

ERIE COUNTY DIVERSE ERIE COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 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=MIFEZ3IraU5jQ05BbjYyM3VzbjVWZz09>
Meeting ID: 853 1948 8506
Passcode: 847117

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

1. Call to Order/Roll Call 6:01P.M.- Vice Chairman Jonathan Atkinson; Paul Kokhanevich; Tiffany LaVette-Were Not Present
2. Approval of the July 18, 2024, Agenda
A Motion was made by Treasurer Marie "Mia" Wells and seconded by Secretary Brandy Cortes to approve the July 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 May 16, 2024, Meeting Minutes
A Motion was made by Marie "Mia" Wells and seconded by Ejay Fyke to approve the May 16, 2024; meeting minutes as presented.
5. Presentations None
6. Report on Chief Administrative Officer:

Personnel: No personnel issues to address currently

Budget:

- a. The Finance Committee conducted a detailed review of the May and June 2024 financial reports, including the budget versus actual, updated budget overview, banking statements, and expense files with supporting documents. The current projected budget is in good financial standing and operates within the Commission's expected financial parameters. The operational budget is secure until December 2024 due to recent budget adjustments.
- b. On June 19th, Attorney Watcher sent a follow-up letter to Attorney Talarico about the \$1.5 million invoice submitted to the County Finance Department on April 16, 2024, for which no action has been taken. The letter inquired about the steps County Council will take to enforce the appropriation and release of funds to the Commission. Attorney Watcher has not yet received a response from Attorney Talarico. Mr. Lee inquired if Attorney Watcher had any additional comments, to which Attorney Watcher confirmed the status remains unchanged.
- c. On June 6th, the team provided all required documentation for the 2023 commission audit to Mr. Clayton and his team from Maloney, Reed, Scarpitti & Company. The audit review process is ongoing, with further questions expected from the auditors.

Commissioner Ejay Fyke asked about the next steps if no response is received from the county council. Mr. Lee explained that council members may have to consider taking legal action due to the delay in fund certification, which is a ministerial function. If county council and county administration cannot resolve the issue, legal action might be necessary. Mr. Fyke also inquired if there has been communication with the County Administration regarding the release of the funds. Mr. Lee noted that discussions indicated the funds had not

been certified, although this is a basic administrative task. The issue is primarily between the County Administration and County Council.

Media and Presentations: None

- a. Regarding media engagements and presentations during March and April, Mr. Lee reported.

Grants Development:

- a. The initial distribution of the 2024 Small Business Min grants was completed on Thursday, June 13th. All checks were successfully distributed by the Commission, and the recipients expressed their immense gratitude for the support. He extended his sincere thanks to all the Commissioners for their contributions to making the initiative a success.
- b. Regarding the Personal Results Fitness Company, owned by Steve Spearman, Attorney Wachter will present an update during the new business section.
- c. As Mr. Lee mentioned earlier, the Commission is enthusiastic about moving forward with Phase Two, which focuses on homeownership, apprenticeship, and healthcare initiatives. He said that we are currently researching potential grant opportunities in these areas. However, as of now, this remains a work in progress.

Website Development and Branding:

- a. Regarding website development and branding, Mr. Lee said that we are actively collaborating with Kate and Company on our strategic plan and branding efforts, including enhancements to our website and social media outreach. Kate and Company are currently assisting three small business awardees and by preparing a promotional video to showcase the value of the Commission's initiatives.
- b. Additionally, the team will be making several updates to the Commission's website, focusing on cosmetic improvements to enhance its appearance. One of the planned changes includes refining the website's layout to create a more professional and visually appealing presentation. Other minor aesthetic adjustments will also be made. This update is crucial, as it has been approximately two years since our website was initially launched.

Mr. Lee continues by saying that he strongly recommends that the commission board members share these updates with their Council representative and their broader network. He added that it is crucial to disseminate information about our efforts, especially given the ongoing resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives at both the public and private levels. We remain committed to these initiatives, believing they are the right course of action.

Other Noteworthy Updates include:

- a. Regarding key items. On May 22nd and 23rd, Mr. Lee attended the third annual Black Caucus Day in Harrisburg. This event provided him an opportunity to engage with key stakeholders on challenges and opportunities related to housing, education, business, and healthcare for Black and Brown communities in Pennsylvania. Regarding the conference, he was invited to serve as a panelist on the statewide housing panel, an opportunity that arose when organizers learned of his attendance. He explained that it was an honor to represent our commission and share our initiatives, which garnered significant interest and positive feedback from attendees who were impressed by our commission's unique structure and history.
- b. On June 4th, Mr. Lee was a guest speaker at the Charter School of Excellence Discovery Center's 8th grade moving-on ceremony, making their official graduation. Mr. Lee said that it was a privilege to motivate and inspire the students in their largest graduating class to date. The event took place at Hitz Auditorium, a venue he said is familiar with from his previous

county work, and he mentioned that it made him feel at home. Despite his brief 10-minute speech, the experience was positive and well-received.

