



**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT
FOR
OCTOBER
2022**

PP

August 2022

Meeting with Executive Director

Ongoing Social Media Management

Ongoing Consulting

August Comms

IMPLEMENTED

- 4 Total August posts
- 4 Total graphics created
- Rural Listening Session Report
- Edinboro Event
 - Media Advisory, distribution, and pitching
 - Press Release and distribution

IN PROGRESS | 2022 Grant Releases and Graphics

- Event planning
- Holiday Graphics

IN PLANNING

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

Perry Wood

From: Abby Harris <harris@parkerphilips.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 13, 2022 10:05 AM
To: Kate Philips
Subject: NEWS: ECGRA Releases Rural Listening Report; Showcases Grant Money at Work in Edinboro
Attachments: ecgra-listening-session-report-2022-compressed.pdf



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ECGRA Releases Rural Listening Report; Showcases Grant Money at Work in Edinboro

Report Reveals Encouraging Collaboration, Creativity Across Erie County

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (September 13, 2022) — Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) reported on its findings from a summerlong “Rural Listening Tour” at an event at Edinboro Borough Building. In the report, ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success.

“As a catalyst for economic and community progress, ECGRA is dedicated to constant communication and continual analysis of the projects happening across Erie County,” said Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA. “Through a productive series of rural listening sessions, we were able to learn about creative connections to support regrowth and barriers to putting plans into action.”

ECGRA also announced an investment in a unique Edinboro collaboration leveraging local share gaming dollars to enhance the region. The Mission Main Street and Multi-Municipal Collaboration grants are working to advance the Borough of Edinboro and Washington Township’s economic and community development collaboration.

Seven listening sessions were organized directly with grant recipients, municipal and civic leaders as well as industry and business owners designed to:

- a) provide the respective community with a summary of local share gaming revenue investments,
- b) conduct outreach and advise decisionmakers on the deployment of Building a Better Future (BBF) funding also known as ARPA funds; and,
- c) solicit hyperlocal feedback from the respective community concerning ongoing projects of priority, shovel ready projects and aspirational projects.

The listening sessions unveiled a vast civic infrastructure fueled through a collective will to understand and access available ECGRA funding to advance the improvement of rural communities.

“We experienced passion and energy for main street revitalization, neighborhood investments, broadband deployment, park and trail improvements, sports complexes, historical preservation, and small business development,” said Dr. Perry Wood. “We explored and learned what works, what’s possible, and what’s necessary to move the needle on unfinished initiatives.”

Members of County Council, a liaison to the County Executive’s Office, a member of the Planning Department, and the Erie Community Foundation were invited to attend the sessions held in North East, Union City, Girard & Lake City, Corry, Millcreek, Edinboro & McKean, and Fairview.

Recommendations from the report are aimed at connecting rural communities by advancing necessary improvements. ECGRA is invested in the region’s municipalities including Edinboro, McKean, and Washington Township, and these townships have shown their investment in the region.

At the event, the Borough of Edinboro and Washington Township were awarded \$150,000 for their Mission Main Street grant program and \$50,000 in the Multi-Municipal Collaboration grant program for a total of \$200,000 towards the borough and township’s economic and community development goals.

To learn more and read the report, visit: www.ecgra.org.

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From: Mary Wassell <wassell@parkerphilips.com>
Sent: Friday, September 23, 2022 3:47 PM
Cc: Kate Philips
Subject: ADVISORY: ECGRA to Continue Showcasing Rural Listening Report, Announces Investment in Union City



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ECGRA to Continue Showcasing Rural Listening Report, Announces Investment in Union City

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA — Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) will host the second in a series of events reporting on its findings from a summerlong “Rural Listening Tour”. ECGRA will also announce an investment in Union City leveraging local share gaming dollars and ARPA funds to enhance the region on Tuesday, September 27th at 10:00am at the DAI Salon.

In the report ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success. The Renaissance Block and Mission Main Streets grants are working to advance Union City’s economic and community development goals.

WHAT: and	Union City Findings from Rural Listening Report, Renaissance Block Mission Main Streets Grants Announcement
WHO:	Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA Charlie Bayle, County Council Natalie Wolmoth, Mayor, Borough of Union City Cindy Wells, Borough Manager, Borough of Union City
WHEN:	Tuesday, September 27 th
TIME:	10:00am
WHERE:	DAI Salon 28 South Main Street



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ECGRA Continues Showcasing Rural Listening Report; Grant Money at Work in Union City

Report Reveals Encouraging Collaboration, Creativity Across Erie County

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (September 27, 2022) — Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) reported on its findings from a summerlong “Rural Listening Tour” at an event at DAI Salon in Union City. In the report, ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success.

“By listening to the people who make up Erie’s future, ECGRA is continuing to move the needle to connect Erie County,” said Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA. “ECGRA is ensuring our impact investments work to support all municipalities, boroughs, and townships local economic and community development goals.”

ECGRA also announced an investment in Union City leveraging local share gaming dollars to enhance the region. The Renaissance Block and Mission Main Streets grants are working to advance Union City’s economic and community development goals grants as part of the Building a Better Future Transformational Grant funding.

“We first received Renaissance Grant funds in 2018, and between 2018–2021 we have received \$210,000 and generated over \$503,000 in improvements,” said Cindy Wells, Borough Manager, Borough of Union City. “This is a very large step forward in fighting blight, and the improvements are noticeable as you drive through those neighborhoods.”

