

ERIE COUNTY DIVERSE ERIE COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 21, 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/82534505816?pwd=bWMzSDV2eIMzVHpSMkVxYWQ5Z1VrQT09>

Meeting ID: 825 3450 5816

Passcode: 809261

Attendees: Tiffany LaVette; Gwendolyn White; Brandy Cortes; Marie "Mia" Wells; Saeedullah Taraky; Timothy Wachter; Gary N. Lee

1. Call to Order/Roll Call 6:01PM

- (a) Dr. Sarah E. Carter-Not Present
- (b) Jonathan Atkinson-Not Present
- (c) Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo-Joined by Phone
- (d) Paul Kokhanevich-Not Present

2. Approval of the Agenda

A Motion was made by Marie "Mia" Wells, and seconded by Saeedullah Taraky, to approve the September 21, 2023, agenda as presented. All commissioners present voted in favor, none opposed.

3. Hearing of the Public

- (a) None

4. Approval of the June 15, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve July 20, 2023, meeting minutes with corrections, was made by Marie Wells and seconded by Saeedullah Taraky. All other commissioners present voted in favor, none opposed.

5. Presentations: None

6. Report on Chief Administrative Officer:

Operational Matters:

Personnel:

- a) No issue for discussion

Budget:

- a) Mr. Lee extended his greetings to the assembled commissioners and informed them that the Finance Committee has received and assessed financial reports for July and August 2023. These reports encompass a comparison between the budget and actual expenditures, a summary of Diverse Erie's banking transactions, an expense breakdown, and supporting documentation.
- b) Furthermore, the Finance Committee has given its endorsement to the projected budget overview spanning from July 1st, 2024, to December 31st, 2026. This comprehensive budget document is slated for submission to the County Council for their deliberation. Mr. Lee mentioned that he and Chairman Ricardo Escajadillo

intend to engage in an in-depth discussion with the county council leadership on this matter.

- c) Additionally, Mr. Lee noted that the Finance Committee has granted approval to the 2024 operating budget, with the most noteworthy increase allocated to legal service fees. This adjustment takes into account potential legal obligations that may arise, although it is hoped that such expenses will not be encountered in the coming year. The minimum municipal obligation worksheet, which outlines the projected contributions to the pension plan (currently set at 5% of salaries) and is subject to review and approval by the Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement System, will be submitted. Copies of these three documents, should have been distributed to commissioners.

Media and Presentations:

- a) Mr. Lee addressed the members of the commissioner board and mentioned that some of them might have come across an article authored by him in the Erie Times regarding affirmative action. The article's title underwent several changes, with the most recent being when Erie Times News published it. Despite the evolution of affirmative action, the imperative to level the playing field persists. He went on to express that he had received positive feedback on the article, highlighting one of his favorite quotes: "When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we need to shift our mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance." Mr. Lee emphasized that there is ample opportunity for everyone, and a more diverse and inclusive society benefits all Americans. He reiterated his belief in this perspective saying things have indeed evolved. The Supreme Court has issued significant rulings, particularly in the realm of education. This transformation is underway as we speak, and it's already making its mark. We've observed these changes manifesting in the private sector, nonprofits, and even within the government sector. From my perspective, it's only a matter of time before we must address these changes on a global scale.
- b) Mr. Lee said that he is also looking forward to appearing on "The Insider Show" with Miss Lisa Adams, where I'll be joined by Vice Chair Jonathan Atkinson. They are currently coordinating a suitable date for this.
- c) Mr. Lee highlighted the important sponsorships we've continued to support in the community:
 - a. The Daughters of Destiny, Inc. 2nd Annual Young Women's Empowerment Conference was a fantastic event that Commissioner LaVette and Mr. Lee attended. Their presence underscored Diverse Erie's commitment to our youth, and the organization's work is truly commendable.
 - b. Diverse Erie also contributed to the American 250 event hosted by Attorney Tim Wachter. Although Mr. Lee couldn't attend personally due to his obligations in Philadelphia, the commission sponsored young professionals to participate, and the feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive. This initiative aims to connect the BIPOC community with other professionals in new and important ways.
 - c. Additionally, Diverse Erie is sponsoring tickets for the Erie Regional Chamber Homecoming event, ensuring that the BIPOC community has access.
 - d. Finally, we take pride in being sponsors of the forthcoming Hispanic Heritage Festival scheduled for September 30th, and Commissioner Cortes will furnish additional information regarding this event later during the meeting.

Grants Development:

- a) Regarding the reimbursement process at the Greater Erie Economic Development Corporation (GEEDC), there are still unresolved legal matters concerning the funds reimbursement request. Our Commission's attorney, Andy Schmidt from Quinn Law firm, will be overseeing this issue. Furthermore, he will attend the next Executive Committee meeting in October to provide a comprehensive update on the situation.
- b) As for the Generational Impact Grant round two awardees, including Erie Black Wall Street (EBWS), Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT), and Youth Leadership Institute of Erie (YLI), Mr. Lee said that, both the Grants Review Committee and 3i Networking have been actively collaborating with them on the reimbursement process. We have already held meetings with them to clarify our expectations. Now, we are waiting for them to gather the necessary paperwork and invoices for submission. We have been proactive in assisting them, and the responsibility currently lies with them.
- c) The Small Business Mini Grant initiative, which awarded 29 contracts totaling over \$300,000, has been successful. Mr. Lee expressed his commendation for the awardees as they diligently followed our guidelines, promptly submitted their agreements, and received their payments within the promised timeframe of 10 business days. The recipients, ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000, expressed their satisfaction with this investment, and Diverse Erie was able to positively impact 29 businesses. This success has reinforced the importance of allocating \$900,000 for this initiative when we are awarded the additional \$3.5 million, as it allows us to achieve more in the community.
- d) At present, there are no concrete grant opportunities identified for leveraging the funds for the commission. However, 3i Networking continues its efforts to identify potential grant opportunities for future partnerships and collaborations, an ongoing process.

