

**CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, January 29, 2026, | 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Reading City Hall, 2nd Floor
815 Washington St, Reading, PA 19601**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Pastor Evelyn Morrison at 5:43 p.m.

I. Pledge of Allegiance

II. Moment of Silence or Prayer

III. Roll Call

The following Members were in attendance: Chair, Pastor Evelyn Morrison, David Myers, Tanya Melendez (via Zoom), Jonathan Mejia, Ann Sheehan (via Zoom) and Debra Bradford (via Zoom).

Members absent were Virna Quinones, Carlos Rivera, Claudette Bullock and Sheila Perez.

Staff present: Edwin L. Stock, Esquire, Solicitor.

There were a sufficient number of members present to establish a quorum.

IV. Public Comments - Agenda Related

There were no public comments.

V. Opening Remarks – Chair

The Chair made a brief comment thanking everyone for their continued good work.

Debra Bradford moved to approve the Minutes of the January 22, 2026 meeting. Mr. Myers seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0.

VI. Meeting Schedule

The Chair noted that the upcoming meetings are February 5, 2026 (Penn Room); February 12, 2026; February 19, 2026 and February 26, 2026.

VII. Discussion of Next Priorities & Work Plan

(a) Review of Survey Results.

No action.

(b) Consideration of Referendum Questions/Approval of Referendum Questions

See attached.

(c) **Consideration of Department of Health.**

This was discussed as part of Subparagraph (b) above.

(d) **Consideration of Toxic Trespass.**

This was discussed. It was agreed there would be further discussion regarding this topic at the next meeting.

VIII. Public Comments – General

There were no public comment.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

DRAFT REFERENDUM QUESTIONS

1. Shall the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to create a Department of Public Health with the authority to collaborate with community partners and which will be fully operational within two years of voter approval?

1/29/26

Ms. Melendez moved to approve

Mr. Myers seconded

Morrison – Yes

Melendez – Yes

Myers – Yes

Mejia – Yes

Sheehan – Yes

Bradford – Yes

The Motion passed 6-0

2. Shall Article X Boards and Commissions Section 1002(c) Membership of the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to allow individuals with outstanding parking tickets of \$300.00 or less to be appointed to City boards, commissions or authorities?

This question was withdrawn on January 15, 2026.

3. Shall Article XII General Provisions Section 1201(c) and the Enforcement of Charter section be amended to merge the Board of Ethics and Charter Board into one Board called Ethics and Charter Board?

Approved - January 15, 2026.

4. Shall Article II Council - The Legislative Branch Section 209(h) be added to the Reading Home Rule Charter to provide that no member of city council shall serve as a voting board member of any municipal authority?

Approved – January 22, 2026

5. Shall Article II Council - The Legislative Branch Section 225 of the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that the term of the City Clerk shall be five years and that the City Clerk shall not hold any office or position in a political party?

Approved – January 22, 2026

- 5.(a) Shall Article II Council - The Legislative Branch Section 225 of the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that the term of the City Clerk shall be five years and that the City Clerk shall not hold any office or position in a political party and that the City Clerk shall only hold office for two (2) five (5) year terms.

Withdrawn – January 22, 2026

6. Shall Article III Executive Branch Section 309(a) of the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to add that the Mayor shall appoint one Chief of Police?

Approved - January 15, 2026.

7. Shall Article X Boards and Commissions Section 1002(d) be added to the Reading Home Rule Charter to provide that no member of an authority, board or commission may serve more than three terms consecutively?

Approved – January 22, 2026

8. Shall Article X Boards and Commissions Section 1002(e) of the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that no active City employee may be appointed or serve on an authority, board or commission?

1/29/26

Ms. Morrison moved to approve with the addition of "as a voting member" before word "on".

Mr. Mejia seconded

Morrison – Yes

Melendez – No

Myers – No

Mejia – Yes

Bradford – Yes

Sheehan – Yes

Motion passed 4-2

9. Shall Article XIII Transition Section 1312 of the Reading Home Rule Charter be amended to provide that the boundaries of council districts shall be realigned every ten years based on the most recent U.S. Census so as to provide for proportionate representation?

Approved - January 15, 2026.

10. Shall the Preamble to the Home Rule Charter of the City of Reading be amended to include this statement about equal and inclusive treatment?:

“ensure equitable and inclusive access to all residents without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, language, sexual preference, religion, and/or immigration status to the City’s governmental programing, services, and processes.”