“The Borough will continue to promote this program and continue the fight against blighted properties — starting by contacting more property owners, so more projects can be completed.”

Seven listening sessions were organized directly with grant recipients, municipal and civic leaders as well as industry and business owners designed to:

- a) provide the respective community with a summary of local share gaming revenue investments,
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Recommendations from the report are aimed at connecting rural communities by advancing necessary improvements. ECGRA is invested in the region's municipalities including Union City, and this borough continues to show their investment in the region.

At the event, the Borough of Union City were awarded \$150,000 for their Mission Main Street grant program and \$100,000 in the Renaissance Block grant program for a total of \$250,000 towards the borough and township's economic and community development goals.

To learn more and read the report, visit: www.ecgra.org.

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ECGRA Continues Showcasing Rural Listening Report; Grant Money at Work in Girard

Report Reveals Encouraging Collaboration, Creativity Across Erie County

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (October 4, 2022) — Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) reported on its findings from a summerlong “Rural Listening Tour” at an event at the Crick Coffee House and Eatery in Girard. In the report, ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success.

“Through our strategic listening tours, we experienced passion and a commitment to see main street revitalization and neighborhood investments through to the finish line,” said Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA. “Taking what we learned and with ARPA funding, ECGRA could successfully apply it and continue to move the needle on these unfinished initiatives — benefitting Erie County for all residents.”

ECGRA also announced an investment in Girard leveraging local share gaming dollars to enhance the region. The Mission Main Streets grant is working to advance Girard’s economic and community development goals grants as part of the Building a Better Future Transformational Grant funding.

Seven listening sessions were organized directly with grant recipients, municipal and civic leaders as well as industry and business owners designed to:

- a) provide the respective community with a summary of local share gaming revenue investments,
- b) conduct outreach and advise decisionmakers on the deployment of Building a Better Future (BBF) funding also known as ARPA funds; and,
- c) solicit hyperlocal feedback from the respective community concerning ongoing projects of priority, shovel ready projects and aspirational projects.

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Recommendations from the report are aimed at connecting rural communities by advancing necessary improvements. ECGRA is invested in the region's municipalities including Girard, and this borough continues to show their investment in the region.

At the event, the Borough of Girard was awarded \$150,000 for their Mission Main Street grant program towards the borough's economic and community development goals.

To learn more and read the report, visit: www.ecgra.org.

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Tammi Michali

From: Mary Wassell <wassell@parkerphilips.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 12, 2022 3:07 PM
Cc: Kate Philips
Subject: ADVISORY: The Erie Action Team to Introduce Infinite Erie Logo, Brand, Vision

*****ADVISORY***ADVISORY***ADVISORY***ADVISORY***ADVISORY*****

The Erie Action Team to Introduce Infinite Erie Logo, Brand, Vision

Will Be Responsible for Implementing Investment Playbook

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (October 12, 2022) — The Erie Action Team, formerly known as the steering committee, will introduce the Infinite Erie brand and vision at Mayor Schember's press conference on Thursday, October 13th at 10:00am at Erie City Hall.

WHAT: Infinite Erie, formerly Erie's Inclusive Growth, to be introduced and implementation plans for investment playbook unveiled

WHO: City of Erie Mayor Joe Schember
Kim Thomas, Director, Infinite Erie
Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA
Curtis Jones, Director of Government Affairs, Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership
Gary Lee, Chief Administrative Officer, Diverse Erie

WHEN: October 13th, 2022

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

WHERE: Erie City Hall, City Council Chambers
626 State Street
Suite 104
Erie, PA 16501

###

Tammi Michali

From: Mary Wassell <wassell@parkerphilips.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 13, 2022 11:25 AM
Cc: Kate Philips
Subject: RELEASE: Infinite Erie to Implement Investment Playbook
Attachments: INFINITE ERIE.pptx



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Infinite Erie to Implement Investment Playbook

The Erie Action Team Presents Infinite Erie Brand, Vision, and Next Steps

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (October 13, 2022) – The Erie Action Team, acting as the steering committee for the Investment Playbook, unveiled the Infinite Erie brand and vision at a press conference today. Infinite Erie is responsible for implementing Erie’s Investment Playbook by positioning Erie to attract and secure more public and private sector funding than like-size regions.

“With the mass influx of federal and state funds available for cities and counties across the country, we are presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity — and Erie is ready to meet this moment through Infinite Erie,” said Kim Thomas, Director, Infinite Erie. “Infinite Erie is the key that unlocks the door to infinite possibilities, infinite growth, and infinite hope for Erie County.

Infinite Erie will transcend politics to transform place. Through the collaboration and coordination of inclusive growth strategies, the Erie Action Team will put the Infinite Erie plans into action to serve as a catalyst for equitable and inclusive growth and deliver transformative change.

“When we are unified, great things can be accomplished — and Infinite Erie is proof of that,” said Karen Bilowith, President & CEO, Erie Community Foundation and Action Team Chair. “By bringing together Erie County’s key economic and community development stakeholders and incorporating the recommendations from various community plans, we will ensure Erie is in the right position to seize this unique and impactful opportunity.”

"The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively-impacted our community. There are enormous opportunities available at the state and federal level to try to mitigate the harm that was caused. This playbook is our to-do list for pursuing that funding to best serve our Erie residents," said Perry Wood, Executive Director, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA). "The Erie Action Team is ready to take Infinite Erie to the next level to enact real change that will make Erie County the best place to live, work, and play."

