

MINUTES

Erie County Council

View More At
www.eriecountypa.gov



Brian Shank, Chairman
Terry M. Scutella, Vice Chairman
Charlie Bayle
André R. Horton
Ellen Schauerma
Tom Spagel
Jim Winarski

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Shank.

OPTIONAL PRAYER OR REFLECTION

Mr. Shank recited the Fireman's Prayer in honor of Shawn Giles.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Brian Shank, Vice-chair Terry Scutella, Charlie Bayle, Andre Horton, Ellen Schauerma, Thomas Spagel and Jim Winarski

Others Present: Megan Moore, Jill Pennsy, Solicitor Tom Talarico and Deputy Solicitor Jay Stranahan

HEARING OF THE PUBLIC

Valerie Pesta

Valerie Pesta, Girard: Ms. Pesta, representing the West County Citizens Coalition, emphasized the importance of the Council truly listening to their constituents. She passionately asserted that their primary duty was to protect the County and its people. She stated belief that the Council should exhibit integrity, bravery, and resolve in rectifying the situation, urged them to vote to rescind Resolution 22. She voiced concerns about the lack of honesty and diligence displayed by Mr. Davis and the County Administration in the past. She stated that the people of Erie County deserved better. She pointed out that the land transfer had occurred hastily to the point where Mr. Davis seemed to disbelieve it himself. She noted that Mr. Davis's assistant had appeared on the news, attempting to obscure the truth with misleading statements. She accused Mr. Davis of gas lighting the public by asserting that they were misinformed, despite contradictory information from the Administration. She highlighted that the council had voted in favor of Resolution 22 on July 11th without fully considering the concerns brought to their attention. She stressed that an industrial park could lead to environmental and water issues, decreased property values, traffic problems, and the irreversible destruction of valuable farmland. She stated that rescinding Resolution 22 and returning the land to the people presented a crucial opportunity for the Council to regain the trust of the County's residents.

Shawn Held

Shawn Held, Millcreek: Mr. Held, an Erie native and Navy veteran, passionately advocated for the youth at the Edmund L. Thomas Adolescent Center. He raised concerns about a recent change in meal providers from a local business, Cali's West Catering, to a national company, Trinity Services Group, which specialized in correctional food service. He stated that the shift resulted in a significant decline in the quality of meals, with nearly all residents expressing dissatisfaction. He pointed out that the youth were being served the same low-quality meals as incarcerated individuals. He disclosed that with the ELTAC administration's approval, he penned a grievance on behalf of the ELTAC youth, addressing the issue to the County Executive, Mr. Davis. He stated that in response to this grievance, Mr. Davis indirectly demanded an apology through the ELTAC Administration. He described that he had met with Mr. Davis and the meeting had lacked a cordial atmosphere. He stated Mr. Davis subjected him to a series of questions, including comments about his lower military rank compared to his own, which he found demeaning. He expressed his frustration at Mr. Davis for disregarding his advocacy for the staff and residents, as well as concerns about taxpayer dollars being misused. He explicitly mentioned that he was terminated from his job one week after the meeting. He stressed his goal to reveal Erie County's questionable financial decisions and workplace practices that did not appear to prioritize the community's best interests. He declared that the young people and adolescents who resided at ELTAC deserved better, and the decisions being made were detrimental to everyone involved.

Steve Wiser

Steve Wiser, Fairview: Mr. Wiser, the owner of Wiser Farms, expressed his frustration at the termination of his lease due to a hunting deal. He emphasized that he had obtained the rights to run the hunting activities through Chuck Crane, Director of Procurement and the County Solicitor, and he had paid the liability for it. He noted his desire to reclaim the two years left on his lease and return to farming the land. He stated his belief that if they allowed Wiser Farms back on the property, it would help calm the situation, giving them two to three years to get everything organized. He stated his connection to the land ran deep, with 53 years spent on it and an additional 10 during his childhood. He mentioned that the generations behind him were ready to continue farming and expressed confidence in the Council's professionalism to do what is right.