Approved - January 15, 2026.

11. Shall Article X Boards and Commissions Section 1002(c) be amended so that the last section reads "Appointees may serve concurrently on more than one authority, board or commission"?

1/29/26

Mr. Myers moved to table.

Ms. Melendez seconded

Morrison – Yes

Melendez – Yes

Myers – Yes

Mejia – Yes

Sheehan – Yes

Bradford - Yes

12. Shall the Home Rule Charter Section X Boards and Commissions be amended by adding Section 1002(d) to provide that individuals should not be disqualified from appointments to an authority, board or commission because of taxes, fines or other amounts owed to the City provided that at the time of such appointment evidence exists of satisfactory arrangements for payment of such amounts?

Approved - January 15, 2026.

13. Shall the Home rule Charter Article X Boards and Commissions be amended by adding Section 1002(e) which will provide "upon appointment to an authority, board or commission, the appointee shall receive from the City two hours of orientation regarding the purpose, operations and affairs of the authority, board or commission"?

1/29/26

Ms. Bradford moved to adopt

Ms. Morrison seconded

Morrison – Yes

Melendez – Yes

Myers – Yes

Mejia – Yes

Bradford – Yes

Sheehan – No

Motion passed 5-1

14. Shall the Home Rule Charter Article IX Financial Procedures be amended by adding Section 916 which provides that City Council may, on its own initiative or at the request of the Mayor, by ordinance direct that a forensic audit of any City department be performed by a qualified forensic auditor? If the Mayor requests that Council direct that a forensic audit be performed, Council shall authorize such forensic audit unless five (5) members of Council vote that such forensic audit is not required.

By consensus, further consideration of this question was tabled for one week. Mr. Mejia, Ms. Bradford and Mr. Myers will work on redrafting language.

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-300:

§11-300. Purpose and Declaration of Policy: The Reading Covenant of Universal Stewardship

Purpose: A Proactive Declaration of Universal Right.

The People of the City of Reading hereby declare an inherent, inalienable right to **Environmental Integrity** that is foundational to a just society and a thriving economy. This right mandates that:

- **Every entity, from the largest corporation to the smallest household**, possesses the right to live, work, and recreate in an environment **free from unmitigated toxic exposure** caused by any source.
- The City's economic resurgence shall be anchored in the principles of **Ecological Prosperity**, where clean land, resilient water systems, and breathable air are recognized as essential, non-negotiable **Shared Public Assets**.
- Reading actively seeks and supports **Regenerative Commerce and Universal Stewardship** – holding all entities responsible for integrating preventative measures, committing to good-faith remediation, and contributing net positive value to the City's environmental health.

Balanced Approach: The Compliance-First Doctrine for All Stewards.

This Article establishes a **Compliance-First Doctrine** designed for predictability and accountability across the entire spectrum of actors.

- **Protection:** To elevate the health and safety of **all residents, animals, and ecosystems** to the highest civic priority.
- **Predictability:** To define clear, objective metrics for performance, providing **all Stewards** with certainty and legal clarity regarding their environmental duties.
- **Partnership:** To favor cooperative risk-reduction and self-auditing agreements over purely punitive measures, provided **all parties** act with verifiable good faith.

Environmental Justice Focus: The Equity Resilience Mandate.

In all applications of this Article, the City shall be governed by an **Equity Resilience Mandate**, specifically addressing and reversing the systemic disinvestment in neighborhoods historically burdened by contamination and poverty, ensuring that **no entity's neglect, commercial or private**, causes a disproportionate or cumulative toxic risk.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-301:

§11-301. Definitions: Concepts of Future Governance

For purposes of this Article, the following concepts shall guide the implementation of ordinances and judicial review:

