

MINUTES

Erie County Council

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

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, October 17, 2023

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Shank led the Pledge of Allegiance.

OPTIONAL PRAYER OR REFLECTION

Mrs. Schauerman recited an inspirational quote.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Brian Shank, Vice Chair Terry Scutella, Charlie Bayle, Ellen Schauerman, Thomas Spagel and Jim Winarski

Others Present: Karen Chillcott, Megan Moore, Solicitor Tom Talarico, Deputy Solicitor Jay Stranahan

HEARING OF THE PUBLIC

Mary Rennie

Mary Rennie, Erie: Mrs. Rennie drew upon her extensive experience working with the Blasco Library. She expressed her concern about the proposed relocation of the research center. She emphasized the need for a critical examination of the proposal beyond its sales pitches. She challenged several assertions made about the proposal, including the absence of program cuts, no impact on public space, and unchanged parking availability. She questioned the apparent uniformity of staff enthusiasm, citing a "gag order" that had been in place for months. She emphasized that Gannon University's annual payment of \$23,000 to the county appeared negligible to her. She highlighted the county's projected expenses for 2024, totaling \$835,000, which encompassed costs associated with custodial services, maintenance, and utilities for both the Blasco Library and its common areas. She contended that the lease arrangement with Gannon granted the university access to various spaces, including classrooms, study rooms, the Idea Lab, and collections from the storage room. She expressed concerns that the proposal seemed to intend turning the library into an extension of Gannon University. She raised issues of program reductions, staff relocations, and the potential impact on children's library programs. She questioned the assertion of no loss of grant funding and indicated that she had contacted the offices of Commonwealth Libraries to verify that claim. She emphasized that the library's function as a district center would be compromised if the children's staff could not offer comprehensive services.

Others - 3 Minutes

Lorraine Dolan, Fairview: Ms. Dolan expressed that the Blasco Library was a community asset funded by residents throughout Erie County, and they had a right to be fully informed by the County Government. She declared that the community desired the opportunity for public comment, conversation, and understanding regarding the library. She expressed her disappointment with the process, highlighting that the County Council and the County Executive allowed the Resolution to be introduced without public notice on an established agenda. She mentioned Gannon University's involvement and urged them not to be a passive bystander. She emphasized the importance of County Council providing oversight over Mr. Davis's actions rather than merely following directives from the County Executive. She expressed her concern that the Council's actions may not align with the best interests of the residents of Erie County.

Art Leopold, Millcreek: Mr. Leopold discussed the NePTWNE Project, expressing his belief in its merits despite concerns about its appointment process. He brought attention to PennDOT's project, which included the modification of the Blasco Library parking lot. He mentioned that the construction would result in a reduction in the number of available parking spaces, estimating a decrease of 11 to 23 spaces from the current count of around 104. He noted that the reduced parking capacity would pose challenges to accommodating the overflow from the various programs expected to be generated by the NePTWNE Project, including students, parents, study groups, and other visitors. He emphasized the importance of having sufficient parking to avoid discouraging people from going to the library. He pointed out that with the addition of students, parents, professional staff, researchers, and the public, the library would need more parking space. He mentioned a suggestion from an official close to the project about the possibility of the County building a parking ramp to address the increased parking needs. He questioned whether the county should be taking on additional expenses in this regard. He advised that the Council should consider delaying the vote on the project to gather more information and evaluate potential solutions. He emphasized the need to examine the upcoming budget, which he believed took higher priority. He mentioned that there might be alternative options, such as potential available space at the EMTA intermodal or the Maritime Bayfront Training Facility behind the library. He suggested exploring those options through fact-finding and discussions to find different solutions.

Freda Tepfer, Erie: Ms. Tepfer considered her decision not to attend the Finance and Personnel meeting. She expressed gratitude to Mr. Leopold for keeping her informed and facilitating her communication with the media in her absence. She delved into the details of a lease agreement, emphasizing the importance of continuous, peaceful, and uninterrupted possession of the premises. She shared her insights about potential funding sources and the suitability of the intermodal for a facility. She raised concerns about parking, pedestrian safety, and the impact of a new facility. She also questioned the alignment of educational material with statewide science learning objectives.

Brian Graff, Erie: Mr. Graff discussed the vote on the lease between Erie County and Gannon University for the Great Lakes Water Research Center and Blasco Library. He stressed the need for more public input and asked critical questions about the impacts on library services, staff, and funding.