Mary Rennie

Mary Rennie, Erie: Mrs. Rennie firmly asserted that there was no reason to delay Ordinance 73, as they were well informed about its details, and it was time to cast their votes. She urged the Council not to hesitate at this stage. She stated Resolution 22 perfectly encapsulated the issues they had faced with the Council majority. She stated that she disagreed with the notion that RDA holding public meetings was the initial step in the process, emphasizing that there were numerous alternatives the County could have explored for the land. She stressed that they were not the sole custodians of the deeds and criticized the County for trying to make choices without adequate public input. She also pointed out a quote from the Chairman suggesting the project was initiated to boost the Erie economy, questioning whether the Council had the necessary expertise. She highlighted the significant financial responsibilities of the Erie County government, with hundreds of millions of dollars flowing through it, mainly for professional services and contracts. She expressed her concern over recent

developments, citing examples from a finance meeting she had attended as a Councilwoman. She noted issues with accounting principles and the lack of correct answers given by the Finance Director. She mentioned a proposed ordinance that would have created a County Disaster Fund, which she believed ran counter to the Home Rule Charter. She argued that such errors and ignorance should raise concerns about competence. She expressed her belief that the Council's attempts were increasingly appeared weak and ill advised. She called for the people to take an active role in guiding the authorities, emphasizing the importance of integrity and stewardship of what belongs to the people. She pledged to continue honoring the people.

Others-3 Minutes

Freda Tepfer, Erie: Ms. Tepfer passionately voiced her opposition to censorship. She vividly described her participation in a sit-in at the library where she sat alongside dozens of people, united in the belief that LGBTQ information should be readily available to children throughout the County. She eloquently argued that the term "hearing" had been used loosely and without the necessary criteria, making it insufficient to be considered a true hearing. She pointed out the absence of hearings regarding the land transfer and industrial park, despite her consistent attendance at all meetings. She called for transparency and accountability from the Council, urging them to provide an annual cost breakdown of classification increases, questioning their necessity. She passionately expressed her deep appreciation for farmland as a precious resource and urged the Council to repeal Resolution 22.

Laura Coulter, Millcreek: Ms. Coulter conveyed her deep sense of responsibility as a parent, emphasizing her commitment to ensuring her child's exposure to age-appropriate printed material. She extended the responsibility to all parents, recognizing their freedom to choose what books and media align with their values and beliefs for their children. She passionately advocated for the freedom to explain concepts like Pride or Hanukkah to her daughter when encountered in public spaces, stressing the importance of supporting and promoting diverse celebrations. She stated her belief that any form of censorship should be confined to the home and not imposed upon libraries. Highlighting the vital role of libraries as hubs of education, assistance, ideas, and inclusion, she referenced the second principle in the Code of Ethics, which underlined the imperative for libraries to resist all attempts at resource censorship, that education transcends partisanship and inclusivity was beyond politics. She reminded the Council of their duty to execute the will of the people, irrespective of their personal feelings on the subject. She urged them to pass Resolution 27 to ensure that libraries continued to serve as educational and inclusive spaces for all.

Carl Anderson, Erie: Mr. Anderson, the former Chairman of the Erie County Council, passionately emphasized the significance of the process in their community service, and emphasized that it should prioritize the greater good over self-interest. He underscored that the process mattered greatly in the context of living in a democracy, especially when it pertained to the transfer of public land. He drew attention to the County Executive's attempt to downplay the situation and possible misinformation regarding the land transfer. He questioned whether they had been deceived by the County Executive and his

administration. He firmly stated that it was the County Council's responsibility to bring clarity to the confusing process. He urged the Council to repeal Resolution 22 and pass Ordinance 73, ensuring the safe return of the property to Erie County and its citizens. He argued that anything less than full transparency would be a callous disregard for the citizens' trust in their elected officials, potentially leading to citizen-initiated recall votes in court if democracy continued to falter.

Jodi Fairchild, Girard: Ms. Fairchild, a member of the West County Citizens Coalition, reiterated her concerns about the disadvantages of the land park proposal. She emphasized the value of farmland in supporting the local economy and providing food for many people. She requested that the Council reconsider their vote. She acknowledged that the time was limited, but she believed that mistakes could be rectified, and decisions could be revisited. She expressed her belief that the proposal had not received the thorough consideration it deserved and asked for it to be rescinded.

