



E·C·G·R·A
ERIE COUNTY GAMING REVENUE AUTHORITY

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT
FOR
MARCH
2024**

February 2024

Meeting with Executive Director
Ongoing Social Media Management
Ongoing Consulting
February Comms

IMPLEMENTED

- 21 Total February posts
- 12 Total graphics created
- Community Facilitates
 - Media advisory and pitching
 - Press Event
 - Press release and distribution
 - Grant recipient graphics

Strategic Marketing Planning with Kate Philips and Executive Director

IN PROGRESS | 2024 Grant Releases and Graphics

- 2023–2024 Annual Report
- Lead Assets
 - Grant recipient graphics
 - Press release and distribution
- Holiday Graphics
- Economic Impact Report rollout
 - Press release
 - PowerPoint presentation
 - Social media graphics

IN PLANNING

- Parks Fields & Trails 2 year report
- ECGRA Playbook
- Roadshow Tours



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEWS*NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS*****

ECGRA Grants Strengthen Local Community Facilities *Invests Nearly \$2 Million In 2024 Community Facilities Grants*

Erie, PA (February 13, 2024) – The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) awarded \$1,649,705.00 for their Building a Better Future — Community Facilities grants, which will be distributed to 19 community facilities across Erie County.

“The critical role that community facilities play in the community and economic development of a region cannot be overstated,” said Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA. “Serving as a hub spot for social, educational, cultural, and recreational activities, these facilities have the power to transform neighborhoods creating vibrant, inclusive spaces with long lasting impacts.”

The Community Facilities grant program is an investment that provides funding for capital improvements, programming, and equipment for publicly accessible community centers. Community centers in Erie County have provided residents with basic health and well-being, job training, mentoring, education, nutrition, and other benefits to a large cross-section of the community.

“ECGRA has provided the Mercy Center for Women and Mercy Anchor Community Center with transformational gifts for both facilities throughout the years,” said Jennie Hagerty, Executive Director, Mercy Center for Women. “To allocate an anchor grant to an

anchor building where funding affords individuals the opportunity to live in an apartment, with wrap-around services, is a victory.

“We are grateful to ECGRA for their partnership and belief in our mission. The ECGRA team took the time to witness the project, provide the funding, and transform a vacant building into a future of hope.”

“The Building a Better Future — Community Facilities grant program is a saving grace to St. Martin Center’s physical structure, programming, and mission,” said David González, MS, CEO, St. Martin Center, Inc. “COVID impacted our ability to manage a costly new roof, and our current funding is allocated where it is needed most – which is to help Erie County families to have what they need to thrive.

“We are incredibly grateful to ECGRA for ensuring that we can be here for years to come!”

Below is a breakdown of the 2024 Building a Better Future — Community Facilities grants approved:

Organization Name	Amount Awarded
Booker T. Washington Center	\$125,000.00
Borough of Edinboro	\$25,000.00
Boys & Girls Club of Erie	\$70,000.00
Community Shelter Services	\$105,694.00
Corry Higher Education Council	\$59,500.00
Eagle’s Nest Leadership Corporation	\$125,000.00
Edinboro Market	\$125,000.00
GECAC	\$13,680.00
Inner-City Neighborhood Art House	\$125,000.00
International Institute of Erie	\$125,000.00
John F. Kennedy Center	\$125,000.00
Journey: Healing Together	\$25,000.00
Martin Luther King Center	\$125,000.00
Mercy Center for Women	\$100,000.00
Mercy Hilltop Center	\$99,000.00

Northwestern Community Youth Center	\$18,500.00
Sarah A. Reed Children's Center	\$86,000.00
St. Martin Center, Inc.	\$75,000.00
YMCA of Corry	\$97,331.00
TOTAL	\$1,649,705.00

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Strategic Planning Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 14, 2024
11:00am – 1:00pm
5240 Knowledge Parkway
Erie, PA 16510

AGENDA

1. Special Events
2. Mission Main Street
3. Community Facility – Union Township: Municipal Building Renovation
4. Harvest 912 – Updated Scope of Work
5. Infinite Erie Neighborhood Revitalization Portfolio
6. Youth Leadership Institute of Erie Restructuring
7. Impact Investment Statement
8. Good of the Order

Fairview Townships reinvests \$3M, looks at dangerous structures

By Maryann Mook
Correspondent

Reinvesting \$3 million, small flow treatment facilities and dangerous structures were a few of the agenda items in front of Fairview Township supervisors' Feb. 1 meeting.