Susan Miceli, Erie: Ms. Miceli, a former Blasco Library worker for 18 years, highlighted the unique role of public libraries and the irreplaceable value of dedicated children's librarians. She expressed concerns about the trade-off between library programs and Gannon's services.

Sarah Ewing, Erie: Ms. Ewing, a representative of Gannon University, elaborated on the vision and original intent of the Great Lakes Research and Education Center. She discussed the project's focus on community engagement and education, including the use of library space to promote learning about Lake Erie and research initiatives.

Jim Van Dyne, Lawrence Park: Mr. Van Dyne, President of the Lawrence Park Historical Society, expressed concern about the decision to designate the project as a continuing Resolution and emphasized the need for more public involvement and hearings. He questioned the impact on the Blasco Library and suggested exploring alternative locations for the NePTWNE Project.

Anna McCartney, Northeast: Ms. McCarthy shared her support for the NePTWNE Project but expressed reservations about its location. She raised questions about the function of the building, adequate parking, traffic, and costs. She urged the council to consider the citizens' perspectives.

Abdullah Washington, Erie: Mr. Washington drew historical parallels to emphasize the importance of community assets and questioned the rush to make a permanent decision without adequate consultation. He pointed out that permanent changes in the library system should be carefully considered and suggested that public libraries played a critical role in supporting the community.

Kitty Harrington, Millcreek: Ms. Harrington, a retired children's librarian, discussed the adaptability of library services over the years and the value of the Blasco Library's location. She questioned the long-term space allocation and urged the Council to consider the future needs of the library.

Marcy Bencivenga, McKean: Ms. Bencivenga shared her perspective as a community member and the importance of community engagement in library services. She expressed concerns about the lack of community input and stressed the significance of libraries in serving underserved and under-resourced populations. She asked that the Council table that Resolution.

Ann Randall-Dill, Millcreek: Ms. Randall, a retired library employee, questioned the lack of information and public discussion regarding the NePTWNE Project and its location at Blasco Library. She raised concerns about

grants and funding for the library, the Library Foundation's involvement, the cost of relocating library staff, the lease terms, and parking.

Robert Gallivan, Millcreek: Mr. Gallivan, a member of the Board of Friends of Erie County Library, expressed opposition to the establishment of the Gannon Water Research Facility at the Blasco Library. He highlighted the importance of the library in serving the community, especially children, and expressed concerns about potential impacts on library operations.

Karen Pierce, Millcreek: Ms. Pierce, Director of Blasco Library, expressed gratitude for the community members who attended the meeting. She acknowledged the overwhelming amount of information and misinformation surrounding the NePTWNE Project. She highlighted the significance of the Friends' space at the library and clarified that none of their space would be affected. She also pointed out the potential benefits of Gannon's participation at the library and emphasized the importance of professional librarians in all county library locations. She concluded by stating that the lease with Gannon could be a positive addition to the community.

Sandy Anderson, Girard: Ms. Anderson raised concerns about the county land and the lack of bidding for leasing the farmland from the failed Fairview project. She noted that she had emailed all the Council members and received no response from anyone. She questioned when was the best time to contact Council members. She emphasized the need to address those issues and maximize income from county assets.

Lisa Austin, District 2: Ms. Austin shared her support for Project NePTWNE but opposed the location. She emphasized the loss of parking spaces due to the proposed changes and concerns about accessibility for pedestrians. She urged the council to vote no on the Resolution.

Valerie Pesta, Girard: Ms. Pesta, a representative for the West County Citizens Coalition, urged the Council to vote no on the NePTWNE Project Resolution. She expressed concerns about the rush to approve the Resolution, questioned transparency, and highlighted the importance of listening to the public.

Izzy Lawrie, Girard: Ms. Laurie, a mother, grandmother, and early childhood educator, shared her love for libraries and expressed concern about the rushed approval process for the NePTWNE Project at the Blasco Library. She questioned the lack of public input, the proposed lease terms, and the impact on library operations.

Cole Schenley, Erie: Mr. Schenley expressed his strong objection to the proposed resolution. He urged the council to vote against the project, highlighting the lack of time and information provided to the Library Advisory Board and the community. He criticized the county executive's support for the project on Facebook and raised questions about the Chairman's behavior.

Jacob Chemsak, Edinboro: Mr. Chemsak, an environmental protection employee, spoke about the lack of planning for the proposed project. He emphasized the importance of community support and suggested considering alternative locations, including the BMC (Bayfront Maritime Center), which had underutilized space. He suggested that better planning and involving the public could garner support for Project NePTWNE.