Sandy Anderson, Girard: Ms. Anderson, a retired Girard Township Supervisor, pointed out the prevailing confusion regarding whether the land transfer had occurred, with conflicting information adding to the skepticism among the people regarding the County government's transparency. She expressed concern that proper public hearings had not taken place, as they should have. She urged the Council to take action by rescinding Resolution 22 to eliminate the confusion and provide a fresh start. She argued that Girard on Route 20 was not a suitable location for an industrial business park, given its historical use in agriculture for over a century. She stressed the value of agriculture as an industry and the impossibility of reclaiming prime farmland once it is lost. She questioned whether the Council had thoroughly considered the potential increase in traffic and the impact on water quality that the industrial park might bring about.

Cole Schenley, Erie: Mr. Schenley, Co-Chair of the Democratic Socialists of America and member of Erie County United, emphasized that their group was much more than mere activists, as they were actively involved in supporting political candidates, working alongside politicians, and supporting organized labor. He highlighted their deep ties with unions, including a recent substantial contribution of \$9,000 to workers from UE506 and UE618. He criticized the County government for swiftly responding to what he described as "small-minded complaints" regarding the Pride display. He revealed that through a Right-To-Know request, they had uncovered intentions by Library Director Karen Pierce, with the support of Doug Smith, to punish the children's librarians who had relocated the display instead of taking it down completely. He emphasized the lack of support given by the Erie County Council and Davis Administration and the active involvement of the DCA and ECU in supporting the affected library workers. He firmly asserted that as long as the Davis Administration continued to negatively affect marginalized groups and unionized employees, the DCA and ECU would persist in challenging the Administration's actions. He criticized the Council for being overly permissive and called on them to fulfill their duty, rather than allowing Mr. Davis to have

undue influence.

Catherine O'Neil, Millcreek: Ms. O'Neil addressed the topic of censorship. She argued that in a civil society, censorship should be deemed unacceptable, pointing out that it often stemmed from intimidation. She firmly advocated for the need for indiscriminate and anti-censorship policies in all libraries. She stated the issue transcended mere books; it was about combating cruelty. She emphasized that her upbringing had instilled the value of helping others. She asserted that nobody had the authority to dictate what others could or could not read. She expressed her hope that the Council would make the right choice to protect the civil rights of Erie County's citizens.

Scott Rastetter, Washington Township: Mr. Rastetter, a property owner in Girard Township, eloquently voiced his concerns regarding the proposal to build over prime farmland. He pointed out that the County Executive's belief that the government should not own land, expressed before taking office, had a dated feel, akin to a 1950s liberal perspective. He firmly believed that the government should own land to serve the community's interests, rather than for speculative purposes. He stressed the importance of well-planned infrastructure and suggested that there were alternative strategies to foster development, emphasizing the value of honesty. He raised a red flag about circumventing legal procedures and excluding the public from decision-making, recognizing that such actions did not paint the community in a positive light. He emphasized the significance of mental attitudes, integrity, diversity, inclusion, and teamwork within big business. He expressed apprehension that the County Executive's approach seemed geared towards selling off the County's assets, resembling a hostile takeover scenario where assets were stripped, and leading to bankruptcy and dissolution.

Samantha Smith, Erie: Ms. Smith addressed the removal of the pride display from the library, expressing deep concern. She emphasized the danger of widespread ignorance and highlighted the overwhelmingly positive impact of representation. Growing up without adequate representation herself, she drew attention to the alarming suicide rates among LGBTQIA youth, particularly transgender individuals. She firmly believed that having meaningful representation could significantly reduce these distressing statistics. She stressed the importance of witnessing individuals assert themselves, express their identities, and enjoy fulfilling lives, as it could be a beacon of hope for those who often face tragically short journeys. She declared that the library sit-in marked just the initial steps of a movement, supported by over 380 signatures from individuals across Erie County, all fervently advocating for the reinstatement of the pride display. She underscored that the level of support exceeded initial perceptions, emphasizing the vital role of representation for the community's future. She urged the Council to endorse Mr. Horton's Resolution aimed at preventing book banning.

