

**City of Reading City Council**  
**Hybrid Regular Meeting**  
**October 25, 2021**  
**At the conclusion of the COW Meeting**

Council President Waltman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:06 pm.

Due to COVID-19, the City changed the meeting format to a hybrid format with Council attending in-person at times and others attending virtually. In addition to providing the public with the ability to observe the Council meetings virtually and via telephone and view live on the BCTV MAC Channel 99 and Facebook Live, the Committee of the Whole and Regular Meetings will be shown in the Penn Room, in the first floor of City Hall – access the Penn Room using the doors on North 8<sup>th</sup> Street only. Public comment at regular meetings can occur virtually, in writing, via telephone or in-person in the Penn Room through Zoom. The meeting agendas are posted on the City's website 3 days prior to the meeting. All agendas include the Zoom meeting information (LINK and Dial In) to easily 'click and join' the meeting. Access meeting agendas at: [https://www.readingpa.gov/council\\_minutes\\_agendas](https://www.readingpa.gov/council_minutes_agendas).

The invocation was given by Pastor Randy Grossman, Grace Bible. All present pledged to the flag.

**ATTENDANCE**

Council President Waltman - electronically  
Councilor Sihelnik, District 1 - electronically  
Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz, District 2 – electronically  
Councilor Ventura, District 3 – electronically  
Councilor Marmarou, District 4 – in person  
Councilor Reed, District 5 – electronically  
Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz, District 6 – electronically  
Solicitor F. Lachat – electronically  
City Clerk L. Kelleher – in person  
Auditor M. Rodriguez – electronically  
Managing Director A. Amoros – electronically

**PROCLAMATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Commendation celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Greek Bazaar at Saint Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Council President Waltman announced that there are two (2) citizens registered to provide

public comment on general matters. Councilor Reed read the public speaking rules approved by ordinance.

**Judy Nuss, of Sinking Spring**, stated that her church group held an event in Pendora Park on September 19<sup>th</sup> and there were many owners with unleashed dogs in the Park creating safety issues. She also noted that chickens are causing property maintenance issues at 438 N 9<sup>th</sup> St and she asked the City to follow up.

**Santiago Serrano, from Congresswoman Houlihan's Office**, highlighted the services their district office provides.

## **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA & MINUTES**

Council President Waltman called Council's attention to the agenda, including the legislation listed under the Consent Agenda Heading for this meeting and the minutes from the October 11<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting and the meeting summaries from the COWs held on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>.

**The minutes from the October 11<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting, the agenda, including the legislation listed under the Consent Agenda heading, and the summations of discussion listed were approved by acclamation.**

## **Consent Agenda**

*The Consent Agenda is designed to provide efficient approval of non-controversial legislation that does not require discussion/debate by giving approval via acclamation when the meeting agenda is approved. The President of Council will call Council's attention to the list of Consent Agenda legislation at the meeting before action is taken, which allows Council to remove a piece of legislation for separate consideration.*

**A. Award of Contract** - for the Southwest Fire Station Project to Kinsley Construction Inc. York, PA in the amount of \$138,742.00

**B. Award of Contract** – for HVAC for the 9<sup>th</sup> and Marion Fire Station Project to Shannon A Smith, Inc., Myerstown, PA in the amount of \$1,026,120.00.

**C. Award of Contract** - purchase of two (2) Fire Pumper Trucks for the Fire Department from Glick Fire Equipment, Bird in Hand, in the amount of \$1,290,446.00

**D. Resolution 95-2021** - authorizing the City to enter into an agreement with the County of Berks for consolidated Fire and EMS dispatch services for 2022 in the amount of \$390,692.24 – the same rate charged in 2021

**E. Resolution 96-2021** – authorizing the reservation of \$31,003.50 payable to the City of Reading or the PennDOT in the event the City does not complete the sidewalk work required for

the 9<sup>th</sup> and Marion fire station project, as required by the PennDOT Highway Occupancy Permit

## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

The managing director read the report provided in writing which is attached to the agenda:

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

- The Community Development Department was awarded a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – HOME ARP grant in the amount of \$3,580,856. The monies may be used to acquire and develop non-congregate shelter(s) for individuals or families. The monies may also be utilized to acquire, rehabilitate, or construct NCS Units, acquire improved or unimproved real properties, demolish existing structures for development, and/or capitalize a replacement reserve to cover reasonable and necessary costs of replacing major systems and their components.
- The CD Department’s Property Maintenance Division is expanding on ways to address the more significant challenges the Division has identified recently. Some of the action items that are being implemented are assigning inspectors to focus on specific areas and connect with property owners. The Division has also developed a list of chronic violators that inspectors will follow up directly with landlords.

### FINANCE:

- The Finance Department’s Citizen Service Center received minimal phone calls from property owners regarding the transition to City trash service and new charges on recent bills. Staff was able to address most of the anticipated issues with property owners upon receiving their notification letter.
- The Finance Department is currently working with Public Work’s Solid Waste Division to improve the billing process for properties that experience a change of ownership but previously had a Senior Citizen Discount applied to the address.
- The Finance Department met with Berks EIT Tax Collection, and collection rates are as expected for this period.
- The Finance Department’s CSC provided information to be distributed at a community table at the Salsa Festival on September 26<sup>th</sup> in City Park. The event was well attended, which provided a great outreach opportunity for the City.
- The Finance Department’s Grant Division gave the following updates:
  - **USDOJ Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant:** Prepared and submitted in August of 2020. The grant benefits City and County law enforcement operations. The grant was awarded to the City and the County, with the City’s allotted amount to be \$55,403. The funds will go towards 540 hours of Police Officer special detail overtime and a one-year reporting and record management software subscription.
  - **Recycling 902 Grant:** The grant application was prepared and submitted on September 24<sup>th</sup> by Public Works.
  - **Schuylkill River Trail - DCED CFA Greenways Trail and Recreation Program Grant:** The City was awarded \$125,000 for upgrades to Schuylkill River Trail with a \$75,000 match required, which will be allocated from CIP funds. The grant project includes design and construction for trail upgrades needed to compliment the current Schuylkill River Trail project, with the activity period ending on June 30, 2022. The City is preparing an extension request which will be submitted by December 31<sup>st</sup>.
  - **City Park, Baer Park, and 6<sup>th</sup> & Amity Playground:** City staff is scheduled to meet with Civil and Environmental Consultants to review plans for each site and compare

grant project narratives. The first site visit will be to 6<sup>th</sup> and Amity at the beginning of October.

- **Penn Street Courtyard:** This project will remove brick walls and include paving, and replace stamped concrete. Existing concrete walls and planters will be coated with sealant and primer for possible mural painting. Also being removed and replaced are the existing drains and stormwater piping.
- The Finance Department has moved the implementation date for the Defined Contribution Plan to January 1, 2022, to allow for a smoother transition.

#### **FIRE:**

- The Fire Department's 9<sup>th</sup> and Marion Fire Station project had four out of their five construction contracts approved by City Council on September 27<sup>th</sup>. The fifth contract for Mechanical and HVAC services went out for rebid with a deadline of October 11<sup>th</sup>. A groundbreaking ceremony will be announced when details are finalized.
- The Fire Department held its Annual Award Ceremony on Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup>. This ceremony covered a two-year period due to last year's cancellation related to the pandemic. Many Department members received an award at this event.

#### **HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION:**

- As of October 6<sup>th</sup>, HRC has:
  - 1054 total rent and utility assistance applications were received (an addition of 14 applications since last reported).
    - 1014 applications for rental assistance
      - 647 applicants were facing eviction
      - 271 applicants were not actively facing eviction
      - 96 applicants resided outside of the City but within the County.
    - 40 applications for utility assistance

#### **HUMAN RESOURCES:**

- The Human Resource Department is reconvening the Wellness Committee, which focuses on the health and well-being of City employees. A kick-off meeting will be held in October. The Human Resource Department is preparing for the open enrollment period for employee benefits and the Annual Employee Wellness Fair. Both events will take place in early November.

