

ERIE COUNTY DIVERSE ERIE COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 21, 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=MIFEZ3IraU5jQ05BbjYyM3VzbjVWZz09>

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 Kokhanevich; Ejay Fyke; Gary N. Lee; Attorney Tim Wachter

1. Call to Order/Roll Call 6:00P.M.-Tiffany L. LaVette-Not Present

2. Approval of the March 21, 2024, Agenda

A Motion was made by Marie "Mia" Wells and seconded by Paul Kokhanevich to approve the March 21, 2024; meeting agenda as presented. All commissioners present voted in favor. None were opposed.

Chairman Escajadillo welcomed Mr. Ejay Fyke as the newest Commissioner of the Diverse Erie Commission, expressing eagerness for collaboration. Following this, other commission members provided brief introductions. Mr. Fyke introduced himself, highlighting his decade-long involvement in community initiatives and political campaigns in Erie, Pennsylvania. Currently serving as the Community Affairs Manager for a utility-scale developer in Dallas, Texas, he engages in nationwide government relations work, particularly for solar farm projects. Mr. Fyke mentioned his family life, being married with two children, and his wife's occupation as a nurse at UPMC. He expressed enthusiasm for joining the team, emphasizing his readiness to contribute to shared goals and learn from colleagues' expertise.

3. Hearing of the Public:

Mr. Art Leopold expressed his intention to keep his remarks concise. He welcomed Commissioner Ejay Fyke, acknowledging his wealth of experience and anticipating his significant contributions to the Commission's activities. Mr. Leopold commended Diverse Erie for initiating a new award program of approximately \$300,000 for the community and eagerly awaited its outcomes. He also expressed interest in updates regarding a new appropriation from Erie County Council. Mr. Leopold concluded by thanking the commission board members for their dedicated service and wishing everyone a pleasant evening.

4. Approval of the January 18, 2024, Meeting Minutes

A Motion was made by Marie "Mia" Wells and seconded by Brandy Cortes to approve the January 18, 2024; meeting minutes as presented.

5. Presentations: None

6. Report on Chief Administrative Officer:

Mr. Lee commenced the Chief Administrative Officer's report by expressing gratitude to the Commissioners, Chairman, and Vice Chairman. He extended a warm welcome to Commissioner Fike, noting his recent addition to the team and expressing collective anticipation. Mr. Lee conveyed that he had engaged in an orientation session with Commissioner Fyke earlier in the month, highlighting Mr. Fyke's enthusiasm for board membership and affirming the positive impact of his presence. Transitioning into the report, Mr. Lee proceeded to delve into the details.

Personnel:

- a. None to discuss.

Budget:

- a. Regarding the budget, Mr. Lee informed that the Finance Committee meticulously examined various elements, including the February 2023 financial reports, budget versus actual updated budget overview, banking statement, expense file, and related documents. He highlighted a reduction of \$36,000 in the legal services allocation, resulting in a \$470,000 operating budget for 2024. This reduction stemmed from the absence of anticipated legal matters in the upcoming period, contrasting with the previous year's occurrences beyond the standard solicitor's responsibilities. Mr. Lee noted the submission of a \$1.5 million invoice to the county's finance department on February 6th, which remains pending payment. The County Council is actively addressing this matter with the county administration following approval of the additional funds during the January 23rd meeting. Despite discussions surrounding administrative procedures, Mr. Lee clarified the legal status of the funds, emphasizing the Council's collaboration with the administration for their release. The team awaits the audit review list from Mr. Rick L. Clayton, CPA to initiate the 2023 Commission audit report, with Maloney, Reed, and Scarpetti and Company selected as the auditing firm. Overall, Mr. Lee affirmed the satisfactory financial condition of the current projected budget, aligning with the Commission's expectations.

Media and Presentations:

- a. In terms of media engagements, Mr. Lee stated his upcoming involvement in several media interviews addressing topics such as Small Business Mini Grant opportunities and the Commission's 2023 annual report, which focuses on DEI initiatives. He mentioned that the report will be released by the following week. Mr. Lee emphasized the diligent efforts put forth by himself and the Diverse Erie staff in collaboration with Kate Phillips and her team from Parker Phillips. He expressed excitement about the forthcoming report and encouraged everyone to stay tuned for its imminent release.

Grants Development:

- a. Regarding grants development, Mr. Lee reported that the Grants Review Committee convened and decided to initiate another round of small business mini grants. This rollout commenced on March 18th, with efforts to inform the public through various social media platforms. The grants range from \$5,000 to \$20,000. Despite previous low attendance, two workshops are scheduled as recommended by the Executive Committee. One will be an in-person session on March 26th, and the other a virtual session on March 28th. Mr. Lee emphasized the importance of familiarizing oneself with the application process to better assist potential applicants. He encouraged individuals with questions or concerns to reach out to the Commission directly. Responding to Vice Chairman Atkinson's inquiry, Mr. Lee confirmed that efforts are being made to gather testimonials from previous grant recipients to showcase the impact of the awards. Commissioner Cortes expressed appreciation for the workshops and urged promotion through social media. Mr. Lee informed the committee about plans to explore educational grants for BIPOC students and discussions with professional grant writers to enhance grant funding opportunities.

Website Development and Branding:

- a. Regarding website development and branding, our ongoing meetings with the Parker Phillips team focus on the strategic plan and branding process, including website development and social media initiatives. As previously mentioned, we have introduced new tools such as a video function to actively record and promote the positive impact of Commission investments on businesses, particularly grant awardees. Additionally, we have implemented a new feature on our website, the Google Translate function, enabling content translation into different languages. This enhancement, requested by the executive

committee, has been successfully integrated, much to our satisfaction. Commissioner Brandy Cortes expressed enthusiasm for these developments, which was appreciated. Mr. Lee echoes her sentiment and encourages continued engagement with our website and social media platforms for up-to-date information. Mr. Lee stated that it is crucial to familiarize oneself with our platform and ensure that your council representative is informed about our initiatives, as they play a vital role in our outreach efforts.

