

# ERIE COUNTY DIVERSE ERIE COMMISSION

## Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 15, 2026

Diverse Erie Headquarters

208 East Bayfront Parkway, Suite 104, Erie, PA 16507

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87152292636?pwd=0GJpE8rdgCam7gy7TDjrPulaCi6yLn.1>

Meeting ID: 871 5229 2636

Passcode: 071731

Attendees: Saeedullah Taraky; Ejay Fyke; Sara Shinsky; Wayne Patterson; Junius Johnson; Anthony Simmons; William Jeffress; Dr. Sarah E. Carter; Gary N. Lee; Attorney Patricia Kennedy

1. Call to Order/Roll Call 6:01 P.M.
2. Approval of the January 15, 2026, Agenda

A Motion was made by Commission Treasurer Wayne Patterson and seconded by Commissioner Sara Shinsky to approve the January 15, 2026; meeting agenda as presented. All commissioners present voted in favor. None were opposed.

3. Hearing of the Public: None
4. Approval of November 20, 2025, Meeting Minutes

A Motion was made by Commissioner Sara Shinsky and seconded by Commissioner Junius Johnson to approve November 20, 2025, meeting minutes; All commissioners present voted in favor to approve the meeting minutes as presented.

5. Presentations: None
6. Report of Chief Administrative Officer:

Personnel:

- a. No personnel issues were reported. Members were reminded that the annual Statement of Financial Interest will be distributed within the next week and should be completed by the end of March, ahead of the May 1 deadline. Mr. Lee stated that the forms are maintained on file at the Commission's headquarters.

Budget:

- a. Mr. Lee reported that the Finance Committee reviewed the November and December 2025 financial reports, including the budget-to-actual, budget updated overview, bank statements, and the expense file with supporting documentation. The commission closed fiscal year 2025 approximately 15% under budget, reflecting strong financial management. He continued by stating that the current projected budget remains in sound financial condition and within the commission's established parameters. Mr. Lee said that additional details will be provided in the Finance Chairman's report.
- b. Regarding the 2026 Erie County budget, Mr. Lee said that Diverse Erie was approved for \$250,000. The original request totaled \$500,000, with \$250,000 proposed from gaming funds and \$250,000 from

American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. He explained that the vote to override the former County Executive's veto for the gaming funds failed (4–3), and those funds will not be received. However, the ARP funding was approved by a 5–2 vote and will be awarded.

- c. Mr. Lee said that the Chairman and himself will be meeting with the County Executive and her administration to discuss future goals, initiatives, and partnership opportunities. He added that an invitation has also been extended to County Council members to participate in executive-level meetings, with scheduling anticipated during the first quarter.

#### Media and Presentations:

- a. Mr. Lee reported that the Commission received strong media coverage related to the Generational Impact Investment Awards. Mr. Lee said that he wrote an Op-ed that was recently published in the *Erie Times-News* emphasizing diversity as an economic strategy rather than a charitable effort has generated positive feedback.

#### Investment Development:

- a. Mr. Lee provided an update on the Generational Impact Opportunity Initiative. The application process was completed successfully, and contract agreements have been executed for the four selected organizations, totaling \$650,000. The agreements were submitted to the County Planning Department on December 18 for review. The County has a 30-day review period to raise any concerns. This submission was required pursuant to the settlement agreement. If no feedback is received by January 18, the county will proceed with implementation.
- b. Mr. Lee also announced the upcoming launch of the Small Business Mini Grant Initiative, anticipated for early to mid-February. He met with the Public Relations team and provided prior application guidelines and timelines to support the rollout. Additional details regarding the official launch will be shared in the coming weeks.

#### Website Development and Branding:

- a. Mr. Lee informed the team that the 2025 Diverse Erie Annual Report has been completed and highlights the Commission's accomplishments and key impacts. Members were encouraged to review and share the report with colleagues and community stakeholders.
- b. Ms. Devan Mitchell and Parker Strategy Group continue to manage the Commission's social media presence. Members were invited to submit relevant content to Ms. Mitchell for posting on the website and social media platforms.
- c. Mr. Lee continued his report by adding that the Commission continues to work with Parker Strategy Group on its communications and outreach strategy, including ongoing website updates, enhanced social media engagement, and the development of educational and promotional materials. Members were encouraged to engage their respective County Council representatives to ensure awareness of the Commission's work and to invite participation in meetings.
- d. The Commission welcomed its new liaison, Jim Wentz, who has already connected with leadership and will be working closely with the Commission moving forward.

#### Other Key Items:

Chief Administrative Officer Gary Lee reported participation in several key activities and events.

- December 10 – Participated in a workshop with Ben Franklin Technology Partners on the Erie Insurance Revitalization Investment Fund. Event was well attended, received positive feedback, and strengthened future partnership opportunities.

- December 13 – Attended the Erie’s Black Wall Street Entrepreneurship Graduation as well as Commissioner Shinsky. Highlighted the growth of small businesses in Erie County; \$100,000 invested in 2023 continues to support their development.
- December 15 – Met with Senator McCormick at the Manufacturing Business Association to discuss regional small business issues. Provided opportunity to engage directly with local business owners and elected officials.
- January 5 & 9 – Attended swearing-in ceremonies for the County Executive and Mayor of Erie, including the County Executive’s inauguration at Warner Theater, to foster positive working relationships with new administrations.
- January 10 – Participated in a community workshop led by the mayor and transition team at the Booker T. Washington Center, focusing on solutions for ongoing challenges in the BIPOC community. Commission will continue to partner with city and county leadership on relevant initiatives.
- Upcoming – On February 27 at noon, CAO Lee will present a seminar titled “Abundance versus Scarcity: The Impact of Inclusive Investments in Erie County” at the Jefferson Educational Society. The presentation will review commission accomplishments, impact studies, annual report highlights, and upcoming initiatives including the small business mini grant program.

