

ECFSA Finance Committee
March 25, 2009
Buffalo Library

Present: Chairman Goodell, Secretary Stanley J. Keysa, Director John Johnson, Director Kenneth Kruly,

Chairman Goodell: “Good afternoon we are here for a finance committee meeting of the ECFSA. The purpose of this meeting is to review an application for an efficiency grant. We welcome Mr. Murphy and Mr. Reynolds to discuss the merits of those grants.”

“The first item of a business is to approve the minutes of the January 8th, 2009 finance committee. It has come to my attention that the representative from the library was referred to as Bridget Quinn Casey when it should be Bridget Quinn Carey so we will need to have the minutes changed in that respect. Are there any other questions that need to be addressed?”

“Okay, is there a motion to approve the minutes?”

Director Kruly moved to approve, Director Johnson seconded and the Directors voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the January 8, 2009 Finance Committee meeting:

“The next order of business is the efficiency grants themselves. The first and only one we have today is an efficiency grant for Erie County scanning of civil service roster cards. Mr. Murphy is here to explain this to us.”

Joseph Murphy: “Thank you gentlemen for taking our request. I can be brief on this topic. What we are trying to do here is take the paper and very labor intensive process of monitoring all civil service jobs throughout the county of Erie; this is not only Erie County employees but every town, village and school district and some of the authorities. We monitor thousands of positions County wide under state civil service law. We also have to keep the record for anyone that has left for the next 20 years. So we have rows and rows and rows of filing cabinets with roster cards in it. The process that currently exists is the towns, villages and school districts will not send us in the US postage mail a change of status for a current employee; if they got a raise, a promotion, they set a reunion contract and every time they do that they have to send us a piece of paper saying that we have to change that persons status. Someone has to go pull that file card out of their file, manually enter it on to the card, refile the card and send an answer back to the town, village or school district. What we are asking to do with that technology is to set this up as an electronic system where they will be able to e-mail us the request and the person who approves these, will review it

right at their computer terminal and if approved will be updated right to that persons electronic roster card and that will help us save space obviously by storing all these records electronically versus all of the roster cards that we maintain.”

Chairman Goodell: “Wow, sounds like a wonderful project and sounds like it has a pay back of maybe 30 minutes.”

Joseph Murphy “Well what we are looking at, since the Commissioner who is currently there and took over several years ago, is that we were anywhere from 7-9 years behind in keeping these cards current. We are currently within 18 months of most jurisdictions but there are a few that are still 7-8 years behind. So we have a task force working on this now. They are working weekends and evenings trying to get this all caught up. We also have an full time equivalent of 2.5 employees working on this full time as their regular jobs. We anticipate that once we become electronic that we will maintain these records with one employee. So it will cut out the evening work, the weekend work and we should be able to cut out and redeploy at least one full time employee.”

Chairman Goodell: “Are there any additional questions from members of the committee. I will entertain a motion for approval that we recommend to the board approval of this request.”

Chairman Goodell moves to approve this request, Director Johnson seconds and the Board votes unanimously to recommend approval to the full board.

Joseph Murphy: “Thank you very much.”

Chairman Goodell: “Is there any other business that we need to address?”

Legislator Reynolds: “Ms. Martin has been coming to our distressed real property task force meetings that we have with Erie County and various community leaders. I just wanted to pass some information out to the Board. We may be possibly coming to you for an efficiency grant on some data. I really wanted to get some information to you so you could see what we are doing on this. I thank you for your support, she has done a great job and Mr. Belliotti has come over a few times as well. We are really working on this property both foreclosure and distressed property throughout Erie County. There are over 30,000 pieces of property throughout Erie County that we have in foreclosure or are distressed and what we are trying to do is get a hold of the data. I just want to give you an overview of what we have been working on so you can digest it and see what is going on with the Distressed Real Property Task Force for Erie County. I thank you for your time.”

Chairman Goodell: “Legislator Reynolds are you getting good help on this project?”

Legislator Reynolds: “The city has been involved, the County, non profits have been involved, town supervisors, code enforcement officers, legal department representatives for some towns; it is a very diverse group of people that we put together for this task force. We have really attacked a lot of ideas. It started in my office two years ago. We have been meeting regularly since then. Congressman Higgins, Congressman Schumer’s office has been represented. Assembly members and Senators of the State are represented. We are taking a distinct look at what is happening in our community. This is one of the biggest economic issues in Erie County right now.”

Director Johnson: “Thanks for the information. What items are documented here on the prevention side to prevent property owners from getting to this distressed point?”

