

MINUTES

Erie County Council

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REORGANIZATION MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 3, 2019

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

OPTIONAL PRAYER OR INVOCATION

Acting Chairman Smith called to order a Reorganization Meeting of the Erie County Council at 3:30 p.m. at the Erie County Council Chambers, 140 West 6th Street, Room 117, Erie, PA. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Mrs. Loll read the following prayer:

"Let us pray. We are having a new beginning, all members together with one body of purpose. We give thanks for all that God has done for us over the past year and what will happen in the upcoming year. We will look inside ourselves and evaluate our past and what we want to be for our future. As we look to the future with hopes and dreams, we are sad to see things come to a close. As we walk into the future, may ours be a renewing time and yours be not an ending but a time of peace and love. Amen."

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mr. Anderson; Mrs. Fatica (via telephone); Dr. Kyle Foust; Mr. Horton; Mr. Leone; Mrs. Loll; Mr. Rastetter

Also Present: Douglas R. Smith, James Sparber, Tracey Fugagli, Ericka Knight; Thomas Talarico

HEARING OF THE PUBLIC

Randy Barnes; Harborcreek; Mr. Barnes wanted to discuss ECGRA, the alleged white collar crime, theft by deception regarding tuition reimbursement in 2017 and Mr. Barnes alleges that this is an intentional deception to try to get people not to look at the tuition reimbursement. He asked Council if a person is willing to take \$5,000 which they probably weren't deserved of because they changed the wording, and they have a \$100,000 job, why would anyone risk their job for \$5,000? He stated it is because this director who is alleged to have stolen this

money, feels he can do anything he wants. Mr. Barnes then talked about Bridgeway Capital and stated they have net assets of \$39,000,000. He emailed Council that they took in grants of \$4,000,000, but handed out grants of less than 10%. They also have salaries in the amount of \$2.8 million, but hand out \$400,000. He asked if Council knows anything about this company other than that Mr. Wood brought it to Erie. Mr. Barnes didn't feel that Council knows anything about this company. He asked why ECGRA money being sent to a company in Pittsburgh. Mr. Barnes then stated that Mayor Schember spends \$100,000 a month on an economic development office, yet millions are being sent to a company in Pittsburgh. He then wanted to know how much money the Pittsburgh casinos are sending to firms in Erie County. Mr. Barnes then stated that Perry Wood gave Bridgeway Capital \$3.5 million in taxpayer dollars. Three weeks ago he was asked where the first million went. He wants to know why this company is getting money and he wanted to know why Council and the Administration is willing to overlook this. He wanted to know if there was anyone else in Erie County that was qualified to do that job and if the person that is qualified to do that job have to belong to the Pennsylvania Society and have taxpayers pay for his membership. Mr. Barnes stated he sees a lot of things wrong and he gets frustrated that the money trail is there but it seems like no one cares. He doesn't feel that this money should be paying salaries for a company in Pittsburgh.

NOMINATIONS FOR CHAIRMAN

Dr. Foust moved to nominate Mr. Leone as Council Chairman. This was seconded by Mr. Horton. Dr. Foust then moved to close the nominations. This was seconded by Mr. Anderson. The nomination then carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

NOMINATIONS FOR VICE CHAIRMAN

Mr. Anderson made a motion to nominated Mr. Horton as Vice Chairman. This was seconded by Dr. Foust.

Dr. Foust then moved to close the nominations, which was seconded by Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Horton's nomination as Vice Chairman carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

COMMENTS BY COUNCIL/CHAIRMAN

Chairman Leone made the following statement:

"First, let me thank my colleagues for electing me as Chairman. Also, let me congratulate Dr. Foust, our past Chairman. The past year has been a very difficult time that included many controversial issues. Dr. Foust handled these controversies in a very professional manner, and I commend him for that.

The new year must bring new ideas to the community. In the past, I have stressed for a better system to relate to the community and care for the history of

County government to be treasured for future use. Time and again I have strived to include the Erie County Chambers video conferencing. This alone will not solve all our problems. However, it is a start to connect with any other counties and also take to CCAP. We need to continue to express our concerns in this area to the Courts. Many Courts are using this to change its way of doing business (i.e. prisoners need not be transported) and savings to the Erie County taxpayers would be forthcoming. Further, the Courts need to begin to use the recording system where Court stenographers are concerns. I am not advocating to eliminate them just yet. I do intend to, by attrition, eventually do just that. This is only one of the many issues facing County governments. As always, I don't believe that many citizens are familiar with the County's service. We need to educate the community to take advantage of the services we provide.

Pleasant Ridge Manor is one of our assets in Erie County. As one Council member, I have, in the past, professed my support for this facility for many reasons. Primarily, I don't feel gambling with the lives of our aged and indigent, they need to receive the finest care possible and I believe Pleasant Ridge Manor does just that. Having said that, we need to continue to press for funding for this facility. At present, we receive less than the private facilities. This area is not the area we need to cut into, as this is our treasure.