- **“Toxic Substance.”** Any chemical, biological, or physical agent identified as hazardous, carcinogenic, mutagenic, or a substance of a “very high concern” by federal, state, or international authorities (including, but not limited to, EPA, PA DEP, and WHO lists), or as reasonably defined by City ordinance based on current scientific consensus.
- **“Toxic Trespass.”** The **unconsented, preventable intrusion of any Toxic Substance into the protected sphere of another entity or Public Asset** (land, water, air) at a level that measurably degrades human health, safety, or ecological integrity, as defined by implementing ordinances. It is the legal mechanism by which the right to Freedom from Toxic Exposure is violated.
- **“Responsible Steward.”** Any person, business, governmental entity, household, or organization that causes, contributes to, or holds a legal obligation for the presence of toxic substances within the City.
- **“Good-Faith Steward.”** A Responsible Steward that, regardless of scale (individual or corporation):
 1. **Proactively Discloses** all relevant operational and environmental data promptly.
 2. **Volunterily Enters** into a City-approved Corrective Action or Risk Reduction Plan.
 3. **Achieves Timely Compliance** with all established milestones, demonstrating an earnest commitment to remediation and prevention.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-302:

§11-302. Rights of Residents and Communities: The Universal Freedom from Toxic Trespass Bill of Rights

Right to Freedom from Unmitigated Toxic Exposure.

Every resident and every **Protected Entity** (including animals and private property) possesses the inviolable right to be free from unmitigated Toxic Trespass – that is, exposure risks that **any Responsible Steward** has failed to reduce, eliminate, or compensate for within a reasonable, defined timeframe.

Right to Ecological Equity and Universal Restoration.

Neighborhoods afflicted by past or current contamination – regardless of whether the source was commercial or non-commercial – have a paramount right to **prioritized environmental investment and remediation** to achieve functional equity.

Right to Transparent Environmental Data.

Residents have the right to real-time, easily accessible, and linguistically appropriate information regarding all significant toxic substances used, stored, or emitted within the City, and all known contamination affecting public health or property.

Right to Participatory Veto and Oversight.

Residents have the right to:

- Mandatory Notification of proposed Tier 1 (high-risk) projects and land use changes.
- Submit Formal Challenges to permits where credible concerns of Toxic Trespass are raised.
- Request independent Monitoring and Investigation where warranted by verifiable data or community health reports, to be funded by the Responsible Steward or a dedicated City fund.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-303:

§11-303. Duties of the City: The Mandate for Active Governance

Duty to Preventative Governance and Systematic De-Risking.

The City shall utilize the full scope of its lawful powers – including planning, fiscal policy, zoning, and litigation – to proactively block and prevent new Toxic Trespass from **all sources** and to implement a Phased De-Risking Strategy for existing contamination.

Duty to Cultivate Good-Faith Stewardship.

The City shall establish a predictable, incentive-based regulatory framework that:

- Provides clear, public Guidance and Technical Assistance for compliance, tailored to the scale of the Steward (e.g., household advice vs. corporate technical guidance).
- Rewards voluntary audits, self-disclosure, and investment in green technology with compliance flexibility, permitting priority, or tax incentives.
- Shall only resort to maximum enforcement where there is documented willful, reckless or repeated failure to comply.

Duty to Inter-Jurisdictional Coordination and Data Integration.

The City shall serve as the central hub, coordinating data, risk assessments, and remediation efforts with all relevant federal, state, and academic partners (PA DEP, EPA, DOH, local universities) to maximize efficiency and leverage external funding for clean-up.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-304:

§11-304. Duties and Protections for Responsible Stewards (Universal Accountability)

Expectation of Best Practices and Zero Tolerance for Recklessness.

All Responsible Stewards, commercial or non-commercial, are obligated to:

- Adhere to all local state, and federal environmental laws.
- Implement **Reasonable Best Available Control Technology (BACT)** and practices appropriate to their scale to minimize releases (e.g., safe disposal of household hazardous waste).
- Report all suspected Toxic Trespass incidents within one business day to the City.

The Good-Faith Steward Safe Harbor Provision.

Implementing ordinances must include a Safe Harbor provision granting the following benefits to a Good-Faith Steward, **scaled appropriately** to their size and resources:

- **Mitigated Penalties:** Eligibility for a minimum **50% reduction** in punitive fines or penalties.
- **Flexible Compliance:** Access to flexible, performance-based **Corrective Action Plans (CAPs)** that allow innovation while meeting objective environmental outcomes.
- **No Automatic Disqualification:** Good-Faith status shields the Steward from automatic public contract or permitting disqualification resulting from the self-reported issue.