"By having community leaders on the same page and agreeing to follow a road map for strategically pursuing funding opportunities, the creation of this strong investment playbook catapults Erie well ahead of other municipalities," said Erie Mayor Joe Schember. "This playbook, which was the result of extensive community feedback and input into community and neighborhood plans, has identified shovel-ready projects for which there exist state and federal funding opportunities. As we move forward with identifying, applying for, and securing grants, and as additional projects become shovel-ready, this playbook will continue to evolve."

"While Erie, Pennsylvania was already ahead of the game by having a strong investment playbook in place, Infinite Erie will help us better compete with other cities across the country," said Christina Marsh, chief diversity and community development officer at Erie Insurance. "Through our shared vision and mission, we're working together now with a sense of urgency to find and secure federal dollars and helping local organizations access the resources they need to get work done across our community."

Infinite Erie is powered by the *Erie Action Team*, comprised of the organizations and people responsible for crafting Erie's Investment Playbook. The team consists of eight entities leading economic and community development in Erie County, including: Erie County, City of Erie, Erie Community Foundation, Jefferson Educational Society, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, Erie Insurance, Diverse Erie, and the Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership.

EDITORS NOTE: Attached is an Infinite Erie PowerPoint that includes more information and visuals.

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ECGRA to Continue Showcasing Rural Listening Report, Announces Investment in North East

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA — Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) will host the fourth and final in a series of events reporting on its findings from a summerlong “Rural Listening Tour”. ECGRA will also announce an investment in the Borough of North East leveraging local share gaming dollars and ARPA funds to enhance the region on Tuesday, October 18th at 10:00am outside at 1-9 East Main Street.

In the report ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success. The Mission Main Street grants are working to advance North East’s economic and community development goals.

WHAT: North East Findings from Rural Listening Report, Multi-Municipal Collaboration and Mission Main Street Grant Announcements
WHO: Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA
Charlene Kerr, Chairwoman, Downtown North East
Patrick Gehrlein, Borough Manager, North East Borough
WHEN: Tuesday, October 18th
TIME: 10:00am
WHERE: 1-9 East Main Street (Corner of Route 89 and 20)
North East, PA 16428

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ECGRA Continues Showcasing Rural Listening Report; Grant Money at Work in North East

Report Reveals Encouraging Collaboration, Creativity Across Erie County

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (October 18, 2022) — Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) reported on its findings from a summerlong “Rural Listening Tour” at an event in North East. In the report, ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success.

“As we wrap up reporting on the findings from our summerlong Rural Listening Tours, one thing remains abundantly clear, more resources are needed to take these impactful projects over the finish line.” said Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA.

ECGRA also announced an investment in North East leveraging local share gaming dollars to enhance the region. The Multi-Municipal Collaboration and Mission Main Street grants are working to advance North East’s economic and community development goals grants as part of the Building a Better Future Transformational Grant funding.

Seven listening sessions were organized directly with grant recipients, municipal and civic leaders as well as industry and business owners designed to:

- a) provide the respective community with a summary of local share gaming revenue investments,
- b) conduct outreach and advise decisionmakers on the deployment of Building a Better Future (BBF) funding also known as ARPA funds; and,

c) solicit hyperlocal feedback from the respective community concerning ongoing projects of priority, shovel ready projects and aspirational projects.

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Members of County Council, a liaison to the County Executive's Office, a member of the Planning Department, and the Erie Community Foundation were invited to attend the sessions held in North East, Union City, Girard & Lake City, Corry, Millcreek, Edinboro & McKean, and Fairview.

Recommendations from the report are aimed at connecting rural communities by advancing necessary improvements. ECGRA is invested in the region's municipalities including North East, and this borough continues to show their investment in the region.

At the event, Downtown North East was awarded \$175,000 for their Mission Main Street grant program and the Borough of North East was awarded \$100,000 in the Multi-Municipal Collaboration grant program for a total of \$275,000 towards North East's economic and community development goals.

To learn more and read the report, visit: www.ecgra.org.

###

Tom Maggio
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Rd Suite 201
Erie PA 16510

Dear Tom —

On behalf of myself, CAFE, and our incredible staff and volunteers, thank you for supporting CelebrateErie 2022!

This was our comeback year and we wanted to truly showcase the businesses, performers, artists, and people that are unique to the Erie region. Your generous contribution helped make that vision a reality, and for that we are grateful.

Thousands of attendees came downtown for the three-day weekend and initial feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Because of your support, we were able to make our signature hometown event not just a street festival, but a true celebration of all things Erie.

We hope you'll join us again to support CelebrateErie 2023. Our team will be in touch soon to discuss opportunities to collaborate in the future, but don't be afraid to reach out with new ideas. We couldn't celebrate Erie without you!

Sincerely,



Joe Schember
Mayor
City of Erie

Thanks much, Tom!



909 East 35th Street · Erie, PA 16504 · 814.456-5300 / 814-456-9599
lefanfare@verizon.net or ErieOma@verizon.net

October 7, 2022

Dear Friends,

First let me start with a sincere **THANK YOU** for your generous contribution to our 2022 26th Annual German Heritage Festival! We were very happy to have received such great corporate support from so many businesses and advertisers.

In this day when many companies are dropping aid for such programs as ours, it is indeed gratifying to know that **YOU** value what we do and have continued to support us! **On behalf of the entire committee, we are enclosing a copy of your ad and we hope you are pleased with it.**

This year's Festival was held on the Labor Day weekend and with pleasant weather, it drew very nice crowds. We know in all that 4,500 or so attendees really enjoyed the great family fun in the old world German tradition that our Fest has become noted for.