During the secretary-treasurer's report, Michelle Barnes asked for a motion to approve a resolution to open an account with Uninvest. The resolution would authorize the transfer of \$3 million-plus from a Public Funds Money Market Account at First National Bank to an Elite Money Market Account at Uninvest to increase interest income.

Supervisor Mark Gennuso said he learned about Uninvest at the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors' conference last year.

Gennuso said Uninvest is, basically, an investment bank using higher returns of interest than other financial institutions.

The current rate of interest at Uninvest is 5.50%, with an annual percentage yield of

5.64%. The account would be a liquid money market account, which is limited to six transactions per month.

Uninvest will provide the township with a Letter of Credit from the Federal Home Loan Bank for the township's full investment at no cost.

Gennuso also said the township's solicitor said Act 72 Public Funds allows the township to make the investment.

"We owe it to our taxpayers," Gennuso said.

Supervisors Pete Kraus, Justin Pacansky and Gennuso passed the motion to authorize moving the funds from one bank to another.

In other business, supervisors passed a resolution for construction of a small flow treatment facility at 4466 Bear Creek to repair an existing malfunction on-lot system serving a three-bedroom single family residence.

Supervisors also passed a resolution for a Plan Revision for New Land Development - a small flow treatment facility - for Michael and Jackie Bernatowicz, 4466 Bear Creek Road.

Supervisors passed the Small Flow Treatment Facility Agreement between Fairview Township and Michael and Jackie Bernatowicz, 4466 Bear Creek Road.

Supervisors also passed a motion to deem a structure at 580 Dorothy Ave. as an unsafe structure.

Urban Engineers Inc. completed a visual assessment of the property, and the building located at 580 Dorothy Ave. was assessed within the context of Fairview Township Ordinance No. 98-15 for the identification, repair and removal of structures dangerous to the health, safety or general welfare of Fairview Township.

Due to a hole in the roof and no apparent efforts to make repairs, Urban Engineers recommends the structure be classified as dangerous as defined by the township ordinance.

Also, supervisors passed a motion to request Urban Engineers complete a visual assessment of 3711 Haskell Drive within the context of the township Ordinance No. 98-15 for the identification, repair and removal of structures dangerous

to the health, safety or general welfare of the township.

Supervisors passed a Corporate Glass Proposal in the amount of \$3,340.87 to remove the existing storefront in the employees' break room and prepare for a new system. The proposal includes furnishing and installing a new thermally broken storefront framing system with 1-inch tempered insulated safety glass on each end and furnishing and installing a clear anodized aluminum casement window into the center bay of the new storefront system.

The new unit will have an insect protection screen.

Kraus said the break room currently does not have a fresh air flow.

"We want to replace the window with a window that will crank out and allow fresh air," Kraus said. "I think that would be the first step in getting ventilation in there."

Pacansky reported that he is working with Urban Engineers on a Green Light Go grant, which would provide funds for a new traffic signal at the intersection of Manchester Road and Route 20. The grant

requires a 20% match.

Parks and Recreation Director Nate Millet said Winter Fun Day, held Jan. 21, was a big success. This year, participants were asked to donate items for the Eric City Mission. Millet also said that clothing drive was a big success.

Township Engineer Andrew Holland reported the grant from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission has been received. The funds go toward protecting the shoreline and controlling erosion behind the Brugger House at Avonia Bear Park by installing an armor stone revetment. The grant was for \$95,600 and the project cost was \$158,500.

Also, the township was awarded a \$25,000 grant from the Eric County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) toward the cost of constructing pickleball courts at Pleasant Ridge Park. The township will also apply for a grant from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Holland also said he is reviewing development plans for a possible Dollar General Store at the corner of Route 98 and Sterrettania Road.