Tiered Remediation and Universal Liability:

Ordinances shall establish tiered remediation timelines optimized for both risk reduction and economic redevelopment:

- **Tier 1 – Acute and Imminent Risk: Emergency Measures Required.** Remediation timeline measured in days or weeks until stabilization.
- **Tier 2 – Chronic or Significant Risk: Structured Remediation Required.** Comprehensive cleanup and containment plan over a defined, publicly reported period (e.g., 1-5 years), tied to performance milestones.
- **Tier 3 – Legacy Contamination (Low Current Risk): Phased Redevelopment Integration.** Long-term monitoring and remediation plans that are tied directly to economic development incentives (for commercial entities) or community grants (for non-commercial areas).

**1/29/26 These potential ballot questions
were reviewed. Further discussion
will occur on 2/5/26**

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-305:

§11-305. Environmental Justice and Community Oversight (EJAC)

The Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) as a Permanent Institution.

City Council shall establish, by ordinance, a permanent, fully funded **Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC)**. The EJAC shall be proportionally comprised of a **majority of residents** from documented overburdened neighborhoods. The EJAC shall serve as the **constitutional conscience** of the City on environmental matters, with the mandate to:

- **Conduct Mandated EJAC Reviews** of all major zoning, permitting, or public asset disposal decisions with potential toxic impact.
- **Advise City Council and the Administration** on the allocation of all environmental fines and remediation funds.
- **Recommend Mandatory Monitoring** strategies for high-risk zones.

The Neighborhood Right to Petition and Action.

A threshold number of residents (e.g., 50 residents or 75% of a block) from an impacted neighborhood may submit a formal petition triggering:

- **A Mandated EJ Impact Review** of a proposed project.
- **A City-Coordinated Preliminary Investigation** of suspected Toxic Trespass. The City shall issue a public, written determination to investigate or decline the investigation **within 30 calendar days**, providing a clear, scientifically-backed rationale for its decision.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-306:

§11-306. Enforcement and Remedial Justice Principles

The Restorative Justice Principle.

Enforcement shall prioritize **Restorative Justice**: all legally permissible monetary penalties, settlements, and damage awards shall be preferentially directed toward Cleanup, Community Health Screening, and Risk-Reduction Programs within the affected Blightshed, rather than being diverted to the general fund.

Universal Standing and Access.

Implementing ordinances shall maximize legal avenues, consistent with higher law, to grant both the City and in defined circumstances, **impacted residents and community organizations**, the right to 233k comprehensive **Injunctive and Equitable Relief** in court to halt or compel remediation of Toxic Trespass by any Responsible Steward.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-307:

§11-307. Supremacy and Future Development

The Environmental Floor and Home Rule Ceiling.

This Article establishes the minimum **Floor** of environmental protection in Reading. Consistent with the City's Home Rule Charter, nothing herein limits the City's power to adopt more protective ordinances – a **Ceiling** of protection – necessary to prevent Toxic Trespass and secure the health of its residents.

The Business Certainty Covenant.

The City shall treat its relationship with Responsible Stewards as a covenant of trust by:

- Providing dedicated environmental pre-application consultations.
- Publishing annual, clear, standardized **Environmental Performance Scorecards** for high risk activities.
- Maintaining processes that are **predictable, transparent, and fair.**

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26

SHALL ARTICLE XI – CITIZENS RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION OF THE HOME RULE CHARTER BE AMENDED BY ADDING THE FOLLOWING AS SECTION 11-308:

§11-308. Implementation: The Transition to a Clean Economy

The 15-Month Ordinance Mandate.

City Council **shall, within fifteen (15) months** of this Article's adoption, enact comprehensive implementing ordinances that:

- Define all key terms and thresholds for “unreasonable” Toxic Trespass.
- Establish the full structure and funding mechanisms for the EJAC.
- Institute the monitoring, reporting, and enforcement mechanisms required by this Article.

Phased Transition for Existing Stewards.

The implementing ordinances shall establish a **reasonable, risk-tiered transition schedule** (e.g., 18-36 months) for existing businesses to adapt their operations and achieve compliance with the new standards, with technical assistance prioritized for local and small businesses.

The Quadrennial Review and Renewal.

Every four (4) years, concurrent with the mayoral election cycle, the City shall conduct a public, data-driven review of this Article's effectiveness, soliciting extensive input from the EJAC, businesses, and residents, and propose any necessary amendments to ensure the Article remains the most advanced mechanism for **Freedom from Toxic Trespass** in the nation.

1/29/26 These potential ballot questions were reviewed. Further discussion will occur on 2/5/26