Travis Pettis, Fairview: Ms. Pettis, representing the West County Citizens Coalition, presented additional signatures from individuals who stood in opposition to the Industrial Business Park to Mrs. Schauerman. She expressed

gratitude to the Council for their willingness to listen to the concerns and voices of Erie County residents.

Lou Aliota, Millcreek: Mr. Aliota expressed his unwavering support for the residents of Girard and Fairview, emphasizing the values of friendship and fellowship. He noted his support for the West Coalition Group, underscoring their simple desire for elected public officials to uphold their oaths. He argued against any form of government intimidation, emphasizing that it went against the public interest when officials used threats or retaliation to suppress wrongdoing revelations. He invoked the First Amendment, stating that when negotiation fails, litigation becomes necessary. He appealed to the Council to halt and repeal Resolution 22, recognizing that collective responsibility lay with all parties in Erie County. He also questioned whether the County Executive and other officials had followed legal procedures regarding the proposed industrial park or if they had sought legal counsel's guidance. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to exercise his freedom of speech at a public meeting.

Antigone Feidge, Erie: Ms. Feidge, a member of the LGBTQ community, emphasized the importance of having a display that educated young people about Pride. She empathized with those who might feel trapped and isolated, unaware that there were others like them. She believed that such displays could be a beacon of hope. She pointed out that the displays could be beneficial for those outside the LGBTQ community, fostering understanding and empathy. She believed that LGBTQ education could contribute to a more welcoming and inclusive community overall.

Brittany Sulay, Erie: Ms. Sulay recited a passage from the Human Relations guidelines. She confidently pointed out that they were likely well acquainted with what those guidelines implied, especially in the context of censorship.

Rose Surma, Erie: Ms. Surma, moved by the preceding speakers, shared her heartfelt perspective as the mother of an LGBTQ child who came out at the age of 12. She emphasized the essential role that books played in her journey of expanding her understanding, accepting, and caring for her child, as well as becoming a better human being. She expressed gratitude to all the speakers and underlined the importance of books as crucial resources for both children and parents. She adamantly argued that those resources should never be hidden away or lead to feelings of shame.

REPORTS OF COUNTY OFFICIALS

**County Executive and/or
his Designee**

- Finance Committee - Mrs. Schauerman** Mrs. Schauerman reported that the Finance Committee met on August 24th, and submitted to the agenda Old Business: A and New Business: A, B, and D-F.
- Personnel Committee - Mr. Scutella** Mr. Scutella reported that the Personnel Committee met on August 24th, and submitted to the agenda Old Business: B and C and New Business: C, G, and H.
- Other** Mr. Horton expressed his gratitude to everyone who had spoken, emphasizing the importance of the Ordinance and Resolution he had proposed. He acknowledged that some of the points he intended to raise had already been mentioned but felt it necessary to emphasize a few key aspects. He emphasized that his focus was on policies, not personalities, underlining his commitment to upholding the constitution and acting with fiscal responsibility. Mr. Horton drew attention to an unresolved issue from the previous year's budget, noting that traditionally it was posted in January but was delayed until August, a cause for concern as it limited citizens' and the Council's ability to review it adequately. He stressed the significance of the upcoming budget and the popularity of farming and agriculture within Erie City, extending his support to the new Americans who had brought spirit into the field. He lamented the budget cut in the previous year that affected Penn State's Cooperative Extensions funding, and emphasized that it played a major role in the region's agriculture and geography. He expressed bewilderment that economic development discussions often overlooked the importance of the agriculture industry and the role of the Extension in supporting Erie County's farmers. He expressed his embarrassment at various aspects of the budget process, such as the absence of a Financial Advisor and reliance on potentially inaccurate information from the Administration. He clarified that his comments stemmed from the ongoing discussions regarding hearings, highlighting the unprecedented turnout he had observed during his ten years in office. He noted that last year's actions, including attempts to add to the budget by veto, were radical and unusual. He emphasized Treasury Department guidelines that prohibited certain actions and raised concerns about potential financial repercussions for Erie County citizens if those guidelines were not followed. He explained that the budget would include an allocation of 2 million dollars to the community college, emphasizing that it was for a specific program unrelated to Erie County's one-third tuition cost responsibility. He underscored the importance of clear guidelines when proposing budget items to protect the interests of Erie County residents. He stressed that "trust" was a fundamental word that he always upheld in his role. He expressed his unwavering support for the LGBTQ community and all marginalized individuals in Erie County, regardless of their district. He emphasized the need for a trustworthy government and expressed his belief that Erie County faced significant challenges due to fiscal irresponsibility. He questioned whether the Council could effectively represent Erie County, particularly in the absence of a Financial Advisor. He urged equal attention should be paid to the budget as to local neighborhood matters, emphasizing the importance of caring for vulnerable populations. He commended the honorability of his colleagues but voiced concerns about processes, including the farm property sale and Project Resolve, which he believed lacked transparency. He reminded everyone that true power rested with the citizens. He highlighted cuts to Erie County programs and Human Services, expressing