Other Noteworthy Updates include:

- a. On February 27th, Mr. Lee attended the Diversity Summit hosted by City and State Magazine in Harrisburg, where he had previously served as a guest panelist two years ago to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion in Erie County. This year's summit was well-attended, providing him with valuable networking opportunities with key leaders in the state. Mr. Lee reminded the group that it is important to periodically engage with Harrisburg to showcase Erie's progress and foster relationships. Additionally, on March 15th, Mr. Lee attended the Funders Partnership meeting, which gathers various funders from the region, including the Erie Community Foundation, Erie County Redevelopment Authority, and Infinite Erie, among others. These meetings remain crucial for providing updates on our activities. Moreover, He recently met with the senior leadership team of Erie Bank to discuss collaboration on homeownership initiatives, marking phase two of the Commission's efforts once we secure our funding. They expressed enthusiasm for collaborating with us on this project. Are there any questions or concerns?

- b. Commissioner Ejay Fyke inquired about the possibility of Parker Phillips creating a social media kit for Commissioners to promote Commission initiatives. In response, Mr. Lee confirmed that such a kit had been provided earlier and agreed to revisit the idea and distribute it to all Commissioners. Mr. Lee reiterated that it is essential to remember that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are ongoing journeys, not destinations. And that Diverse Eie commission board must continue to build strategic partnerships and leverage data to tell our unique story effectively. For instance, on March 17th, Mr. Lee had the honor of attending a special dinner with the Afghan community during Ramadan, along with Commissioner Taraky. The experience was enriching, and Mr. Lee said that he appreciated the invitation. Expressing gratitude to the commissioners, particularly the executive committee, for their dedication, expertise, and commitment to the commission's mission, He emphasized the importance of teamwork and adaptation.

In conclusion, Mr. Lee reiterated our commitment to making adjustments and not excuses and thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to present his report.

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

7. Reports of Committee Chairpersons
Executive Committee-

- i. Dr. Rocky, addressing the executive committee, expressed his appreciation for the recent meeting and extended thanks to the Commissioners who attended the January 23rd County Council meeting. Despite encountering some challenges, the Commission successfully secured an additional \$1.5 million in funds, which will be allocated towards education, training, homeownership initiatives, and healthcare. Dr. Rocky emphasized the urgency of addressing health issues such as type 2 diabetes, citing recent research highlighting the benefits of low carbohydrate and ketogenic dietary patterns in managing the condition. He also recommended a book titled "Brain Energy," which discusses the metabolic basis of mental disorders, underscoring the importance of dietary changes in improving overall health.

- ii. Acknowledging the efforts of Mr. Lee and Devan in preparing the 2023 annual report with Parker Phillips, Dr. Rocky commended their commitment to producing a quality report. He then shifted focus to the grants review committee, expressing enthusiasm for the small business mini grant opportunities and recalling the excitement of a recent event where grants were awarded.
- iii. Dr. Rocky encouraged continued engagement with County Council members and participation in community activities and events, such as the upcoming Fiesta on the square in September. He also took a moment to recognize National Women's International Month, expressing gratitude for the women in our lives and advocating for greater balance and support between masculine and feminine energies to foster thriving communities.
- iv. With emotion evident in his voice, Dr. Rocky concluded his remarks, expressing gratitude for the presence and influence of mothers and friends in our lives. He then passed the floor to Treasurer Wells to provide any updates from the Finance Committee.

Finance Committee-

- i. Commission Treasurer Marie "Mia" Wells provided an update, stating that everything is progressing smoothly. She recently met with Gary, albeit via Zoom, to review all the financial reports. She expressed satisfaction with the current financial status, noting that the Commission is performing above expectations. Mia emphasized the collaborative effort among team members to ensure success. Overall, she conveyed that everything is on track and progressing well.

Grants Review Committee-

Vice Chairman Jonathan Atkinson provided an update, stating that Mr. Lee had offered insights regarding the announcement of the upcoming mini grant cycle, which is currently active. He encouraged all Commissioners to disseminate this information among their respective networks and social media platforms to maximize outreach. Additionally, upon the closure of the application period, Mr. Lee will conduct a thorough analysis of the applicants to identify the most suitable candidates. Subsequently, the Grants Review Commission is expected to convene, most likely by the end of April, to finalize decisions on awardees and the corresponding funding amounts. Jonathan expressed anticipation for the completion of this process by the specified timeframe and concluded by acknowledging all updates from the Grants Review Committee.

Diverse Erie Secretary Brandy Cortes expressed her gratitude for the ongoing efforts and hard work of everyone involved, including Devan, Mr. Lee, and the entire team. She emphasized her anticipation for further progress and collaboration, particularly with Commissioner Fyke's involvement, aiming to enhance representation within the diverse community. Brandy reiterated her pride in being a member of this dedicated team and looked forward to continuing to build upon their existing initiatives.

Mr. Gary Lee stressed the importance of submitting the financial interest statement promptly. He reminded everyone that reminders had been sent out previously and encouraged completion. He offered assistance with any questions and provided copies for those in attendance. He requested submission by April 2nd for those not present, emphasizing compliance with Commission requirements. Finally, he thanked the Chairman and attendees for their attention to this matter.

Unfinished Business-None

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: Art Leopold (Erie County Resident and Diverse Erie Supporter)