

ERIE COUNTY DIVERSE ERIE COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Diverse Erie Headquarters

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

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85319488506?pwd=MlFEZ3lraU5jQ05BbjYyM3VzbiVWZz09>

Meeting ID: 853 1948 8506

Passcode: 847117

Attendees: Tiffany L. LaVette; Dr. Sarah E. Carter; Brandy Cortes; Jonathan Atkinson; Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo; Marie “Mia” Wells; Saeedullah Taraky; Paul Kokhanovich; Gary N. Lee; Attorney Tim Wachter

1. Call to Order/Roll Call 6:14PM-Gwendolyn White-Not Present

2. Approval of the December 21, 2023, Agenda

A Motion was made by Marie “Mia” Wells and seconded by Tiffany L. LaVette to approve the January 18, 2024; meeting agenda as presented. All commissioners present voted in favor. None were opposed.

3. Hearing of the Public: None

4. Approval of the December 21, 2023, Meeting Minutes

A Motion was made by Marie “Mia” Wells and seconded by Brandy Cortes to approve the December 21, 2023; meeting minutes as presented.

5. Presentations: None

6. Report on Chief Administrative Officer:

Mr. Lee provided an update on various key points and initiatives during the meeting:

Personnel:

- a. No changes reported at this time.

Budget:

- a. The Finance Committee thoroughly reviewed the December 2023 financial report, which included a budget versus actual, updated overview, banking statement, and expense file. The 2023 operating budget performed exceptionally well, coming in \$11,000 under the budgeted amount of \$462,000. This positive outcome reflects the Commission's strong financial standing. Additionally, discussions are underway with County Council regarding a potential \$1.5 million investment for 2024, marking a positive step forward. Collaboration

with Mr. Rick Clayton, the CPA, is set to commence this month in preparation for the upcoming audit by Maloney, Reed, and Scarpetti and Company.

Media and Presentations:

- a. No updates were provided in this category.

Grants Development:

- a. The Grant Review Committee and executive committees will collaborate on the next round of grant initiatives. Further discussions on grant impact, generational impact grants, grant reimbursement processes, and engagement with GMA Development Group are scheduled for later in the meeting.

Website Development and Branding:

- a. Ongoing meetings with Parker Phillips regarding the strategic plan and branding process, including website and social media outreach, continue. Chairman Escajadillo and Commissioner Taraky will meet with Parker Phillips' team to discuss upcoming features and improvements to social media platforms.

Other Noteworthy Updates include:

- a. Policies and Procedures:
 - i. Mr. Lee addressed the procedures for providing Commissioners' contact information. Commissioners will be contacted by Devan to determine their preferences for sharing contact information with the public.
- b. DEI Challenges:
 - i. Mr. Lee highlighted the current backlash against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives nationally. He emphasized the importance of perseverance in the ongoing DEI journey, acknowledging challenges faced by DEI initiatives in various states. He urged the need for strategic alliances, particularly with the support of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including Caucasian colleagues.
- c. Mental Health Awareness:
 - i. Mr. Lee shared news of a tragic incident involving Dr. Antoinette Bonnie Candia-Bailey, the vice president for student affairs at Lincoln University, who faced challenges leading to her unfortunate death by suicide. This incident underscored the importance of mental health awareness and self-care. Mr. Lee encouraged the Commission to take these matters seriously and concluded by expressing gratitude for everyone's efforts.

In conclusion, Mr. Lee reiterated the Commission's commitment to making adjustments rather than excuses and thanked all members for their contributions.

Commissioner Brandy Cortes expressed gratitude for Mr. Gary Lee's update and conveyed her condolences for the loss experienced by Dr. Bailey's family. She acknowledged and appreciated Mr. Lee for bringing attention to the broader challenges associated with funding. Commissioner Cortes clarified that she was not singling out any local universities but noted the widespread concern across the United States, particularly affecting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in colleges.

Highlighting the potential cascading effect mental health issues have on individuals, she emphasized that many present had benefitted from opportunities provided by educational institutions. Commissioner Cortes stressed the importance of revisiting this issue in the future, with a focus on supporting local colleges and universities. Recognizing their pivotal role in shaping future generations, she underscored the necessity of providing them with the information and support needed to emphasize the significance of DEI components throughout all educational systems.

A Motion was made by Tiffany L. LaVette and seconded by Marie "Mia" Wells and Paul Kokhanevich to approve the report of the Chief Administrative Officer. All commissioners present voted in favor.