#### **LIBRARY:**

- The Reading Public Library's Northwest Branch hosted Hispanic Heritage Month Storytime with Mayor Eddie Moran as the guest reader. Mayor Moran really connected with the kids, many of which were middle school students.
- The RPL's Executive Director attended the Pennsylvania Library Association's Annual Conference, which was held virtually.
- The RPL's signature fundraising event, Cocktails & Classics, was held on Friday, October 1<sup>st</sup>. The event raised \$127,000 and was attended by close to 300 people.

#### **POLICE:**

- The Reading Police Department's Community Outreach Officer, Lt. Lance Lillis, continues to attend recruiting events at area colleges, universities, and other local events. He has partnered with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which provides resources to the approximately 200,000 service members that transition to civilian life annually. For anyone interested, an entry-level civil service test is scheduled for October 23<sup>rd</sup> at Alvernia University.

#### **PUBLIC WORKS:**

- Public Works staff has completed 200 out of the 780 streetlights from the LED Streetlight project.

- Public Works has completed the City Park Washington Street Stonewall project.
- Public Work's 18<sup>th</sup> Ward Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Construction project continues with pavement restoration occurring at the third traffic island. At the same time, preparations for the concrete curb installation at the sixth traffic island are happening.

Councilor Sihelnik questioned the date of the Holiday Parade. The managing director stated that the parade is scheduled for the Saturday before Thanksgiving, as per prior years. Those interested in participating should contact [downtown@readingpa.gov](mailto:downtown@readingpa.gov) and/or [managingdirector@readingpa.gov](mailto:managingdirector@readingpa.gov).

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the success of the Trunk or Treat held on Penn Street and she questioned the official day for door-to-door treat or treating. The managing director stated that the official day is October 31<sup>st</sup>.

## **AUDITOR'S REPORT**

The Auditor introduced Christopher Turtell, partner at Herbein & Co. who presented the 2020 external audit.

Mr. Turtell explained the required auditing standards and regulations along with the testing schedule applied for this audit. He stated that a clean audit opinion has been provided, noting that the City eliminated four (4) repeat findings, leaving only 1 regarding account reconciliations/material adjustments posted as a result of audit, which is a remarkable improvement. He noted the City's continued work to improve its financial reporting since the City began the Act 47 process. He congratulated all for this accomplishment.

Mr. Turtell stated that the 2020 audit shows a \$2.4M surplus caused by decreased expenditures due to the pandemic and a sharp increase in the Real Estate Transfer Tax due to the improved real estate market. He stated that the \$2.4M surplus increases the General Fund balance to \$34M, of which \$30M is unrestricted. However, he noted the requirement to comply with the ordinance to retain at least \$22M to cover annual expenditures.

Mr. Turtell stated that the Enterprise Funds show the following surpluses: Water Fund \$3.3M, Sewer Fund \$12M and Solid Waste \$1M.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Mr. Turtell and his team for their assistance to help the City improve.

The Auditor thanked the Herbein and City teams for their work on the external audit.

Council President Waltman thanked the Herbein team for their excellent oversight and report.

## **REPORT FROM DEPT. DIRECTORS, BOARDS, AUTHORITIES, & COMMISSIONS.**

Reading Area Water Authority (RAWA) Executive Director Bill Murray stated that due to travel delays Mr. McCracken was unable to attend tonight's meeting. Mr. Murray gave an overview of RAWA's successful operations during the pandemic, noting their employees' diligence to perform well while working remotely. He described the work of the RAWA board to create a program to replace residential water piping made of lead. He noted that RAWA has not had a rate increase for a six (6) year period due to increased efficiencies and continued work on RAWA's capital needs.

Council members thanked Mr. Murray, the RAWA board and employees for their work to improve and protect the water system. They also recognized the benefit of the community service projects and programs offered by RAWA.