Erie Times-News

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024 | GOERIE.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Davis blasts Gaming Revenue Authority

Organization has long sought to avoid politics

A. J. Rao
Erie Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

When former state Sen. Jane Earll helped establish the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority in 2008, a single



Davis

word resonated with her as arguably its most essential feature: its autonomy. Earll, a Republican who chaired the Community, Economic & Recreational Development Committee, which oversaw the passage of the state's casino gaming legislation, said ECGRA was purposely designed to

be an independent authority, governed not by elected officials, but a volunteer board.

The thinking was that an independent board, although appointed by Erie County Council, would be the best way to ensure that local share gaming revenue was distributed fairly across the county and not be subject to political whims.

But recently, Erie County Executive

Brenton Davis has chipped away at that philosophy, publicly criticizing ECGRA and threatening to dismantle it.

In recent weeks, Davis has singled out the authority for its operating costs and executive director's salary; rebuked it in the news media as a "slush fund of walking-around money;" and floated the idea of dissolving the board.

See GAMING, Page 4A

Gaming

Continued from Page 1A

altogether, placing all funding decisions squarely in the hands of political leaders.

Davis, who's presided over a 10.9% property tax hike for fiscal year 2024, has argued that the county could do a better job at leveraging ECGRA's funds in pursuit of tax relief and economic development projects.

Denouncing the authority as an enabler of predatory lending, he's requested a detailed report on ECGRA's loan portfolio and years-worth of financial records to ensure its practices are above board.

He's also joined a handful of state lawmakers, who, in a Feb. 1 letter sent by state Sen. Dan Laughlin's office, requested that ECGRA refrain from any long-term obligations pending an audit by the state Auditor General's office.

That includes not approving ECGRA Executive Director Perry Wood's five-year contract extension, which is slated to be voted on Thursday.

ECGRA board members, solicitor say evidence is lacking

Despite the frequency of Davis' public comments, ECGRA Chairman Dale Barney, along with board members Whitey Cleaver, Kelly Hess and Angela Amatangelo, insist the county executive has produced no evidence of wrongdoing.

While Davis stated in a recent Corry Journal report that there are a "lot of legal questions surrounding ECGRA's decision-making" and that "where there's smoke, there's fire," County Public Information Officer Chris Carroll declined to comment on those questions for the Times-News.

In fact, ECGRA Solicitor Tim Wachter informed the board in a Feb. 6 memo obtained by the Times-News that ECGRA's funding approvals have "met both the spirit and letter" of state gaming laws.

ECGRA's finances are also audited by an independent accounting firm every year, the results of which are approved by the board and shared with County Council and Davis's office.

For Earll, who represented Erie

County in the 49th Senatorial district seat and who considers herself an "architect" of ECGRA, Davis' comments have done a "disserve to the credibility of what has been a highly functional organization."

"To just cast aspersions that impugn the credibility of the whole organization is irresponsible," she said. "I know the county executive wants to have more money at his discretion to invest in economic development. But this model has worked wonderfully."

Earll also pushed back on Davis' frequent assertion that gaming revenue was designed to lower taxes, insisting the bulk of gaming revenue already goes toward property tax relief via the state's share. The local share that comes to ECGRA, she said, was "never earmarked for that purpose."

Of the roughly \$10 million of local share gaming revenue generated annually from Presque Isle Downs & Casino, roughly \$5 million goes to the county, \$1 million goes to the Erie Land Bank and about \$4 million goes to ECGRA.

Of ECGRA's share, about 25% goes toward public safety and infrastructure in Summit Township, which houses the casino, and to municipalities contiguous to the casino, and the county, as per a 2010 legal settlement.

The remaining amount, roughly \$3 million, goes towards municipal grants and loans to spur economic and community development across the county.

Earll said these monies should go toward the best return on investment and that she has "no confidence that the political decisionmakers are capable of that."

"Reasonable minds can disagree on how much someone should get paid or what percentage of your budget should go to overhead," Earll said. "But that's why an independent board is there — to make sure that those issues are addressed internally with the mindset of protecting the community's interest. That's the board's job."