7. Reports of Committee Chairpersons

Executive Committee-

- i. Chairman Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo expressed gratitude to the Finance Committee and staff for effective budget oversight, celebrating the achievement of being under budget in 2023. He congratulated Commissioner Mia Wells on her reappointment and announced a meeting with Chairman Scutella to discuss the Commission's importance. An invitation to Vice Chair Atkinson for an upcoming meeting was extended. Dr. Escajadillo urged members to engage with Council representatives professionally, emphasizing respect and maintaining boundaries. Looking ahead, he highlighted February's significance as Black History Month and American Heart Month, advocating for educational initiatives, particularly focusing on heart health and challenging dietary norms based on recent research. Addressing health concerns, he expressed optimism for positive lifestyle changes in the upcoming year. Dr. Escajadillo addressed the alarming rates of diabetes and obesity, pointing out the potential for lifestyle and behavioral changes to mitigate these issues. Expressing optimism for the year ahead.

Finance Committee-

- i. Marie "Mia" Wells reported that the finances for Diverse Erie are progressing smoothly, as anticipated. She wanted to express her appreciation to Saeedullah Taraky, Dr. Sarah Carter and Mr. Gary Lee

for their dedicated efforts and excellent work. They are doing a commendable job, and She said that she is pleased with the ongoing positive developments. There are no notable changes at this point, and everything continues to proceed well.

Grants Review Committee-

- i. Vice-Chairman Jonathan Atkinson reported Currently, there are no significant updates to report. No grant initiatives are pending at this point. I look forward to gaining more insights once we receive details about the County Council's plan to allocate 1.5 million. We remain hopeful that this plan materializes, and upon confirmation, we can proceed to develop initiatives for the upcoming calendar year.

Diverse Erie Secretary Brandy Cortes-

- i. Secretary Cortes expressed gratitude for the chance to share her thoughts and apologized for being under the weather. Although she did not have specific updates, she commended everyone for their outstanding work on budgets and related matters.
- ii. She acknowledged Dr. Rocky's remarks, emphasizing the diverse expertise within the volunteer team beyond financial matters. Secretary Cortes believes the team possesses valuable knowledge that can significantly benefit the community, a perspective sometimes overshadowed by the challenges of the past year.
- iii. Commissioner Cortes echoed Dr. Carter's suggestion and expressed interest in exploring community-focused initiatives. Despite the absence of an in-person meeting, she suggested considering future opportunities for community engagement. Recognizing the heightened health risks within the BIPOC community, especially with age, she proposed organizing a panel discussion addressing various medical conditions. While not an expert in those areas, Commissioner Cortes specializes in mental health, substance use disorders, and social services. She proposed planning a community panel discussion involving the team and external experts to delve into these crucial topics and collaborate with local community agencies.

8. Unfinished Business-

- a. No motion was submitted for the reconsideration of the request to extend the funding agreement between Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and GMA Development Group. As a result, this agenda item did not advance due to the lack of motion.

The December 21, 2023, meeting minutes, a typographical error was identified in the set approved by the board. Specifically, it was observed that Mr. Paul Kokhanevich was erroneously documented as having cast both affirmative and negative votes on a motion

to amend the funding agreement between Erie County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission and GMA Development Group, LLC, request for an extension for the Generational Impact Grant. It is important to clarify that this typographical error does not impact the substantive outcome of the vote.

9. New Business-

- a. Attorney Tim Wachter explained the process for electing officers, introducing two methods:
 1. The initial approach involves proposing a motion for a comprehensive slate of officers, encompassing the chair, vice chair, treasurer, and secretary. Subsequently, a second motion is sought, followed by a vote on the nominated slate.
 2. Alternatively, the second approach consists of individual nominations for each position, accompanied by motions, seconds, and votes.

Tiffany LaVette proposed a motion to nominate the slate, suggesting Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo for Chairman, Mr. Jonathan Atkinson for Vice-Chairman, Miss Brandy Cortes for Secretary, and Dr. Sarah Carter for Treasurer. However, the motion did not proceed due to a lack of a second motion.

A motion was made by Brandy Cortes and seconded by Saeedullah Taraky, to approve the slate of Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo, Miss Marie Wells, Mr. Jonathan Atkinson, and Miss Brandy Cortes to remain in their respective positions as the executive officers for Diverse Erie Commission.

To approve the slate of Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo, Miss Marie Wells, Mr. Jonathan Atkinson, and Miss Brandy Cortes to remain in their respective positions as the executive officers for Diverse Erie Commission.			
	YEA	NAY	ABSTAIN
Tiffany LaVette			X
Dr. Sarah E. Carter			X
Brandy Cortes	X		
Jonathan Atkinson	X		
Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo	X		
Marie "Mia" Wells	X		
Saeedullah Taraky	X		
Paul Kokhanevich	X		

Adjournment

A motion was made by Marie "Mia" Wells and seconded by Brandy Cortes to adjourn the meeting at 6:45PM. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Invitees: Andre Horton (Erie County Councilman-Diverse Erie Liaison), Sarah Shinsky (AVP/Office Manager Northwest Bank), AJ Rao (County Government Reporter The Erie Times-News)