We hope you are pleased with our progress and as always, if there is anything we can do for you, please do not hesitate to call us! Again we value your support and we hope you plan on staying with us as we move into next year and our 27th Annual German Heritage Festival!

Sincerely,

The German Heritage Festival Committee



Lake Erie Fanfare

DRUM CORPS COMPETITION

909 East 35th Street

Erie, PA 16504-1827

Fax & Phone (814) 456-5300

lefanfare@verizon.net

October 14, 2022

Dear Friends,

First let me start with a sincere **THANK YOU** for your generous contribution to our 2022 program book which celebrated our 39th year of hosting these DCI events! We were very happy to have received such great corporate support from so many businesses and advertisers. **On behalf of the entire committee, I am enclosing a copy of the program book ad and we hope you are pleased with it.**

While we were set for a nice re-start to our drum corps activities, our Erie weather suddenly turned the entire event upside down! A fast moving and severe lightning storm descended right as the National Anthem was being performed and within minutes, everyone ran for cover!

Using radar technology, the coordinators phone had accurate locations on the lightning strikes and these lasted until 10:30 PM before the all clear was given. By then, the crowd had left and the groups had to begin traveling for the last evening run into Indianapolis for the World Championships. While the long awaited "return" show couldn't happen, most understood the safety concerns and so we wait until next year!

Even with these shortcomings, we hope you are pleased with our efforts for the musical youth and as always, if there is anything we can do for you, please do not hesitate to call us! We truly value your support and we hope you plan on staying with us as we move into next year and our 40th Anniversary Show!

Sincerely,

Ray Luniewski, Co-Chmn.

WWW.LEREGIMENT.ORG

**THE
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GAMES**



AM Keynote:
Andrew Davis, BoardSource



PM Keynote:
Christal Cherry, The Board Pro



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**Register for the 21st annual Keystone Nonprofit
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- **NEW LOCATION FOR 2022!** We'll see you at the Ambassador Banquet & Conference Center in Erie, PA
- Deep dive into a topic of your choice on Monday, October 24th
- Build your own agenda and network with like-minded professionals on Tuesday, October 25th
- **Register by Friday, October 14th at TheKeyCon.org**

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New and ongoing initiatives on Union City's project list

BY STEVE BISHOP
Contributing writer

Some projects have been completed, others are ongoing and important new initiatives populate the "project update" list on Union City Borough's website.

The list, at unioncitypa.us/ progress, is designed to keep Union City's citizens apprised, and provides a community investment scoreboard of sorts that since 2009 now totals more than \$5.5 million.

"My reaction is definitely excitement," said Borough Council President Riley Cross about the constantly evolving initiatives. "To see the amount of people and money investing their time into our town is a great indi-

cation of what's to come for our future as well."

The most recent changes to the project list include closing out three recent projects, although each of them is actually moving into new phases with the acquisition of additional funding by Borough Manager Cindy Wells.

One is completion of more than \$200,000 in residential property improvements, with costs shared by those property owners and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority's (ECGRA) "Renaissance" program. While that round of funding has been completely utilized, an additional round of \$100,000 in residential matching grants from ECGRA is being made available for the remainder of 2022 and 2023.

A second closed-out project is a \$65,000 feasibility study to construct a "French Creek Trail" through the borough, from Devereaux Park along Bridge Street to the American Legion Little League complex at the north end of First Avenue.

With the study completed, work to construct the first phase of the trail and related enhancements is anticipated in 2023. Just this week, the borough was awarded a \$91,240 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for that work, and is awaiting word on an approximate \$202,000 grant application to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

◀ See List, P.3

List

(Continued from front page)

fully funded, that project will pedestrian walkways that will ally become part of the larger Creek Trail initiative, a gazebo handicap-accessible observation deck on French Creek.

A third closed-out project is a assessment of the City Building, houses the borough office and department, for handicapped ability throughout the building, tential second-floor uses. The already has \$132,750 in hand variety of sources to undertake phase of that work in 2023.

ing projects outlined on the include:

is II and III of the downtown "y" initiative, which includes the of the former Union City Dining the site; aesthetic improvements the front and side facades of ining building; construction of ard at the former diner site; reard replacement of the stairs to ing lot at the rear of the former e; and redeveloping the bor-Industrial Park" across West et from the diner site.

projects - undertaken in con-with community development

nonprofit Union City Pride -- are expected to be largely completed this year with \$421,164 in funding appropriated by the state, ECGRA, the Union City Community Foundation, MFG Corp. of Union City and Erie County through the Erie County Redevelopment Authority.

- Sidewalk repairs and replacement along certain corridors within the borough in accordance with an earlier completed "Active Transportation Plan." That plan is designed to facilitate walking and outdoor activity, with the locations of those sidewalk improvements to be determined and announced in the future.

- Improvements to the borough's Southwest Park at the corner of Washington and Atlantic streets totaling \$100,000. The borough this week was awarded a \$65,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and has the required matching funds totaling \$35,000 already in place from ECGRA, the Union City Community Foundation, and the borough.

That work, to include a parking area, pedestrian walkways and installation of new playground equipment, is expected to take place in 2023.

- A significant sidewalk improvement project through PennDOT that targets walking routes to Union City Middle-High School on Concord, Bridge

and Willow streets. That project is anticipated to take place in late 2023 or early 2024, funded with \$875,000 in PennDOT funds and \$87,500 in local matching funds.