All of my colleagues are to be commended for their hard work in the liaison areas they are assigned. I believe that each of us must review the areas we are presently representing and try to make changes with each other in an effort to learn more in areas that we are responsible for as Council members. I will ask everyone to review their area and discuss with each other any changes you would like to make by the next Council meeting. I would like to make assignments to liaison positions as presented by you. As always, we make more than one councilman as liaison to some of these areas. The primary one will be the liaison, the second one would be an alternate.

A few areas I have already decided the assignments, i.e. Chairman of Finance Committee will be Carl Anderson; Vice Chairman will be Carol Loll; Chairman of Personnel will be Kathy Fatica; and Vice Chair of Personnel would be Scott Rastetter. I have not made any changes to the Retirement Board and don't plan to unless a member wishes to be replaced. Please inform me if you so desire.

Looking back at the past 41 years of the Home Rule Charter, I need to review what has transpired. As a member of the No Committee, I opposed the Home Rule Charter. My reasons at the time are different than they are now. I always felt that the Commission form of government was working fine and shouldn't be changed. Hindsight proves some of my points; however, the issue should not be determined as Commission vs. Home Rule. The only issue involved is who the elected officials are and how they can cooperate with the governmental process. Many of us are called political and let's be honest, we are political. Any

individual that places his/her name on a ballot becomes a politician. Is this a bad thing? No, it isn't. My concept of a politician is one that knows government. This community has been fortunate because throughout the years, the community has elected some very caring officials in Erie County.

Hopefully, this will continue in the future. In the 41 years as a Councilman, I have seen many changes and some have been good and some, in my estimation, have been not so good.

In my years of experience, I have found that all counties continue to stress economic development for their community. I have seen many changes in these counties and many changes in Erie County. We have lost much in population and that changed our status from the 3rd largest city to the 5th largest. The County still maintains 3rd Class County with 274,541 population. Many times I have heard from the different administrations, when talking about salaries and other issues, refer to 3rd Class counties and their salaries. In one example, Westmoreland County is a 3rd Class county and has a population of 352,627, almost 100,000 more in population than Erie County. How can anyone put 3rd Class counties in the same category? This should not be the criteria for raises or use in determining what's best for Erie County.

In Westmoreland County, they have a community college second to none. Erie County has proposed a community college. Will it come to fruition? In all the areas that have a community college, businesses locate there because of the opportunity to train and retrain their employees. Some have indicated the use of the Rural Community College. I believe it is time to credit the use of the Rural Community College. We have always given credit to its use, but not at the expense of a stand-alone Erie County Community College. When meeting with the members of the Rural Community College, they too agreed that Erie County needs a community college. Let's continue to press this goal in County government.

Economic development has been bantered around for as many years as I can remember. This region has tried to accomplish this goal. We have had many programs that have failed, economic development corporations failed, some due to lack of basic principles, self-serving leadership. Too many have tried to steer our economic development ship and have failed. We need to determine how to sell Erie County to new business. We have fresh water, a lake port and yet have not been able to sell this to businesses that are locating or relocating. Our goal is to promote this community and try via the various organizations being used to promote Erie County.

Also, we need to blame the non-profit organizations that pay no taxes and burden our citizens and local businesses, leading them to find other locations for their business ventures. At one time, Erie led the state in manufacturing jobs.

How do we entice these businesses to relocate to Erie? Is a community college one of the factors needed to help this economy? Perhaps. This is not the only way to promote Erie, however, it is one of the starters for this area.

The role of Chairman besides what's written in the Home Rule Charter is at times difficult. Some believe that the solicitor's ruling is other than legal. Many feel that he rules in favor of the Chair. Nothing could be further from the truth. The procedure, as he indicated previously, is for him to respond to the questions asked via our Clerk and send the answers to the County Chairman. He also sends copies to all members of Council and addressed to the Chairman with copies to Council members. He indicated to us that many are new and don't understand the procedure. Some Council members took that in a wrong manner. Our solicitor is one of the finest in Erie County and as such will only provide us with what he feels is legal. In many cases, we may not agree, but the decision is based on law and not some Council members' opinion. Let's wake up to the fact that this solicitor's opinions are just that; if you don't agree with it, it is your prerogative. Let's not complicate these issues. Many of us have disagreed with our solicitor for various reasons. Many have gone contrary to his decision. We need to stop the criticism of our solicitor. He is there to protect all of us.

Some of my goals in Erie County this year are:

1. A no tax increase budget
2. Installation of Video Conference for all of Erie County and use of it!
3. Economic Development
 - a. We need to assist any and all businesses in this County that need help in retaining jobs, and further, in areas of attracting businesses. As Council Members, we have this responsibility and need to exercise more effort in this area.
4. Funding from state and Federal government for many of our unfunded mandates. Express our concerns over non-funded mandates.
 - a. Cost of voting machines.
 - b. Funding increases for PRM.
 - c. Any and all unfunded mandates.

In conclusion, I am asking Council members to understand that an issue in County government is just that, an issue. Once voted on, if you are on its side or against it, move on. Don't dwell on it. If you win or lose consider it as: An issue is an issue. Move on. There are far too many fish to fry."

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Foust moved to adjourn at 3:51 p.m.