concern about the allocation of ARP funds. He called for the removal of the Resolution regarding the library from the table and encouraged the Council to vote on it with conviction.

OLD BUSINESS

Second Reading of Ordinance Number 73, 2023 "Repeal of Resolution Number 22, 2023 and Rescission of Agreement Between the County of Erie and the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Erie" (First Read 8/15/23) (Finance Committee)

Mr. Bayle expressed his deep connection to the people of Girard, emphasizing that every decision he made had a profound impact on the entire County. He believed that the discussions regarding the issue in Fairview were instrumental in initiating a crucial conversation. He expressed sincere appreciation for everyone who participated and shared his or her concerns. He stated that his primary concern was that the conversation should have been extended to involve the entire county, as he believed it was a matter that affected everyone, despite Girard and Fairview being the most affected.

Mr. Scutella pointed out that public hearings had not been completed before the conversation began; emphasizing that he had received emails from people across the County, indicating widespread concerns. He lamented the prevailing attitude of "if it's not in my neighborhood, I'll remain silent" and urged the County government to abandon the approach that seemed to create more problems than solutions. He noted that, until that point, the County had tried to rectify issues, but it was time for a change.

Mr. Horton remarked on the correspondence received from the Lake Erie Conservancy, who opposed the project. He observed the faces of the people present and could not help but recall the lyrics of the song "pave paradise and put up a parking lot." He acknowledged that Girard may be their paradise. He expressed hope that the vote would favor rescinding the deal, providing relief while allowing for a more considered approach to proceedings.

Mrs. Schauerman emphasized the commitment to public input and listening to the community's voices from the very beginning. She felt proud of everyone who had spoken their minds and noted that their voices had been heard and valued.

Ms. Moore gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 73, 2023 "Repeal of Resolution Number 22, 2023 and Rescission of Agreement Between the County of Erie and the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Erie". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Mr. Horton, and passed 7-0.

Second Reading of Ordinance Number 75, 2023, "Reclassification of Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator Position from NB14 to NB15" (First Read 8/15/23) (Personnel Committee)

Ms. Moore gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 75, 2023, "Reclassification of Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator Position from NB14 to NB15". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Winarski, and carried 6-1. (Horton)

Second Reading of Ordinance Number 76, 2023, "Reclassification of Emergency Management Specialist Position, Grade Level NB9, to Emergency Management Planner, Grade Level NB 12" (First Read 8/15/23) (Personnel Committee)

Ms. Moore gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 76, 2023, "Reclassification of Emergency Management Specialist Position, Grade Level NB9, to Emergency Management Planner, Grade Level NB 12". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Winarski, and carried 6-1. (Horton)

NEW BUSINESS

A motion to amend the agenda was made by Mr. Scutella to add a possible appointment to the Library Board and to move items B and C to a second read, was seconded by Horton, and passed 7-0.

First Reading of Ordinance Number 77, 2023, "Third 2023 American Rescue Plan Act Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$2,000,000 for Erie County Community College (EC3) Allied Health and Nursing Labs" (Finance Committee)

Ms. Moore gave a First Reading of Ordinance Number 77, 2023, "Third 2023 American Rescue Plan Act Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$2,000,000 for Erie County Community College (EC3) Allied Health and Nursing Labs".