Davis has been accused of overreach — and faced roadblocks — before

Could Davis actually dissolve ECGRA? It would be an uphill battle.

He would need the ECGRA board to vote on a resolution to dissolve itself

before passing it onto County Council, a proposition that a majority of both bodies already reject.

Wachter also noted in a memo to the board that state lawmakers, while authorized to request a third-party audit, do not have the authority to force ECGRA to refrain from voting on long-term obligations.

Similar roadblocks have hindered Davis before, especially when accused of overstepping his authority toward boards, commissions and authorities.

In May 2022, Davis requested the resignations of three of the five members of the Erie County Redevelopment Authority Board of Directors, a move that he had described as part of a larger effort to "align the ECRDA board with the strategy of the current Erie County executive."

The request was quickly condemned by the board and considered incongruous with the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, which provides that board members are appointed to a five-year term and will hold office until a successor has been appointed.

Davis eventually backed off his request.

In the fall of 2022, Davis called for the removal of six members of the Erie County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission and demanded the commission's funds be frozen until a full complement of members was seated.

Davis removed the first three members because of what he considered conflicts of interest. However, Commission Solicitor Wachter stated the members had properly recused themselves from the grants process in accordance with the commission's bylaws and the Pennsylvania Ethics Act.

Davis removed the other three members because they continued to move forward with the commission's business despite his request that they pause activities. The three members, who were not appointed by Davis, remained on the commission, arguing that Davis merely sought to frustrate and block the commission's work.

A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@gannett.com. Follow him on X @ETNRao

Erie Times-News

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024 | GOERIE.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

ECGRA undergoes an audit every year

Why is Brenton Davis unsatisfied?

A.J. Rao
Erie Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK



Wood

The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority is no stranger to audits.

The authority, which administers millions of dollars in casino gaming revenue every year to spur economic and community development, undergoes an annual audit by independent accounting firm Maher Duesel.

The audits, which are required by ECGRA's charter and shared each year with

Erie County Council and the office of Erie County Executive Brenton Davis, consistently show that ECGRA fairly and accurately reports its finances, as stated in ECGRA's five most recent audit reports obtained by the Erie Times-News.

But for Davis, who's recently voiced concerns about ECGRA's financial management, the audits haven't been detailed enough.

In recent weeks, the county executive has requested an exhaustive list of financial information from the authority, including, among other things, years

of credit card statements, contracts, financial interest reports, check detail reports and every payment ever made to ECGRA Executive Director Perry Wood.

Davis has stated his goal is accountability, transparency and ensuring taxpayer money is not being wasted. And while many of the materials requested are already checked by Maher Duesel, some information is not.

Here's what Davis is looking for.

Davis seeks details of lending terms

Davis is requesting to see a comprehensive and detailed report on the status of ECGRA's loan portfolio — speci-

cally, the performance of each loan, their delinquency and collectability status.

The latest ECGRA audit indicates the sum of ECGRA's loan agreements — roughly \$9.5 million — and the combined outstanding principal balance — about \$7.9 million — but it doesn't indicate how loan recipients, particularly lending institutions, invest that loan.

For example, ECGRA in 2016 entered into a \$1 million loan agreement with Bridgeway Capital, a Pittsburgh-based community development financial institution.

The CDFI, which also has an Erie

See **AUDIT**, Page 5A

Audit

Continued from Page 1A

office, leverages that funding and issues loans to local businesses, predominantly minority-owned businesses in distressed areas that can't access capital on their own.

The Davis administration has noted that ECGRA's audits don't identify those recipient businesses or the amount that Bridgeway Capital loans out to them and at what interest rate.

"If we're giving gaming revenue to private institutions like Bridgeway and others, we want accountability of that money," Erie County Public Information Officer Chris Carroll said. "We want to know how much has been deployed by Bridgeway and whether Bridgeway has taken money off the top."