"It's been exciting to see all that we have been able to accomplish in a short amount of time," Wells said. "These are projects that people are able to notice."

"The projects that we have pending are very large and will provide the community some major improvements that wouldn't be possible without the grant funding," she added.

Riley Cross said the wide variety of work is noteworthy.

"I think tackling projects on a wide range goes to show the investment is being made to the town as a whole and not just one place," he said. "I believe as more residents see this, it will get them involved, and excited as well."

Cross said it can be difficult to convince residents of any community that positive change is occurring, and that local government and organizations can actually make a difference.

"There will always be people that have a better idea, think we are focusing on the wrong things, or wasting money," he said. "But I think as more people get involved, and as more projects get completed, they will see just how much has been accomplished from where we were just a couple years ago."

Davis' pledge of relief funds for project draws scrutiny

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

Erie County Executive Brenton Davis has pledged millions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief to a single manufacturing center he believes will spark greater investment in the region.

But in order to make good on that pledge, Davis wants to divert funds from a transformative grants program that has been supporting hard-hit communities for a year.



Davis

Erie County Council members Mary Rennie, Andre Horton and Terry Scutella say the pledge violates the spirit of the American Rescue Plan, which was to provide immediate help to those most affected by the pandemic.

See PROJECT RESOLVE, Page 13A

Project RESOLVE

Continued from Page 1A

They also say Davis made the pledge unilaterally, with no public hearings, no public votes and no regard for the process and procedures of county government.

"It's not even a rubber stamp, it's a rollover," Rennie said in regard to Davis' approach to council.

At a Sept. 15 meeting, Davis officials asked council to support a resolution to green-light the use of American Rescue Plan funds toward the proposed center.

The resolution was tabled after Rennie, Horton and Scutella said the administration was merely seeking council support after already committing funds to the project.

On Thursday, the finance committee agreed by a 4-3 straw vote to add the resolution to the regular council meeting agenda for Oct. 4 as a first read. Rennie, Horton and Scutella, all Democrats, were the nay votes.

Davis eyes Penn State Behrend project

The pledge in question involves \$5 million in American Rescue Plan money that Davis wants to go toward the development of a manufacturing and engineering center at Penn State Behrend's Knowledge Park.

The \$5 million makes up a local match for a state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant of \$8 million. If awarded, the RACP grant — on top of the local matches from the county and Penn State University — could provide the project roughly \$16 million.

The center is the first phase of Project RESOLVE and is one of 15 projects in Erie County competing for a RACP grant. It's the only one that Davis is supporting with American Rescue Plan funds.

In a statement, Davis said the new center would establish the region as a "global leader in battery research and testing," and make the area a magnet for employment and investment, especially at the Wabtec Corp. plant in Lawrence Park Township.

He said using the \$5 million was a "logical approach" since the money was part of an existing budget line, Transformative Grants, in the 2022 American Rescue Plan budget.

Rennie says Davis is "playing favorites" among the potential RACP contenders and has committed funds to the center — before seeking council approval — to bolster its chances of getting the RACP award.

Funds were to help community projects

Speaking with the Times-News, Rennie said the Transformative Grants budget line was intended for the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, which received the first round of this funding in 2021 and has a grant process in place to support critical community projects.

Davis officials said the money was fair game because the 2022 American Rescue Plan budget did not specify the Gaming Revenue Authority as the recipient of the funds.

"If ECGRA doesn't have control over it, then that doesn't automatically mean the county executive has control over it," Rennie said. "In other words, if we didn't name a fiscal agent, all that means is council needs to name a fiscal agent for that money. The county executive does not have complete authority to go in any line of the budget and just raid it for his own purposes."

Perry Wood, executive director of the Gaming Revenue Authority, said he expected to receive the \$5 million and had conducted "organized rural listening sessions" in the summer to determine what projects needed support.

"It would be a shame to see that funding directed away from transformational grants to communities like Millcreek, Girard, Corry, North East and Union City," Wood told the Times-News. "The County Council has been put into a very difficult position being asked to choose between their constituents and a single project."

Wood said the listening sessions showed an "urgent need for investment" in dozens of projects, from water lines and broadband in Girard to sewer service expansion throughout the borough and township of North East.

"It's projects like those that would be left unfulfilled," he said.

While Rennie, Horton and Scutella each voiced their support for Project RESOLVE, they questioned whether American Rescue Plan funds are the appropriate funding source.

"I think the money can be used for basically what it was meant to be used for," Scutella said. "There's still people and other organizations that are hurting and I think it would be better to use it for them."

Council solicitor says Davis violated charter

At a Sept. 15 finance meeting, County Council Solicitor Tom Talarico said Davis had "usurped" the council's authority by pledging the funds without approval.

He also said if council approved the resolution to support the use of American Rescue Plan funds, it would be "breaking the law every bit as much as the county executive."

"He, on his own, usurped the County Council's authority and pretended that he had the authority to get involved and influence Wabtec, Behrend, RACP, the government — all giving them the impression that that money has been appropriated already," Talarico said of Davis. "He has no authority to do that. He is completely out of line."

Horton questioned why the council's three-person ad hoc committee — formed in July to recommend changes to the 2022 American Rescue Plan budget — had not reported back to council on the matter.

County Information Officer Chris Carroll, in an email to the Times-News, said Davis had met with the ad hoc committee on multiple occasions and the committee had "indicated support of this commitment to Project Resolve."