First Reading of Ordinance Number 78, 2023 "Fourteenth 2023 General Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$288,800 for Renovations of the Parking Lot at the Office of Children and Youth" (Finance Committee)

Ms. Moore gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 78, 2023 "Fourteenth 2023 General Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$288,800 for Renovations of the Parking Lot at the Office of Children and Youth". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Bayle, and passed 7-0.

First Reading of Ordinance Number 79, 2023 "Approval of Four-Year Agreement between the County of Erie and Pennsylvania Social Services Union Local 668-First Level Supervisors " (Personnel Committee)

Ms. Moore gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 79, 2023 "Approval of Four-Year Agreement between the County of Erie and Pennsylvania Social Services Union Local 668-First Level Supervisors". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Spagel, and passed 7-0.

Possible Adoption of Resolution Number 27, 2023 "To Prohibit the Censorship of Reading

Mr. Horton made a motion to untable Resolution 27, 2023, seconded by Schauerman, and passed 7-0.

Mr. Spagel sought clarification on Resolution 27, inquiring whether the

Materials in the Erie County Library System" (Tabled 8/15/23) (Finance Committee)

materials in question were still accessible at the library but in a different location, which his colleagues confirmed were still available.

Mr. Bayle shared his concern, articulating that he had not witnessed any censorship on the part of the library. He believed that there had been some decisions made that had not undergone thorough vetting. He pointed out that the material remained accessible, albeit not in the manner that people would have preferred.

Ms. Moore read Possible Adoption of Resolution Number 27, 2023 "To Prohibit the Censorship of Reading Materials in the Erie County Library System". A motion was made by Horton, seconded by Schauerman, and passed 7-0.

Possible Adoption of Resolution Number 28, 2023, "Waiver to the Bid Requirements under the Purchasing Code and Approval of Sole Vendor Contract between Erie County and LinkedIn Learning" (Finance Committee)

Ms. Moore read Possible Adoption of Resolution Number 28, 2023, "Waiver to the Bid Requirements under the Purchasing Code and Approval of Sole Vendor Contract between Erie County and LinkedIn Learning". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Winarski, and carried 6-1. (Horton)

Possible Adoption of Resolution Number 29, 2023 "Approving the County Council Response to the 2024-2026 Erie County Operational and Capital Plan" (Finance Committee)

Ms. Moore read Possible Adoption of Resolution Number 29, 2023 "Approving the County Council Response to the 2024-2026 Erie County Operational and Capital Plan". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Spagel, and carried 6-1. (Horton)

Possible Appointment of Mari R. Howells to the Erie County Library Advisory Board. Term to Expire December 31, 2025. (Winarski) (Personnel Committee)

Ms. Moore read Possible Appointment of Mari R. Howells to the Erie County Library Advisory Board. A motion was made by Horton, seconded by Winarski, and passed 7-0.

Possible Reappointment of Anne Rosenthal to the Erie County Library Advisory Board. Term to expire December 31, 2025. (Horton) (Personnel Committee)

Ms. Moore read Possible Reappointment of Anne Rosenthal to the Erie County Library Advisory Board. A motion was made by Horton, seconded by Spagel, and passed 7-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Item I: Ms. Moore read Possible appointment of Mohamed Almorsy to the Erie County Library Advisory Board. A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Horton, and passed 7-0.

Mr. Horton made a motion to go to an Executive Session at 7:29pm. The Council returned from Executive Session at 7:48pm. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Horton and the meeting concluded at 7:50pm.

***The next Finance/Personnel Committee Meetings are Thursday, September 7, 2023, at 4pm in room 114A, Erie County Courthouse or via Zoom.**

***The next Regular Meeting of County Council is Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 6pm in room 117, Erie County Courthouse or streamed live at the link provided on the County website.**

***Members of the public wishing to speak at an upcoming Regular Meeting of Council or those requiring specific accommodation are encouraged to call or email the Council Office at (814) 451-6303 or Councilrequests@eriecountypa.gov, no later than the end of business 5 days prior to the meeting. The public must be present at the meeting to speak.**