Michael, Erie: Michael expressed his concerns about the library project and urged the Council to table it or change the location. He raised concerns about the funding allocation and noted that \$1.5 million of ARPA money had already been provided to Gannon for the project. He argued that the funding could have been used to address urgent issues, such as the food deserts, especially on the eastside of the city.

Paige, District 2: Paige expressed her concerns about the long-term commitment associated with Project NePTWNE. She pointed out that a 25-year commitment might hinder the library's ability to adapt to evolving community needs. She urged the Council to consider the potential impact on library resources and accessibility.

Chris Drexel, Harborcreek: Mr. Drexel highlighted the educational value of the library for children and the importance of public education. He urged the Council to consider the impact on families in the county and suggested that the library's funding and expansion should be discussed.

Sherry Cummings, Fairview: Ms. Cummings expressed her concerns about the library's historical role in providing summer entertainment for families, especially those with limited resources. She questioned the process by which the leasing agreement for the library space was established, specifically inquiring about the dollar amount involved. She raised questions about how the amount was determined, whether lawyers or real estate experts were consulted, and whether the process allowed for open bidding. She also mentioned the potential impact on future generations and their access to library services.

Anna, Edinboro: Anna highlighted the limited time and outreach provided to the community to learn about the project. She stressed the strong community support and concern for the library and urged the Council to vote against the project based on the community's wishes.

MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

**September 26, 2023 -
Regular Meeting**

A motion to accept previous meeting minutes was made by Mr. Horton, seconded by Mr. Schauerma, and passed 7-0.

REPORTS OF COUNTY OFFICIALS

County Executive and/or his Designee

Doug Smith, Director of Administration: Mr. Smith expressed his appreciation to the Council for their attentive presence throughout the meeting. He underscored the importance of building upon the decision to invest in the NePTWNE project. He highlighted the project's collaborative nature with Gannon University. He explained that the goal was to create public spaces that catered to schoolchildren, university students, and adults. He emphasized that the project served as a library enhancement, making it more robust and adaptive to modern needs, including digital resources. He anticipated that the future would prioritize electronic data over physical space, positioning Erie as a vital contributor to Great Lakes water research. He rationalized the low rent charged to Gannon University, emphasizing the partnership's nature. He urged the Council to envision the project's long-term potential and the opportunities it offered for growth and positive change. He acknowledged the presence of dissenting voices but reminded the Council to consider the broader community's interests. He expressed disappointment in what he viewed as the spread of misinformation and divisive tactics. He implored the Council to vote in favor of the lease, emphasizing the project's benefits for the community and the necessity of change in response to a declining population and businesses. He addressed the proposed tax increase as a means to counteract the shrinking tax base and stimulate growth. He thanked the Council for their attention and consideration of the project's potential.

Finance Committee - Mrs. Schauerman

Mrs. Schauerman reported that the Finance Committee met on October 12 and submitted to the agenda Old Business: A-C and a New Business: A-H.

Personnel Committee - Mr. Scutella

Mr. Scutella reported that he did not have a report, as there were no items for the Personnel Committee.

Other**OLD BUSINESS**

**Ordinance Number 83,
2023 "2023 General Fund
Budget Waiver of County
Purchasing Code for a
Three Year Contract for
Westlaw Patron Access
Plan for Law Library"
(First Read 9/26/23)
(Finance Committee)**

Ms. Chillcott gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 83, 2023 "2023 General Fund Budget Waiver of County Purchasing Code for a Three-Year Contract for Westlaw Patron Access Plan for Law Library". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Winarski, and carried 7-0.

**Ordinance Number 84,
2023 "Seventeenth 2023
General Fund Budget
Supplemental
Appropriation of \$25,000
for AOPC Reimbursable**

Ms. Chillcott gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 84, 2023 "Seventeenth 2023 General Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$25,000 for AOPC Reimbursable Grant for Courts Security Equipment". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Spagel, and carried 7-0.

Grant for Courts Security Equipment" (First Read 9/26/23) (Finance Committee)

Ordinance Number 85, 2023 "Fifth 2023 Library Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$5,000 for Opioid Settlement Grant" (First Read 9/26/23) (Finance Committee) Ms. Chillcott gave a Second reading of Ordinance Number 85, 2023 "Fifth 2023 Library Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$5,000 for Opioid Settlement Grant". A motion was made by Scutella, seconded by Spagel, and carried 7-0.

