

January 9, 2014

ERIE COUNTY COUNCIL – Reorganization Meeting

Mr. Douglas Smith, acting Chairman, called to order a Regular Meeting of the Erie County Council at 3:30 p.m. at the Erie County Council Chambers, Erie County Courthouse, Erie, Pennsylvania. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Mrs. Loll recited the following prayer:

“We have just celebrated the Christmas season, may the loving kindness of the season not only enter into our hearts, but live there, so that not even the return to our cares and responsibilities may cause it to leave. May the joy and spirit of Christmas stay with us now and forever. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”.

Roll Call

The County Clerk called the roll:

Members Present: Mr. Breneman  
Mr. DiMattio  
Mr. Fatica  
Dr. Foust  
Mr. Horton  
Mr. Leone  
Mrs. Loll

Members Absent: None.

Also Present: Douglas R. Smith, County Clerk  
Joseph Maloney, Council CPA  
James Sparber, Director of Finance  
Sue Ellen Pasquale, Manager of Accounting  
Thomas Talarico, Solicitor

Hearing of  
The Public

None.

Nominations for  
Chairman

Mr. Smith opened the floor for nominations for Chairman. Mr. Fatica nominated Dr. Foust for Chairman. This was seconded by Mr. Leone. Mr. Leone then moved that the nominations be closed, and this was seconded by Mr. Fatica. The vote was unanimous naming Dr. Foust as Chairman of Erie County Council for 2014.

Nominations  
For Vice Chairman

Dr. Foust then opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chairman. Mrs. Loll nominated Mr. Leone for Vice Chairman. This was seconded by Mr. Fatica. Mr. Fatica then moved for nominations to be closed, and this was seconded by Mr. DiMattio. This nomination carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

Comments by  
Chairman

Dr. Foust congratulated Mr. Leone on his nomination. Dr. Foust then commented, “As we look forward to a new year with two new members and a new County Executive, I don’t think it’s all that inappropriate to look back for a just a moment. This Council, over the last ten years, has been at the forefront of a lot of the changes that have gone on in Erie County. Time and time again, when big projects and big changes have been imminent, this Council has been an active and important partner in implementing that change. Whether it be the Public Safety consolidation, the construction of the new building, the stabilization of the library system, and Pleasant Ridge Manor, and the budget in general, the consolidation or reconfiguration of departments like Accounting, Planning, and in the future, IT, whether it be reassessment and all the different related technologies

that we have acquired and implemented since then to be able to accomplish reassessment twice now, in house, whether it be gaming revenue or the airport runway expansion project, or just recently the Erie Insurance Arena, and in the past the Convention Center and Jerry Uht Ball Park, we have been an active partner in all of those projects and I expect us to continue to be an important partner going into the future. I say that because in times of austerity here in government, it is very difficult to serve as we might wish to serve otherwise. This Council has always sought to keep those who truly need help and services to fund projects that are beneficial to our citizens, but at the same time we have struck an appropriate balance between appropriating resources, not over-extending ourselves, and alienating the taxpayers. This coming year will present some future challenges. We have set up a process to streamline the IT personnel at the courthouse to achieve two important objectives: to make our process here and our employees here much more efficient, and to save the taxpayer resources. We need to work cooperatively with the Administration to ensure that a qualified person is put into place that can lead this important project going forward.

The cutbacks at the state and federal level have been making it more and more difficult on County government each year, and now we are faced with a decision as to how to deliver Public Health services in the future. To me, the benefits of the County Health Department at the direction of local personnel, rather than to the full direction of the state, are important benefits to maintain. We should find a willing partner with Harrisburg to maintain this relationship since it's in their financial interest to do so as well. However, rushing headlong into this process without fully thinking out its ramifications is foolhardy. We have had preliminary discussions up to this point to fold the Health Department into Human Services. In the abstract, I am not opposed to that idea, but we need to make sure that a great degree of independence for Public Health is maintained or we risk pinching pennies at the expense of public health.

Another important issue I would like us to focus on this year, which really all of us who have been here before, have lived and died in many ways so to speak with the issue of Public Safety. Last year, the General Assembly took some strides to be able to restructure the telephone system and the ways to fund the 911 system. We need to make sure we keep our state delegations' feet to the fire to make sure that this project and those restructuring moves are put into place.

This Council has always risen to whatever challenge it is presented and I have no doubt we will do so again in the future. To help lead that effort, I have asked Mr. Fatica and Mrs. Loll to respectively serve as the Chairman and Vice Chair of the Finance Committee, and Mr. DiMattio and Mr. Breneman as the respective chairs of the Personnel Committee. It is also the prerogative of the Chairman of County Council to name appointees to the Retirement Board from Council, and along with Mr. Leone, who has been a long serving member, Mr. Fatica and I will also serve on that Board. Many of the members, including the new members, have indicated to me some preferences for liaison appointments to different Boards, Authorities, and County departments. I don't want to finalize that list until the end of January, 2014, so if there are additional changes to where you would like to serve, let me know within the next week to ten days and we will get that taken care of.

This last year, we said goodbye to two long serving members of this Council. We will miss their leadership and certainly their friendship. As much as I miss them, I equally look forward to working with our new colleagues and reaping the benefits of their expertise and diversity that both Mr. Horton and Mr. Breneman will bring to this Council.

When we opened our chambers a few years ago following the refurbishment, I paraphrased John Adams' remarks at the opening of the White House, hoping that 'May none but honest and wise men and women ever rule within our chamber walls'. That blessing accurately described our past membership and as I look around today, I am reassured those words still apply.

Since the inception of Home Rule and the creation of our current form of government, we have always worked in a cooperative and respectful manner toward each other, regardless of party affiliation or any other difference that may exist between us. The biggest benefactor of that spirit has been the taxpayer who is served by professionals who care about the community as much as

they do. I urge all of my colleagues and the County Executive to continue working in that spirit. Thank you.”.

Dr. Foust then opened the floor for any comments by Council members. Mr. Leone wished the newest members of Council good luck and stated that they will be an asset to Council just as much as previous members were. He invited the newest members to ask questions and he would be glad to help at any time.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Deneé M. Breter, Council Secretary

\*\*\*\*\*