However, ad hoc committee members Brian Shank and Jim Winarski said they were unclear about any such commitment.

"To the best of my recollection — no," said Shank of the ad hoc committee backing the \$5 million pledge. Winarski said, "I would say people liked the idea but

I don't know if there was ever any commitments."

Schauerman, the third member of the ad hoc committee, could not be reached for comment.

Rennie stressed that if the resolution passes, then County Council is "rolling over" for the county executive. If it fails, the county will be "on the hook" to find funds elsewhere, she added.

Penn State Behrend, Davis deny fund pledge

In an emailed statement to the Times-News this past Tuesday, Robb Frederick, Penn State Behrend's assistant director of news and information, said no one has pledged funds toward Project RESOLVE.

"No officials, including the current county executive, have at any point made any promises of funding for this project," Frederick said. "It has always been our understanding that any allocation of local funding for the center would require the approval of County Council. We recognize and respect the council's role in this process."

This past Thursday, Davis told council members that any allegations that he committed funds or made any deals with Penn State Behrend on Project RESOLVE were "fictitious."

However, Davis and his director of administration, Doug Smith, have acknowledged in a statement and at a council meeting, respectively, that \$5 million in American Rescue Plans was "pledged" to the project.

Documents obtained by a Right-to-Know request from the Times-News also indicate that Davis on Aug. 19 emailed the Erie County General Authority — which submitted the RACP application on the county's behalf — and wrote that "Erie County will invest \$5 million in Project Resolve from our ARPA funds" and that "PSU has agreed to match the \$5 million," and that these funds were "agreed upon."

The RACP grant application, submitted on Aug. 19, indicates a local match of \$8.4 million — which includes the \$5 million investment.

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Bid to re-budget rescue funds fails

Council blasts the lack of detail in Davis' plan

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

Since taking office in January, Erie County Executive Brenton Davis has sought to repeal and replace a massive COVID-19 relief plan approved by his predecessor.

Rescue

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seek any kind of community partners when we don't have a serious commitment," he said.

While council unanimously agreed to not move the budget forward and to have more work sessions, the stand-off between Davis and Democrats revealed what has been — and what will be — a central question surrounding the use of Rescue Plan funds in the county: Should the money be used on long-term and potentially lucrative business projects or serve the immediate needs of those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Davis pushes 'generalities,' Democrats want specifics

The \$26 million represents the second half of a \$52-million pot of Rescue Plan funds awarded to the county. Both halves were unanimously budgeted by the former County Council in 2021 and approved by then-Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper.

Davis has argued the second half was hastily budgeted as Dahlkemper prepared to leave office and that his administration should have an opportunity to revise it. He's also said the U.S. Treasury released new, more expansive guidelines in April and allow for Rescue Plan funds to be used more broadly, and potentially toward his economic development priorities.

In July, council formed the ad hoc committee to study these guidelines and recommend any budget changes to council. The committee met four times, each time with Davis in his office, according to a statement from the administration and Shank.

The proposed budget Thursday was considered a potential ordinance for the Oct. 4 regular council meeting, as requested by the administration.

But council members, including Horton, said this was the first time the full council saw the budget.

"The seven of us collectively have not had time to digest or even peruse this," he said.

Rennie said the proposal was severely lacking details that were present during the budgeting of the first round of Rescue Plan funds in 2021. She insisted the administration provide supplementary documentation and exhibits that break down every bureau and program receiving funds, as well as descriptions and plans of action for each.

"When we sign our names to these

On Thursday, his first serious attempt at a replacement fell short.

In a contentious two-hour work session, Davis clashed with members of Erie County Council over his proposed re-budgeting of \$26.2 million in American Rescue Plan money awarded to the county.

Davis, whose administration developed the new budget with a three-person ad hoc committee, consisting of council members Brian Shank and Ellen Schauermaier, both fellow Republicans,

and Jim Winarski, a Democrat, said the proposal was merely a "framework," designed for council to agree on areas of investment as opposed to specifics on who exactly will get the money.

Council members Mary Rennie and Andre Horton, both Democrats, blasted the lack of detail and said they wouldn't commit to any budget without more information. They also said Davis was more keen to prop up new industries as opposed to serving hard-hit minority communities.

"The American Rescue Plan was intended for those most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic," Horton said, "and it was also supposed to help those demographics who've been historically impacted — and that would be Black and brown people."

Davis accused Democrats of grandstanding and using stall tactics to delay his efforts to build partnerships.

"I don't know how we can seriously

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Erie County Executive Brenton Davis accused Democrats of grandstanding and using stall tactics to delay his efforts to build partnerships. Council unanimously agreed to not move the budget forward and to have more work sessions. ERIE TIMES-NEWS FILE

ordinances and resolutions, they become law," Rennie said. "We bear the weight. Our one signature is really signing for tens of thousands of people that we represent and that's why it's so important to know what we're signing and that everything we sign is backed up by written rationale. These aren't suggestions, this is the way council operates."

Davis said the ad hoc committee was only meant to develop a budget plan of "generalities," a basic framework of investments that council could agree on and commit the \$26 million toward. He said once the money is committed, it will be easier to build partnerships and find leveraging opportunities.

"Counties that can't allocate and move progress forward aren't going to be as competitive as counties that can," he said.

He added it would be an "egregious abuse" of taxpayer dollars for the administration to fill in all the requested details only for council to reject the proposal.

Rennie responded by saying "that's (the county executive's) job."

