philips did an excellent job covering website development. As always, Mr. Lee encouraged the commission board to invite family members, business associates, and County Council members to actively engage in the process. He added that it is crucial that the group share this information with their constituencies as well.

- (b) Mr. Lee discussed the key items reviewed for the 2023 goals during the first period. The goals for this year were and still are:

Conducted a board training retreat for commissioners to focus on governance roles and responsibilities.

1. Developed and implemented the Mini Grant Initiative to support BIPOC businesses in Erie County.
2. Conducted research, identified, and applied for grant opportunities using the \$3.5 million seed investment from the County of Erie.
3. Provided key financial reporting documents and quarterly reports to AARP.
4. Identified and fostered collaborations and partnerships in areas like home ownership, education, training, and opportunities in the BIPOC community, working with public and private stakeholders.

Mr. Lee said that the commission is making efforts to change the narrative regarding the region's image. Feedback from the community, including feedback from the commissioners, indicates that the organization is heading in the right direction. Despite being relatively young (existing for only a year and a half), the progress is commendable.

- (c) Mr. Lee announced that on September 12th through 16th, he will attend the National Black MBA Association's 45th Annual Conference & Exposition, hosted in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He expressed his excitement about having the opportunity to meet leaders from across the country and learn about their actions and initiatives, especially from the private sector, which Mr. Lee said that he believes significantly influences current developments in various areas, including affirmative action and higher education.

A Motion to approve the report of the Chief Administrative Officer was made by Brandy Cortes and seconded by Marie "Mia" Wells. All commissioners present voted in favor.

7. Reports of Commission Officers

- (a) Chairperson-Deferred to Executive Committee portion of the meeting.

- (b) Vice-Chairperson-Deferred to the Grants Review Committee Portion of the meeting.
- (c) Secretary-Nothing to Report
- (d) Treasurer-Nothing to Report

8. Reports of Committee Chairpersons

- (a) Finance Committee-No report currently.
- (b) Executive Committee-
 - i Dr. Escajadillo discussed key points from the last executive committee meeting, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the board's code of conduct policy and training. He commended the Commission staff and Grants Review Committee for their excellent work on Small Business Grant Reviews. Dr. Escajadillo encouraged regular updates between commissioners and County Council members, promoting community engagement in Erie County. Dr. Escajadillo invited everyone to a special press conference and award ceremony at ECAT 650 E Ave at 10:00AM and mentioned a summer break in August, with board meetings resuming in September.
- (c) Grants Review Committee-
 - i Vice-president Atkinson said that The Chair and Committee met with 3i Networking to assess candidates for Small Business Committee Grants. The team carefully reviewed all recommendations based on specific criteria and have prepared to recommend 29 grants totaling \$300,800. The Commission has been provided access to the list of proposed awardees for review.

9. Unfinished Business-No Unfinished Business

10. New Business

A motion was made by Brandy Cortes and seconded by Saeedullah Taraky to approve the Diverse Erie (DEI) Code of Conduct. All commissioners present voted in favor.

A Motion was made by Tiffany L. LaVette and seconded by Jonathan Atkinson, to approve the award of Small Business Mini Grants, as recommended by the Grants Review Committee and as presented to the Commission. All commissioners present voted in favor.

11. Adjournment

A motion was made by Tiffany L. LaVette and seconded by Brandy Cortes to adjourn the meeting at 6:45PM. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Attendees: Marissa Thomas & Tyrone Clark (3i Networking), Curtis Lofton, Curtis Jones, Sr., Mary Euell, Shekira Curry, Shawn ?; and AJ Rao