Davis reiterated this point during a recent interview with Talk Erie, suggesting ECGRA could be issuing a loan to a lender institution at 0 to 1% interest, and that institution, in turn,

"If we're giving gaming revenue to private institutions like Bridgeway and others, we want accountability of that money. We want to know how much has been deployed by Bridgeway and whether Bridgeway has taken money off the top."

Chris Carroll
Erie County Public Information Officer

could be loaning that money out at "exorbitant rates."

"How is that not viewed as predatory?" Davis asked.

Finance Committee chairman: CDFIs are investment in community

Wood told the Times-News that Maher Duesel doesn't analyze how lending institutions like Bridgeway Capital invest because those decisions are made by the Bridgeway Capital staff.

Wood said ECGRA insulates itself

from those decisions and instead invests in the "established process" of Bridgeway Capital as a longstanding and reputable CDFI, an economic development bank that has the staff, resources and know-how to analyze bank loans and screen recipients.

Indeed, Bridgeway Capital Communications Director Katherine Chamberlain told the Times-News that CDFIs have been a "part of the national financial ecosystem for over 50 years."

Moreover, she said, Bridgeway Capital, like other CDFIs, is certified and regulated by the U.S. Treasury Depart-

ment.

"In its 34-year history, Bridgeway has always repaid 100% of the principal of the loan capital lent to us by public and private sources, plus interest," she stated.

Erie County Councilmember Rock Copeland, who serves as finance committee chairman, further defended CDFIs, telling the Times-News that "these are the kinds of organizations we need in Erie to recognize small businesses and to give them opportunities to grow."

"A (CDFI) is a bank that doesn't operate under the normal parameters of a bank where they're loaning to realize a return on investment on themselves," he said. "They're loaning on a return on investment for the community."

"ECGRA builds communities and builds capacity in our communities to do more," he added.

Wood said ECGRA staff will provide the administration the requested information on the loan recipients.

A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@gannett.com. Follow him on X @BTNRao.

Grants

Continued from Page 1A

power to transform neighborhoods creating vibrant, inclusive spaces with long lasting impacts."

St. Martin Center, Boys & Girls Club of Erie among grant recipients

Grant recipients included the St. Martin Center Inc., which received \$75,000. CEO David Gonzalez said the money will go toward critical repairs of the center's Parade Street facility roof.

"Because of this generous grant, we will be able to continue providing services ... to just about a thousand individuals every month that come through our doors for rent and food or mortgage, financial literacy, etc.," Gonzalez said.

He added that the funding enabled the center to leverage and attract other funds.

"It really was the seed cornerstone funding," he said. "We've been able to obviously put some of our monies in and fundraise the rest. So that we have all the funds for our roof, which comes out to be about \$140,000."

Another grant recipient was the Boys & Girls Club of Erie, which received \$70,000. Director John Popoff said the money will go toward major renovations of the center's swimming pool.

"It has been a longstanding tradition at the club's 129-year history to have a swimming pool on site and to offer an aquatics program to its members," he said. "The aquatics program at the club has taught hundreds of members basic water safety, swim lessons, competitive swimming, and also recreational open swims."

"Through this grant, ECGRA has allowed future club members the opportunity to participate in a club's long-

ERIE COUNTY GAMING REVENUE AUTHORITY

Group awards nearly \$2M to community facilities

A.J. Rao
Erie Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority on Tuesday awarded nearly \$2 million in grants to 19 community facilities across the county.

The \$1.6 million in grant money, part of ECGRA's Building a Better Future program, aims to support capital improvements, programming and equipment at publicly accessible community centers. These centers provide Erie County residents with basic health and well-being, job training, mentoring, educational, nutrition and a host of other benefits, according to an ECGRA news release.

"The critical role that community facilities play in the community and economic development of a region cannot be overstated," ECGRA Executive Director Perry Wood stated in the release.

"Serving as a hub spot for social, educational, cultural and recreational activities, these facilities have the

See GRANTS, Page 3A



The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority awarded \$1.6 million in grants to 19 community facilities. A check presentation, shown here, was held on Feb. 13 at the Mercy Anchor Community Center. A.J. RAO/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

standing aquatics program," he added. "There is a large population of youth without access to a swimming pool, aquatics program, or basic water safety instruction. The club is a unique offering and is the only urban-centered facility which operates solely for the youth of our community."