Website Development and Branding:

- a) Mr. Lee mentioned his ongoing meetings with Philip Parkers regarding the strategic plan and branding, which encompasses our website and social media outreach efforts. As he always emphasizes, he encouraged board members to invite their business associates, family, and friends to visit our website and engage with our social media platforms to access current information.
- b) Tomorrow, September 22, 2023, the commissioners will receive updated talking points from Mr. Lee, which he considers highly significant. He said that he plans to distribute these updated talking points to ensure that all commissioners have the opportunity to share this information, not only within their sphere of influence but, more importantly, with their respective county council representatives. Mr. Lee stressed the importance of Diverse Erie commissioners meeting with these representatives within the next month, as the county budget discussions are approaching in October. These talking points will contain information about our activities and future plans.
- c) Mr. Lee also shared his recent attendance at the 45th National Black MBA Association Executive Leadership Conference event in Philadelphia, PA. He described it as a fantastic experience, noting that he has intermittently attended this conference for the past 25 years, always returning with new insights to contribute to Erie. Some key takeaways and principles emphasized at the conference include the importance of self-care in physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Leaders

emphasized the need to take care of oneself repeatedly. Mr. Lee mentioned the passing of Dr. Joanne Epps, the acting president of Temple University, as a stark reminder of the significance of self-care. Dr. Epps had dedicated 40 years to Temple and unexpectedly passed away while attending a memorial service for someone else. Her sudden loss served as a poignant reminder of the need for self-care.

- d) The conference also highlighted the value of relationships, coaching, mentoring, and sponsorship, emphasizing the development of a support network. Mr. Lee pointed out that while you may coach, mentor, or sponsor others, it's essential to have your own support team, someone you can confide in and collaborate with to navigate various challenges. These aspects of self-care and support are crucial in the journey of leadership.
 - a. Mr. Lee continued by adding that, one of the crucial aspects that stood out during the numerous seminars he attended was the idea of wearing blinders in life. This means being excessively focused on our tasks and not taking time to live in the present moment. One seminar that particularly caught his attention was the discussion about corporate board appointments and their significant influence on businesses. These corporate boards play a pivotal role in providing guidance and leadership to CEOs and their teams. Another intriguing seminar focused on the importance of self-care, particularly in the context of mental health. In today's world, with the challenges posed by the pandemic, we are witnessing a surge in mental health issues, both in personal and professional life.
 - b. One speaker shared their experience with therapy and encouraged others not to stigmatize seeking professional help. The concept of servant leadership was also discussed extensively. Instead of being solely focused on personal success, the idea is to give back through time, energy, money, and resources. Mr. Lee had the privilege of hearing Thasunda Brown Duckett, only the second Black female CEO currently in the Fortune 500, who delivered a fantastic speech. She highlighted the significance of character over job titles, stating, "I rent my title, but I own my character."
 - c. Lastly, Mr. Lee mentioned a remarkable book titled "Data-driven DEI" by Dr. Randall Pickett, a multi-degreed African American author and thought leader. This book underscores that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is not a destination but a continuous journey. Dr. Pickett emphasizes the need to measure and manage DEI, presenting it as both an organizational and personal responsibility. His insights on continuous improvement and the necessity of measuring progress resonated with Mr. Lee, given his background in change management. Mr. Lee expressed his gratitude to the commission for enabling his participation in this conference, as continuous learning is essential for leadership.
- e) Mr. Lee had the opportunity to connect with influential community leaders like the Mayor, the CEO of Erie Insurance, the CEO of Saint Vincent Hospital, and a former Provost of Penn University. They all appreciated the positive direction the commission is heading and commended our commitment to excellence.
- f) Additionally, Mr. Lee said that he attended a DEI training for CEOs hosted by the Erie Regional Chamber Growth Partnership. He said that although he did applaud the participation of CEOs like Tim Necastro, President & CEO at Erie Insurance Group, it's vital for more top leaders to engage actively in DEI initiatives. He reiterated that real change starts at the top, and their commitment is crucial. Infinite Erie remains dedicated to spreading awareness and working diligently towards its goals. Building strong relationships with community leaders is a priority, regardless of immediate

funding opportunities. Trust and relationships are invaluable, and Mr. Lee said he looks forward to passing the baton to future leaders as we continue to make history. Our momentum is strong, and we're excited about the journey ahead.

A Motion to approve the report of the Chief Administrative Officer was made by Tiffany L. LaVette and seconded by Saeedullah Taraky. All commissioners present voted in favor.

8. Reports of Committee Chairpersons

a. Finance Committee- Updates provided by Chief Administrative Officer

b. Executive Committee- Updates provided by Chief Administrative Officer

c. Grants Review Committee- Updates provided by Chief Administrative Officer

9. Unfinished Business- No unfinished business

10. New Business

A Motion to Approve Projected 2024 Operating Budget, Motion to Approve the Projected Budget for July 1, 2024-December 31, 2026, and Motion to Approve the 2024 Minimum Municipal Obligation (MMO) Worksheet, was made by Marie "Mia" Wells and seconded by Saeedullah Taraky. All commissioners present voted in favor.

11. Adjournment

A motion was made by Dr. Ricardo "Rocky" Escajadillo and seconded by Tiffany L. LaVette to adjourn the meeting at 6:52PM. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Invitees: Philip Thomas (3i Networking), Anna Schmitt (Educational Representative-Erie County Northern Pennsylvania Regional College) and AJ Rao (Erie Times News-GoErie.com)