- c. Mr. Lee said he planned to visit the Enterprise Center on June 10th to meet with Ms. Delia Clark and tour her facilities, but the meeting was postponed due to her travel schedule. They have agreed to reschedule for a later date to discuss the initiatives in Philadelphia.
- d. On July 13th, Mr. Lee attended the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission's "Building Pennsylvania Beloved Communities" event at Second Baptist Church in Erie. The community meeting was insightful, and he said that he will follow-up with Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) Executive Director Chad Dion Lassiter, for further discussions.
- e. From July 24th to 28th, Mr. Lee will be attending the 2024 National Urban League Conference in New Orleans. This highly anticipated event will feature key leaders from government, private, and public sectors addressing critical issues. He said he looks forward to participating in sessions on diversity, equity and inclusion and sharing insights from the conference at our next meeting.
- f. Lastly, congratulations to Commissioner Atkinson for being named to Erie Reader's 40 Under 40 Class of 2024. This is a well-deserved recognition of his contributions. We encourage him to continue his outstanding work.
- g. Mr. Lee expressed his gratitude to Commissioner Wells, who will be moving back to California. He said that it had been a pleasure working with her, and that her positive energy and contributions will be greatly missed. He thanked her for all that shea has done for the Commission.

Mr. Gary Lee concluded his report with the following statement:

"As I always emphasize, we do not make excuses; we make adjustments. WE will continue to adhere to this approach moving forward."

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

7. Reports of Committee Chairpersons

Executive Committee-

- i. Chairman Ricardo Escajadillo express his sincere gratitude to all Commissioners for their commitment, particularly during the summer months, emphasizing that their dedication is greatly appreciated.
- ii. He extended special congratulations to Commission Atkinson for being named to Erie Reader's 40 |Under 40 Class of 2024---an outstanding achievement. Additionally, he congratulated Jonathan on the anticipated arrival of his second child and wished him well as he embarks on this new and exciting chapter.
- iii. Regarding Commissioner Wells, Chairman Escajadillo noted that her departure is bittersweet. He reminisced about their shared experiences on the board, recalling their mutual navigation through various challenges. He commended her dedication, including her attendance at meetings via Zoom while pursuing EMT training. Her positive contributions will be missed, but he acknowledges that moving back to California to be with family is a wonderful opportunity, and he hopes to visit soon.

- iv. Treasure Marie "Mia" Wells response by encouraging everyone to visit California, and Dr. Ricardo Escajadillo agreed, expressing his gratitude for Commissioner Wells' contributions to the board.
- v. Looking ahead, Chairman Escajadillo highlighted the importance of spreading our message. In the September meeting, he plans to present on time-efficient resistance training. Aiming to make fitness accessible to the BIPOC community. He stressed that effective exercise does not require expensive gym memberships or extensive time commitments, with a focus on improving quality of life and longevity.
- vi. He concluded his report by urging continued outreach to Council representatives regarding the \$1.5 million funding, which is critical for our initiatives. Chairman Escajadillo also thanked Mr. Lee for his diligent work on this matter and extended appreciation to Devan Mitchell for keeping everyone informed.

Finance Committee-

- i. Commission Treasurer Marie "Mia" Wells addressed the meeting by acknowledging that most of the key points regarding funding and finances had already been covered earlier, and everything remains on track. She added that, as always, the process is ongoing.

Grants Review Committee-

Jonathan was not present at the meeting-No Report.

Diverse Erie Secretary Brandy Cortes addressed the meeting with the following remarks: "I don't have any new updates at this time. However, I want to express how much I will miss you, Mia. Your positive influence has been significant, and I have always admired your commitment to the community. You have been a trailblazer in the BIPOC community, particularly as a Hispanic/Latina leader and a grandmother. We need to encourage more BIPOC individuals, especially youth, to pursue careers in fields such as firefighting, law enforcement, medicine, and education. Your role in this regard is invaluable, and I hope you can continue to engage with young people, through virtual platforms, to inspire them. Seeing role models in these professions can greatly motivate them.

Additionally, I want to inform everyone about the upcoming Fiesta on the Square, which will kick off Hispanic Heritage Month on September 14th at Perry Square from noon to 7PM. The event will feature food, music, a car show, and various activities for children. It is a wonderful opportunity for community members to connect and share resources beneficial to the Hispanic/Latino community. The event is organized by the Erie Latina Leadership Association and the Mayor's Hispanic/Latino Advisory Council. I encourage everyone to attend and support this celebration."

8. Unfinished Business-None

9. New Business:

Attorney Tim Wachter reported that concerns have been raised regarding the accuracy of the information provided in the funding application. Specifically, there were questions about the current status of taxes, whether the business had been operational in the previous year, the amount of operational revenue reported for the prior year, and the business's capacity to complete the proposed project given personal circumstances. He added that, despite a request for clarification, the required information was not provided, nor was a signed contract from Personal Results Fitness received. As the Commission stipulated, the Commission formally approves a motion to confirm the grant award's rescinding to Personal Results Fitness.

A motion was made by Chairman Ricardo Escajadillo and seconded by Commissioner Secretary Brandy Cortes and Commission Marie "Mia" Wells, to confirm rescinding of the grant award to Personal Results Fitness. All commissioners present voted in favor.

10. Adjournment

A motion was made by Ejay Fyke and seconded by Marie Wells to adjourn the meeting at 7:13PM. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Invitees: Sara Shinsky-Northwest bank, AJ Rao ETN