Ordinance Number 87, 2023 "Amending Ordinance Number 68, 2023" (First Read 9/26/23) (Finance Committee) Ms. Chillcott gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 87, 2023 "Amending Ordinance Number 68, 2023". A motion was made by Winarski, seconded by Spagel, and carried 7-0.

NEW BUSINESS

A motion to move item B to a second reading was made by Scutella, seconded by Schauerma, and passed 7-0.

Ordinance Number 90, 2023 "2023 General Fund Budget Waiver of County Purchasing Code for a Two Year Contract for Westlaw Subscription for Judges' Library" (Finance Committee) Ms. Chillcott gave a First Reading of Ordinance Number 90, 2023 "2023 General Fund Budget Waiver of County Purchasing Code for a Two-Year Contract for Westlaw Subscription for Judges' Library".

Ordinance Number 91, 2023 "Sixth 2023 Library Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$13,560 for Donations from the Friends of the Library" (Finance Committee) Ms. Chillcott gave a Second Reading of Ordinance Number 91, 2023 "Sixth 2023 Library Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation of \$13,560 for Donations from the Friends of the Library". A motion was made by Schauerma, seconded by Spagel, and carried 7-0.

Ordinance Number 92, 2023 "Approval of Waiver of the Erie County Purchasing Code for the Libraries Integrated Library System (Polaris)" (Finance Committee) Ms. Chillcott gave a First Reading of Ordinance Number 92, 2023 "Approval of Waiver of the Erie County Purchasing Code for the Libraries Integrated Library System (Polaris)".

Resolution Number 32, 2023 "Approval of Mr. Scutella made a motion to amend Resolution Number 32, 2023 to read "Lake Erie Church" as opposed to "Lake Erie Christian Fellowship" due to a

Tentative Lease Agreement with Lake Erie Christian Fellowship for Office Space Located at 1571 West 38th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania for Magisterial District Judge Timothy S. Beveridge" (Finance Committee)	name change. Mr. Horton seconded the motion and it carried 7-0. Ms. Chillcott read Resolution Number 32, 2023, as amended, "Approval of Tentative Lease Agreement with Lake Erie Church for Office Space Located at 1571 West 38th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania for Magisterial District Judge Timothy S. Beveridge". A motion was made by Schauerma, seconded by Scutella, and carried 7-0.
Resolution Number 33, 2023 "Approval of Tentative Lease Agreement with Greene Township for Office Space Located at 9333 Tate Road, Erie, Pennsylvania for Magisterial District Judge Susan Strohmeier" (Finance Committee)	Ms. Chillcott read Resolution Number 33, 2023 "Approval of Tentative Lease Agreement with Greene Township for Office Space Located at 9333 Tate Road, Erie, Pennsylvania for Magisterial District Judge Susan Strohmeier". A motion was made by Schauerma, seconded by Bayle, and carried 7-0.
Resolution Number 34, 2023 "A Resolution of the County of Erie, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Authorizing the Submission of an Application to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development for Funding through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, as Authorized under the Housing and Community Development Act [42 USC 5301 and 24 CFR Part 570], and Further Certifying Compliance with the Requirements of Said Program" (Finance Committee)	Ms. Chillcott read Resolution Number 34, 2023 "A Resolution of the County of Erie, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Authorizing the Submission of an Application to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development for Funding through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, as Authorized under the Housing and Community Development Act [42 USC 5301 and 24 CFR Part 570], and Further Certifying Compliance with the Requirements of Said Program". A motion was made by Schauerma, seconded by Winarski, and carried 7-0.
Resolution Number 35, 2023 "Supporting Operation Green Light for	Ms. Chillcott read Resolution Number 35, 2023 "Supporting Operation Green Light for Veterans". A motion was made by Schauerma, seconded by Spagel, and carried 7-0.

**Veterans" (Finance
Committee)**

**Resolution Number 36,
2023 "Approval of Lease
Agreement between the
County of Erie and Gannon
University for the Gannon
Great Lakes Water
Research Center at the
Blasco Library"**

Mr. Horton expressed his belief that due to the nature of the subject, it should have been treated as an Ordinance rather than a Resolution. He proposed either amending it to be an Ordinance or removing it in its current form. He argued that a Resolution might be more suitable for a letter of support, whereas the present proposal involved approval and specific actions, including expenditure. He deferred to the Solicitor for advice on the matter.

Mr. Talarico clarified that whether something should be done by an Ordinance or Resolution was determined by the Home Rule Charter and Administrative Code. He emphasized that, despite the Resolution's significance, the Council's role was solely to approve the agreement, and that was typically achieved through a Resolution.