List of grant recipients

- Booker T. Washington Center: \$125,000
- Borough of Edinboro: \$25,000

- Boys & Girls Club of Erie: \$70,000
- Community Shelter Services: \$105,694
- Corry Higher Education Council: \$59,500
- Eagle's Nest Leadership Corporation: \$125,000
- Edinboro Market: \$125,000
- GECAC: \$13,680
- Inner-City Neighborhood Art House: \$125,000
- International Institute of Erie: \$125,000
- John F. Kennedy Center: \$125,000

- Journey: Healing Together: \$25,000
 - Martin Luther King Center: \$125,000
 - Mercy Center for Women: \$100,000
 - Mercy Hilltop Center: \$99,000
 - Northwestern Community Youth Center: \$18,500
 - Sarah A. Reed Children's Center: \$86,000
 - St. Martin Center, Inc.: \$75,000
 - YMCA of Corry: \$97,331
- A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@gan-nett.com. Follow him on X @ETNRao.

Friday, February 16, 2024



Contributed photo

Hi-Ed, YMCA receive grants

On Feb. 13, Dr. Matthew Platz (second from left), executive director of the Corry Higher Education Council, met with representatives of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) to receive a check for \$59,500 for the Corry Higher Education Council. Platz said the funds were used to cover the cost of a new rubber roof that was installed in September 2023. The YMCA of Corry also received an ECGRA grant. Lisa Cox, associate executive director of the Y, said the \$97,331 grant will be utilized to assist the aging building with infrastructure needs. Of ECGRA's 19 grants, totaling \$1,649,905, \$1,324,374 was granted to entities within the city of Erie, \$156,831 to Corry, \$150,000 to Edinboro and \$18,500 to Albion.

Union City moves forward with Devereaux Park Project

BY MARYANN MOOK
Correspondent

Union City Borough Council approved several agenda items during its meeting on Monday, including an engineering agreement for development at Devereaux Park and advertising a proposed animal ordinance.

Council approved signing an agreement with the EADS Group for engineering services for the Devereaux Park Project, after the borough's solicitor reviews the agreement.

The Devereaux Park Project includes an observation deck on French Creek, placing benches in the park and making part of a sidewalk that is ADA accessible.

The project is part of the borough's French Creek Trail Plan and its Comprehensive Plan. The borough wants to develop a nature trail to enhance the natural resource and maintain the green and sustainable characteristic of French Creek as a community asset.

"It's a project we've been working on for two years,

so we're looking forward to getting it done this year," Borough Manager Cindy Wells said.

Funding for the project comes from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA).

In other business, after discussing fines for violations, Council approved advertising a proposed animal ordinance.

The proposed ordinance sets regulations on animal leash laws, refuse and noise. It also includes a section on fees and penalties and will be known as the Borough of Union City Animal Safety and Sanitation Ordinance. Council is expected to vote on the ordinance during its March 4 meeting.

Council also approved scheduling a public hearing and advertising a proposed amendment to the Zoning Ordinance regarding solar energy panels. The hearing will be held on March 18. Wells said the Union Area Planning Commission and the Erie County Depart-

ment of Planning have given Council their approval for the amendments.

A retroactive motion to change the amount of the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Strategic Plan match was approved. The motion changes the previously approved amount of the match from \$5,500 to \$6,195. The strategic plan focuses on improvements to the city building and plans for the future of borough employees.

A retroactive motion to proceed with engineering for the 2022 and 2023 Community Development Block Grants was approved. The borough is required to pay for engineering for an ADA ramp grant and would be reimbursed for the engineering on the Miles Street sidewalk grant. Council previously agreed to move forward with the engineering even though the project would not start until 2025.

The sidewalk grant would be for the sidewalk on the east side of Miles Street.

◀ See Project, P.2

Project

(Continued from front page)

The resignation of Lindsey Troyer from the Parks and Recreation Commission was accepted, effective immediately, and Samantha Day was appointed to fill the remainder of the term that expires Dec. 31.