Chairman Taraky recommended coordinating outreach for the mini grant program with council members to enhance participation, and Mr. Lee concurred. Commissioner Shinsky acknowledged and expressed appreciation for Mr. Lee’s proactive engagement with community and business initiatives.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Sara Shinsky and seconded by Commission Treasurer Wayne Patterson to approve the report of the Chief Administrative Officer. All commissioners present voted in favor.

## 7. Reports of Committee Chairpersons

### Executive Committee-

- i. Chairman Saeed Taraky formally welcomed Mr. Jeffress to the Board and expressed enthusiasm regarding his appointment and anticipated contributions.
- ii. The Chairman extended appreciation to Mr. Lee, Devan, and Parker Strategy Group for their exemplary work on the 2025 *Diverse Erie Annual Report*. Board members were encouraged to share the report broadly with colleagues and community stakeholders to help amplify its impact.
- iii. Chairman Taraky reported that Mr. Lee has been asked to coordinate and schedule a series of meetings with County Council members, in groups of two to three, along with members of the Executive Committee. The purpose of these meetings is to highlight the Commission’s positive work and to continue strengthening relationships with County Council. In addition, Mr. Lee will reach out to the County Executive to request a meeting with the same objectives.
- iv. Mr. Lee will also proceed with updating the Commission’s Strategic Plan, which will be shared with all Commissioners upon completion.
- v. The Chairman emphasized the importance of active Board engagement with the Commission, the broader community, small businesses, and civic leaders. Board members were encouraged to invite colleagues and community members to attend meetings and to provide feedback. Commissioners were further encouraged to continue identifying

- community activities and events that the Commission may consider sponsoring, promoting, or supporting.
- vi. Chairman Taraky noted that key City of Erie, state, and other community initiatives in which Commission leadership is involved will continue to be shared with the Board, along with ongoing communication regarding the vision and priorities for the Commission's role within the county.
  - vii. The Chairman concluded the report by extending best wishes to all in recognition of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration.

#### Finance Committee-

- i. Commissioner Patterson reported that the Finance Committee did not convene during this reporting period and, therefore, had no formal updates to present.
- ii. CAO Gary N. Lee added that, although the Committee did not meet, members received the monthly financial statements and related financial reports for November and December as scheduled.

#### Grants Review Committee-

- i. Mr. Lee stated that all relevant updates were included in his earlier report and confirmed there was no separate report at this time.

#### **8. Unfinished Business: None**

#### **9. New Business:**

Chairman Saeed Taraky opened the discussion regarding the 2026 election of commission executive officers and appointments to commission committees. After confirming the participation of Commissioner Anthony Simmons, the commission proceeded with nominations for each officer position.

Commission Treasurer Wayne Patterson nominated Mr. Saeed Taraky to continue as Chair. There were no other nominations. Commissioner Junius Johnson moved to close nominations, seconded by Commissioner Sara Shinsky. The motion to close nominations was approved unanimously.

A Motion to approve Mr. Taraky to continue as Chairman was made by Commission Treasurer Wayne Patterson and seconded by Commissioner Sara Shinsky. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Commission Treasurer Wayne Patterson nominated Commissioner William Jeffress for Vice Chairman. No other nominations were made. Commissioner Anthony Simmons moved to close nominations, seconded by Commissioner Junius Johnson. The motion to close nominations was approved unanimously.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Sara Shinsky and seconded by Commission Treasurer Wayne Patterson to appoint Commissioner William Jeffress for Vice Chairman. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Commissioner Wayne Patterson nominated Commissioner Sara Shinsky as Treasurer. No other nominations were made. Commissioner Junius Johnson moved to close nominations, seconded by Commissioner William Jeffress.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Junius Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Anthony Simmons to appoint Commissioner Sara Shinsky as Treasurer. All commissioners present voted in favor

Chairman Saeed Taraky nominated Commissioner Wayne Patterson for Secretary. There were no other nominations. A motion to close nominations was made by Commission Treasurer Sara Shinsky and seconded Commission Vice Chairman Will Jeffress.

Attorney Patricia Kennedy confirmed the 2026 slate of officers as follows: Mr. Saeed Taraky, Chair; Commissioner William Jeffress, Vice Chair; Commissioner Sara Shinsky, Treasurer; and Commissioner Wayne Patterson, Secretary. Chairman Taraky congratulated the newly elected officers and expressed appreciation for the commissioners' efforts and support of the commission's work.

Chairman Saeed Taraky thanked members for their continued commitment and confirmed that he will make the appointments to the 2026 Appointments Commission Committee.

Finance Committee: Commissioner Sara Shinsky; (Chair) Commission Vice Chairman William Jeffers; Commission Secretary Wayne Patterson

Grants Review Committee: Commissioner Anthony Simmons; (Chair) Commissioner Junius Johnson; Chairman Saeed Taraky; and Commissioner Ejay Fyke.

Strategic Fundraising Committee: Formed to support the DEI Commission's sustainability and community engagement efforts. Commissioner Ejay Fyke; Commissioner Junius Johnson; Commissioner Anthony Simmons; Chairman Saeed Taraky

Commissioner Shinsky emphasized the urgency of fundraising due to the lack of budget beyond 2026 and encouraged members to leverage their community networks. All Commissioners were invited to contribute ideas across committees.

## **10. Adjournment**

A motion was made by Commissioner Junius Johnson and seconded by Commission Secretary Wayne Patterson to adjourn the meeting at 6:42 P.M. All commissioners present voted in favor.

Invitees: None