Proposed budget eliminates diversity commission funding, focuses on business 'clusters'

Among the changes in the proposed budget was an elimination of funding to the Erie County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission, or Diverse Erie, which was created in 2021 to invest in

communities of Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

The commission was allocated to receive \$3.5 million as part of its second round of Rescue Plan funds.

The Rev. Dwane Brock, bishop of the Victory Christian Center Cathedral in Erie, who attended a council finance meeting immediately after the work session, said Davis was demonstrating "insensitivity" toward marginalized communities.

"Obviously, he doesn't recognize it, but if he does recognize it, he's just ignoring it," Brock told the Erie Times-News. "It's a travesty to humanity and a travesty to poor people in the minority community within Erie, Pennsylvania, and Erie County, and he ought to be ashamed of himself for it."

County Director of Administration Doug Smith and County Information Officer Chris Carroll declined to comment on the matter Thursday.

The budget also eliminates funding for an urban renewal and community development budget line, as well as an entrepreneurship budget line.

New investments included the Beehive Network, Lake Erie Watershed Protection, county re-entry services, general community investment projects and education technology grants. The budget maintained funding for the Erie

County Community College and the Homeless Project Grant program.

Davis said part of his vision was to leverage Rescue Plan dollars toward projects like Project RESOLVE at Penn State Behrend, with its focus on plastics, and Project Neptune at Gannon University, with its focus on water-quality testing, and tap into what he called a multi-trillion-dollar Great Lakes economy.

"Put those two projects together, that essentially makes us the epicenter for water pollution, plastics pollution (research and testing)," Davis said. "I think this is merely a catalyst for larger returns."

Horton reminded council that it passed a \$531 million county budget in 2021 and that "we probably spent less than \$1.5 to \$2 million on communities of color."

"All these shovel-ready projects — it looks like the rich are going to get richer, and those who have the capacity to put forward stuff quicker or have the grant writers," he said. "It doesn't appear to me that a lot of thought has been given to the American Rescue Plan's mission of impacting those communities and demographics most affected by the pandemic."

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ECGRA brings \$250,000 in grant funds to Union City

BY MARYANN MOOK
Staff writer

The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority came to the Borough of Union City on Tuesday, Sept. 27, with some good news and a big check.

ECGRA officials and borough officials gathered at Dai Salon, 28 S. Main St., along with Grace Dorman, daughter of salon owner Dailene Adams; salon employee Dorothy Fairchild; and Erie County government representative Jeff Cooper.

Dai Salon was chosen for the press conference because Adams had used grant funds for building improvements.

ECGRA reported on its findings from a summerlong "Rural Listening Tour." In the report, ECGRA makes recommendations to position rural communities for success.

"By listening to the people who make up Erie's future, ECGRA is continuing to move the needle to connect Erie County," said Dr. Perry Wood, executive director of ECGRA. "ECGRA is ensuring



Maryann Mook/The Corry Journal

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority and other county officials came to Dai Salon in Union City on Tuesday, Sept. 27, to present Union City officials with a \$250,000 check for Mission Main Street and Renaissance Block grant funds. From left are ECGRA Executive Director Dr. Perry Wood; Dai Salon employee Dorothy Fairchild; Grace Dorman, daughter of Dai Salon owner Dailene Adams; UC Mayor Natalie Wilmoth and UC Borough Manager Cindy Wells.

our impact investments work to support all municipalities' boroughs' and townships' local economic and community development goals."

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ECGRA

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ECGRA also announced an investment in Union City, leveraging local share granting dollars to enhance the region. The Renaissance Block and Mission Main Street grants are working to advance Union City's economic and community development goals as part of the Building a Better Future Transformational Grant funding.

The Borough of Union City was awarded \$150,000 for its Mission Main Street Grant program and \$100,000 in the Renaissance Block Grant program for a total of \$250,000 toward the borough and township's economic and community development goals.

Union City Borough Manager Cindy Wells thanked ECGRA and said ECGRA has been very supportive of Union City with grant funds.

"We first received Renaissance grant funds in 2018, and between 2018 and 2021, we have received \$210,000 and generated over \$503,000 in improvements," Wells said. "This is a very large step forward in fighting blight, and the improvements are noticeable as you drive through those neighborhoods."

"The borough will continue to promote this program and continue the

fight against blighted properties - starting by contacting more property owners, so more projects can be completed."

Union City Mayor Natalie Wilmoth said yes, Union City is currently in a state of transformative growth.

"This is made possible by two main factors," Wilmoth said.

The first factor, Wilmoth said, is the collaboration of local government with several key Union City nonprofit organizations, such as Union City Pride and the Union City Community Foundation. The second component, she said, is the financial support of organizations such as ECGRA and Erie County leadership.

"Their assistance has been vital in advancing our vision of transformative community improvements," Wilmoth said.

Wilmoth added that Union City is grateful for the ongoing support of ECGRA and Erie County leadership.

"This financial investment in our community will help our local small business owners and further our community's efforts at transforming our Main Street corridor and improving blight within our neighborhoods," Wilmoth said.

Wood said some of the money is from ARPA funds.

"The purpose of federal dollars that are flowing to our communities right now are to stabilize local economies in the wake of the pandemic," Wood said. "Union City is a great example of a community doing everything right to strengthen itself."

County rejects Project RESOLVE

Erie says no funds for Penn St. project

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

Erie County Council shot down a resolution Tuesday to use COVID-19 relief money toward the development of a

manufacturing and battery-testing facility at Penn State Behrend.