Council tabled a motion to accept or reject bids for the Willow Street At-Risk Bridge Project because the bids were too high. Bids

came in at about \$130,000 higher than the amount originally planned.

Council also approved applying for a grant with the DCNR Rivers Conservation and Development if all property and grant requirements are met.

In another matter, Council asked Streets Supervisor Bob Phillips to get prices for various streets for seal coating and paving. The list of streets will be presented at Council's March 4 meeting.

Davis critic accuses county executive of assault

A.J. Rao
Erie Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

An Erie man's contentious relationship with Erie County Executive Brenton Davis has reached a new level.

Jay Breneman, a former Erie County Council chairman, a Pennsylvania State Police instructor and Erie School Board president, has accused Davis of



Breneman

See ASSAULT, Page 2A

Assault

Continued from Page 1A

physically assaulting him during a meeting of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority Board of Directors, held at Penn State Behrend, on the morning of Feb. 15.

Breneman, an ardent critic of Davis, claims the county executive, while exiting the meeting, deliberately elbowed him in the head, causing redness and soreness to his left ear.

"He hit me in my left ear," Breneman told the Erie Times-News. "I didn't really know how to react. I wasn't expecting to get assaulted by someone in that setting."

Breneman, who said he was left "stunned," reported the incident to Behrend campus police on Feb. 16.

Pennsylvania State Police confirmed Monday they are investigating the matter.

County public information officer says no assault occurred

The meeting, which drew several in-person attendees, many of whom sought to defend ECGRA from recent public criticism made by Davis, was also being shown live via Zoom.

ECGRA Executive Director Perry Wood said the meeting was recorded but the screen, during the incident, was not showing the audience at the time.

Wood said Behrend campus police also had a plainclothes officer seated at the meeting at ECGRA's request.



Davis

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024 | ERIE TIMES-NEWS



Attendees are shown at the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority Board of Directors meeting on Feb. 15. J. RAO/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

utive in April, when an Erie woman accused Davis of physically abusing her two minor children. Davis has denied the allegations.

When Breneman returned to his seat and the public comments ended, Davis, who was seated in the front row, stood up to address the board. Upon finishing his remarks, Davis picked up a banker's box full of folders and documents next to his seat and walked toward the exit.

Breneman claims Davis, along the way, passed by his seat and elbowed him in the head.

Former ECGRA Chairman Dave Sample, who was seated next to Breneman, said he witnessed the incident.

"Jay and I were sitting side-by-side in the last row, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw (Davis) throw an elbow into the side of Jay's head," Sample said. "There was absolutely no reason for (Davis) to be that close to Jay. It was blatant."

Breneman, 41, an Army veteran who's also been dealing with the effects of long COVID, said he continues to have neck problems from his military service and sensitivity on his head due to his illness. He said the incident left the side of his head sore for days.

As the curator of a satirical Facebook page and website that have lampooned Davis stretching back to his campaign in 2021, Breneman said he expected the county executive to be angry at him but added he "didn't expect a physical assault."

"Who would expect a public official to do this?" he said. "I think the fact that he would respond to an abuse allegation with physical abuse is very telling of who he is."

A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@erietimes.com. Follow him on X @ETNRao.

Witness says incident was 'blatant'

Breneman, who attended the meeting at 5240 Knowledge Parkway on the Behrend campus, said he was there as a member of the public and was seated by the aisle in the last row of the public seating area.

Breneman, who previously served as County Council liaison to ECGRA, spoke during the public comments portion of the meeting, defending ECGRA from what he described as Davis' "bullying" tactics.

He concluded his remarks by calling Davis a "child abuser," a reference to allegations made against the county executive.

The Erie Times-News reached out to Behrend campus police but could not confirm whether the officer witnessed the incident.

Erie County Public Information Officer Chris Carroll sent the following statement to the Times-News on Monday:

"We have no comment at this time due to a pending investigation, except to say the alleged incident never occurred in any way, shape or form. The meeting was public, on camera, live on Zoom, with a police presence in the room. We're confident that this investigation will prove this allegation false."