Mr. Horton requested that Resolution Number 36 be tabled, aligning with the reasons previously articulated by the public. He emphasized the need for more extensive discussion and inquiries, allowing all stakeholders to participate. He expressed his support for the library and highlighted his involvement in its development from the very beginning.

Mr. Talarico clarified that once a table motion was in progress, there should be no further discussion on the matter.

Mr. Shank questioned whether the time for tabling the matter had already passed considering that the procedures were already set in motion.

Mr. Talarico clarified that it was possible to move to table at any time, but once a motion to table was in place, the discussion would have to come to a halt. He suggested that they vote on the motion to table.

Mr. Horton made a motion to table Resolution Number 36, seconded by Scutella, and failed 2-5. (Bayle, Schauerma, Spagel, Winarski, Shank)

Mr. Scutella expressed his concerns regarding Project NePTWNE. He emphasized the need to take the time to address questions and not rush the decision. He shared an interaction with Michelle Ridge, the former First Lady of Pennsylvania, who had similar unanswered questions regarding the project. Despite her attempts to seek answers, she did not receive a response. He emphasized the passion and dedication of Michelle Ridge to the Erie County Public Library. He indicated that he had concerns about the project's location and the lack of guarantees for access to the library, especially for children who could not afford to travel to other library branches. He raised questions about the financial aspects of the project, including the legality of the arrangements between the county and Gannon University. He declared his opposition to the project as long as it involved the Blasco Library.

Mr. Horton voiced his intention to vote against the lease agreement for Project NePTWNE. He expressed concern about the process and emphasized the importance of thorough questioning. He highlighted that 50 percent of the second legislative district was tax-exempt, underlining the need to determine what would remain tax-exempt and what would not. He mentioned the uncertainty surrounding potential costs associated with other library services. He indicated that his decision to vote no was primarily based on his belief in providing access and giving constituents a voice in the decision-making process. He expressed a desire for more open dialogue and engagement with the community. He suggested that Gannon University and the County Administration should have provided clearer information about the project to the public. He emphasized the importance of learning from past experiences and not rushing into decisions. He mentioned that answers to the questions raised during the meeting would be provided, but expressed concern about the details that needed to be thoroughly addressed before moving forward.

Mr. Bayle reflected on the challenging decisions that the County Council often had to face. He drew a parallel to previous investments like Project Resolve and the collaboration with Penn State Behrend, noting the positive impact they had on the local economy. He highlighted the substantial investment by Kyocera triggered in part by those past decisions. He stressed that those decisions were made after a thorough assessment of the American Rescue Funds and their potential impact. He stated that Project Resolve was presented as evidence that such investments could lead to substantial contributions to the local economy. He acknowledged that the decisions had faced opposition and intense debate but noted that they represented the kind of change that could be transformative for the entire region, not just the County. He addressed the concerns raised about financial support and potential cuts to program services, indicating that Director Pierce had assured that financial support would not be lost and that program services might even expand. He stated his intention to vote in favor of the project.

Mr. Winarski emphasized the significance of the lake in the community. He recognized it as a substantial asset, contributing to recreation, commerce, freshwater resources, and the financial well-being of Erie County. He pointed out that many people visited the lake, spending their tax dollars in the area. He referred to potential cuts in children's services. He stated that at the Caucus meeting, the Library Director assured that those services would not be reduced; and if anything, they might be expanded. He addressed questions about state funding, stating that, according to the Director, it would not be jeopardized. He expressed his support for the location of the project, believing it to be a favorable choice. He saw it as a location that would enhance the library's role as a learning facility and considered it an asset for the near future. He indicated his intention to vote in favor of continuing the project.

Mrs. Schauerma stated that she viewed the project as a "win-win-win," benefiting the library, the citizens, and Gannon, emphasizing the triple advantage of the proposed initiative.

Ms. Chillcott read Resolution Number 36, 2023 "Approval of Lease Agreement between the County of Erie and Gannon University for the Gannon Great Lakes Water Research Center at the Blasco Library". A motion was made by Schauerman, seconded by Spagel, and passed 5-2. (Scutella, Horton)

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Horton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:55pm.

***The next Finance/Personnel Committee Meetings are Thursday, October 26, 2023 at 4pm in room 114A, Erie County Courthouse or via Zoom.**

***The next Regular Meeting of County Council is Tuesday, October 31, 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.**