## **ORDINANCES FOR FINAL PASSAGE**

### **Budget Ordinances**

- Ordinance** – 2022 Real Estate Tax Rate *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*
- Ordinance** – 2022 Non-Resident EIT Tax Rate *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*
- Ordinance** – 2022 Position Ordinance *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*
- Ordinance** – 2022 General Fund Budget *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*
- Ordinance** – 2022 Capital Fund Budget *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*
- Ordinance** – Adjustments to Trash/Recycling Fees *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*
- Ordinance** – ARPA Plan *Introduced at the Oct 4 Special Meeting*

**A. Bill 75-2021** – amending the Code of Ordinances Chapter 62 New Officers and Employees Pension Fund, Section 102 to prohibit the participation of new members where the employee is hired or rehired on or after January 1, 2022 *Introduced at the September 27 regular meeting; Tabled at the October 11 regular meeting*

**Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz, to table Bill No. 75- 2021.**

The managing director stated that the administration needs to analyze the effect this ordinance will have on those vested employees who resign and return to the City's employ.

**The motion to enact Bill No 75-2021 was tabled by the following vote:**

**Yeas: Cepeda-Freytiz, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, Reed, Ventura, Sihelnik, Waltman, President – 7**

**Nays: None – 0**

**B. Bill 80-2021** – authorizing the transfer of \$29,717 from the Public Works General Fund Street Division Budget to the Public Property Division General Fund Budget to pay for the New Neco Replacement Duplex Water Pressure Booster Pump System at the Public Works Center  
*Introduced at the October 11 regular meeting*

**Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz, to enact Bill No. 80- 2021.**

**The motion to enact Bill No 80-2021 was approved by the following vote:**

**Yeas: Cepeda-Freytiz, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, Reed, Ventura, Sihelnik, Waltman, President – 7**

**Nays: None – 0**

## **INTRODUCTION OF NEW ORDINANCES**

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz read the following ordinance into the record:

**A. Ordinance** – authorizing a budget transfer in the Law Dept in the amount of \$70K from Special Counsel Labor Negotiations to General Legal Services

## **RESOLUTIONS**

None

## **COUNCIL COMMENT**

Councilor Reed thanked Public Works for the well done road work at the Pagoda. She also noted the opening of Café Esperanza at Hope Lutheran Church. She noted the recent zoning application for a new daycare at 1501 Schuylkill Avenue, directly across from Glenside Elementary School. She noted the recent traffic report by Chief Tornielli denoting the speeding and fatal accidents that occur at this location. She expressed the belief that approving a daycare at this location would be a grave mistake and she noted her hope that the Zoning Board would deny the application.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Public Works and the contractors for the road improvements at the Pagoda. She noted the need to be sure to lock all the gates that secure the parking area during times that the park is closed. She announced the Trunk or Treat scheduled for the 28<sup>th</sup> from 5-7 pm at the parking lot located at 325 South 12<sup>th</sup> Street. She also thanked Berks Nature and Public Works for the recent tree planting event at Egelman’s Park to help address the swampy areas in the park.

Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz gave a shout out to the Youth Commission’s suggestion to hold the Trunk or Treat on Penn Street and to Brad Waples for the event held at his store on South 4<sup>th</sup>

Street. She noted that Youth Commission member Brandom Hernandez Ruiz recently hosted her In Your District program. She announced the upcoming boxing matches at Star City Boxing on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

Councilor Sihelnik encouraged all to recognize the importance of Breast Cancer Awareness month and to perform preventative screenings. She provided an update on the plan to plant two (2) evergreen trees – one in the South of Penn and one in the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward area. She reminded everyone to Get Out the Vote on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and to visit the great interior and exterior art displays at the Museum. She noted the increase in events at the Firefighters Museum located on South 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Councilor Marmarou moved, seconded by Councilor Ventura, to adjourn the regular meeting of Council.**

*Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*