Legislator Reynolds: “If you look at the sheet I passed out, we do have a prevention list of what is coming down. I have included some of the minutes from our latest meetings for you. There is a whole chart of what we are trying to get on top of. We figure the largest problem right now is data sources. The County Executives representative Joe Maciejewski would be a source, the Clerk’s office has a source, GIS has a source in Environment and Planning. We found out that there are other people in villages and towns that have certain resources. If you look at the website for Amherst and what the city us doing, we are trying to bring all this data together for the benefit of the community. In other wards if we see a piece of public property, three vacant properties and a property owned by the government, there is economic development there that we need to take a look at. So that is kind of a quick overview. We have a whole prevention chart that is included in there. The minutes at the end vary on data; we broke down each section of how we want to take a look at it from foreclosure, code violations to mail that become obsolete. If there is unregistered mail that gets returned back is a great source of data. We have quite a few non profits involved. We also have the WNY Law Office involved and UB. We had a committee meeting this morning. We are going to try and change foreclosure law from three years to one year to speed up the foreclosures so we can get them out earlier. What we are finding is that we are getting so far behind in foreclosures after three years because we don’t start the process. There is a piece of property in Angola that I will use for example. This is how it all started, there is \$700,000 in back taxes. It has been there for ten years and I have another piece in Eden that we don’t know who the owner was, it is falling down and there are numerous code violations. It has been there for over 10 years, so this is how the whole process starts.”

Director Johnson: “I have one more questions are you looking at instances where senior citizens are able to hold their mortgage, pay their bills, some problems come up with insurances canceled whatever, renovations are needed. Are you touching on items of that nature?”

Legislator Reynolds: “We’re going to start looking at that through our marketing committee. We are looking at the weatherization stimulus package that is coming down from the federal government and how to market that to the seniors especially low income seniors because that is a lot of money coming to WNY for that. We do need to market that properly besides the vacant property for people to get in trouble. The WNY Law center has put together a foreclosure process for us so we have a direct number that we can call. I have a meeting with the Vice President of M&T Bank tomorrow. We are trying to get the banks involved here as well. It is really a group effort and as Ms. Martin will tell you, I don’t take the credit for this because I really just want the community to come together and understand how important this is. What we are trying to do is bring people together from the community to start talking about this. We have had some great discussions and I thank the control board for being involved, I truly do. I am very happy about that because it helps us out.”

Director Kruly: “There was a disagreement a while back about how serious the foreclosures issues are around here. I think the County Clerk said we weren’t so bad but another organization said that is not necessarily so, that there are serious problems. What is your take on that?”

Legislator Reynolds: “I think sub primes will start taking effecting us more this year and next year definitely because what happens is that you have the adjustable rates that in say 2007 and 2008 are really going to start effect in 2009 and 2010 where the rates have gone up sometimes 18%, so those will start coming forward. What we found out with the Clerk’s office is that the SBL is not registered in the clerks office and we see that as a little bit of a weakness because it is hard for us to track what is happening in the Clerks office as well as Joseph Maciejewski’s office and we are trying to tie this all together and that is what that data is all about. I still think we have a lot of issues with foreclosure right now. If you drive through the neighborhoods, you see a lot of for sale signs and the banks do not report all of their information to us either. So Mr. Kruly on the question I think it is a very big issue. We are reporting about 30,000 pieces of property is the data we are getting back.”

Director Kruly: “Is this problem spread throughout Erie County?”

Legislator Reynolds: “It is throughout Erie County. The city is obviously concentrated in areas but you get out to Hamburg, I think there is some information in the charts I gave you, even in Eden, Collins, way out to Gowanda we have property

that is vacant. Farms are going under. So we are trying to get it under control. If we have the data we figure we can get in their and do some research and do some preventative maintenance on the property beforehand with the home owner or whoever is doing the transaction.”

Secretary Keysa: “One of the questions I have, you are looking to move up the foreclosures from 3 to 1 year, my question is, is there anyone doing any foreclosures in the County right now?”

Legislator Reynolds: “We are doing foreclosures. We actually have a foreclosure sale coming up on May 9th of 100 pieces of property. The biggest problem we have right now is the marketing of the properties that are in foreclosure because obviously we are not selling them to Xspand. This is the opinion of the Legislature, after this is all said and done we are glad that we came out of that business but we need to look at how we are going to market this property now. That is why we got the Buffalo Realtors involved. Joe Maciejewski is doing 100 piece of property on May 6th coming for foreclosure but that is another part that we want to get the resources, the costs for us to do that on the for sale side of that property. In other words they will have to pay what it costs to foreclose and save some costs for the County and for the taxpayers.”

“Thank you for your time, I really appreciate you listening.”

Chairman Goodell moved to adjourn, Director Johnson seconded and the Board voted unanimously to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted:

Stanley J. Keysa
Secretary

May 5, 2009