In a 4-3 vote, the council's four Democratic members — Mary Rennie, Andre Horton, Terry Scutella and Jim Winarski — voted down the measure, which would have greenlit \$5 million in Amer-

ican Rescue Plan funds toward the proposed center at Knowledge Park.

While all four Democrats said they supported the center itself — which Penn State Behrend called its first phase of Project RESOLVE, a 10-year regional strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of local manufacturing — they voiced concerns about the legality of the transaction. Namely, whether the pro-

ject was eligible for Rescue Plan funding.

"What is legal and what isn't?" Winarski asked his colleagues. "Can we use the money for this or can't we?"

Winarski, who told the Erie Times-News on Monday he would support the resolution, changed his position

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Tuesday, insisting he had too many unanswered questions.

Horton and Scutella argued that Rescue Plan funds were intended for communities most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Horton added that Penn State University was already a significant "money-making institution" and didn't need county funds, whereas minority communities, the homeless and at-risk county residents did.

Rennie, Shank clash over county executive's influence over council

The meeting's most heated exchange involved Rennie and Council Chairman Brian Shank over the role of Erie County Executive Brenton Davis.

Rennie questioned the process by which Davis brought forth the resolution, insisting he pledged the \$5 million toward the project — and privately met with certain council members to secure votes — before discussing the matter with the full council body.

"This money was promised before we ever stepped foot in this room," said Rennie, who has argued that Davis often blurs the line between his office and council.

The comment set off Shank, who said Rennie was grandstanding and making false accusations.

"Nobody on this council walks around with votes in their pockets," he said. "Everyone of these (council members was) duly elected by the people and we make decisions on why we vote."

Turning to Rennie, he said, "So for your grandstanding, name-calling that you love to do, it's inappropriate and it will not happen again in this chamber that you say just whatever Mary Rennie wants to say however she wants to say it."

When Rennie said Shank made a "personal attack," followed by Horton stating Shank was out of order, Shank banged his gavel and threatened to "clear the room" if members infringed on his speaking time.

Rennie said she was referring to the Davis administration — not council members — with votes in their pockets.

"I think everyone understands that," she said.



Erie County Council, shown here on Tuesday, voted down a resolution to use \$5 million in American Rescue Plan funds toward Penn State Behrend's Project RESOLVE.

USA THOMPSON/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

Legal opinions vary on use of Rescue Plan funds

Central to the resolution's failure was the question of legality: Was it legal to use Rescue Plan funds for Project RESOLVE?

County Solicitor Bill Speros said it was "absolutely legal," during a recent council meeting. That opinion was shared by Matthew Hanson, a member of Witt O'Brien's, an international crisis and emergency management company that serves as the county's consultant on the Rescue Plan funds.

Hanson on Tuesday said a pathway to eligibility was proving to the U.S. Treasury that a local business or industry impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic could benefit from the proposed center.

He said the Davis administration selected the Wabtec Corp. plant in Lawrence Park Township because it suffered at least an 8% loss in employment during the pandemic and met the job loss threshold stated in the Rescue Plan guidelines.

Councilwoman Ellen Schauermaur voiced confidence in the consultant's assessment, saying Tuesday "they are well aware of what is allowed and what isn't allowed in the ARPA guidelines."

However, former County Council Chairman Carl Anderson disagreed.

Speaking at Tuesday's meeting during the public comment period, Anderson, who helped spearhead the budgeting of the 2022 Rescue Plan budget, read aloud an excerpt from the U.S. Treasury guidelines that stated "large capital projects intended for general economic development or to aid impacted industries" were ineligible for Rescue Plan funds.

He said the Behrend center should be funded through eligible means, like revenue replacement, as opposed to taking money away from the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, where the \$5 million was originally intended.

County Council Solicitor Tom Talarico similarly pushed back on the county's consultant.

"ARPA monies are not supposed to be used for this purpose — it's completely inappropriate," he said. "There's nothing wrong with using any kind of county money if it's available to satisfy this. But it's a complete violation of the ARPA law to use ARPA money for this particular project."

The Davis administration sought the \$5 million as a local match for a state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant of \$8 million.

Prior to any council approval, a RACP grant application for the project was submitted in August by the Erie County General Authority on behalf of the administration and Penn State Behrend. The application indicated an \$8 million local match, which included the \$5 million.

Speaking during the public comments period Tuesday former County

Council Chairman Fiore Leone blasted Davis for committing funds before council approved them.

"I supported that county executive," Leone said of his endorsement of Davis in 2021. "But they do put erasers on pencils when you make mistakes. I'm not saying it's entirely true yet. I'll wait to see what he does in the future."

Davis and Penn State Behrend have denied making any commitments of funds toward Project RESOLVE.

What's next?

Following the meeting, County Information Officer Chris Carroll, who represented the administration at the meeting, said he was disappointed in the outcome.

"We feel that the investment into plastics, the investment into that industrial battery-testing facility, is a one-of-a-kind project," he said. "It's going to be the first of its kind in the nation and we need to start investing in ourselves. We're disappointed in the outcome, but it's not going to deter us. We're going to continue to fight for Project RESOLVE."

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and we'll see what's ahead."

Rennie said the project is "up to Penn State at this point."

"We don't know yet how much or even whether they will get an award

from the RACP grant application," she said. "The question of public or private funding matches, I think will be a future conversation and not only one for County Council."

Penn State Behrend could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

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