

**City of Reading City Council  
Virtual Regular Meeting  
February 8, 2021  
At the conclusion of the COW Meeting**

Council President Waltman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:10 pm.

Due to the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, the City was forced to change their meeting format to prohibit the public's ability to physically attend the meeting and for public comment to be provided through alternative methods. Public comment can occur in writing (email message or letter clearly marked for public comment) or via a telephone or internet connection with the virtual app. Meeting attendees are participating remotely by phone or electronically through a computer application. The meetings can be viewed live on the BCTV MAC Channel 99, Facebook Live or on the City's website at <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/city-council-video>.

Nilda Nieves, Feet on the Street Ministries, gave the invocation.

A moment of silence was held for the victims of the recent gun violence and their families and for all those whose lives have been affected by gun violence.

All present pledged to the flag.

There was an executive session after the January 25<sup>th</sup> COW on collective bargaining re PA Sunshine Act Title 65 § 708. Executive sessions (a) 2 and after the February 8<sup>th</sup> COW on personnel re PA Sunshine Act Title 65 § 708. Executive sessions (a) 1.

**ATTENDANCE**

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

## **PROCLAMATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS**

- Commendation recognizing Black History Month issued to the NAACP

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Council President Waltman announced that there were three (3) written submissions for public comment. The City Clerk was asked to read the written comment submitted.

**Chris Ellis, of South 19<sup>th</sup> Street**, in opposition to legislation regarding Aggressive Panhandling and Loitering (attached).

**Becky Ellis, of South 19<sup>th</sup> Street**, suggesting the implementation of gun buy-back or drop-off programs to put a stop to gun violence (attached).

**Shannon Leonhard, of West Douglass Street**, wrote concerning the poor condition of the alleyways in her area and about low hanging wires at the rear of her property (attached).

Councilor Reed reported that the City Clerk started to assist Ms. Leonhard with the issues by asking MetEd to evaluate the low hanging wires and advising Ms. Leonhard that the alleyways are owned by the property owner, noting the availability of the Special Assessment where neighborhoods can make affordable improvements to alleys, sidewalks, and curbs as per City Code Chapter 508, Part 1 Levying Special Assessments for Public Works Projects.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that further discussions on the draft Loitering and Panhandling ordinance are scheduled so the City can develop the best result for all involved. She noted that the incident over the weekend with juveniles was not the City's first incidence of gun violence. She suggested that the mayor and administration work with Council and all stakeholders to develop a sound solution.

Councilor Reed stated that a community meeting is organized this Wednesday at Hope Lutheran Church and a separate Zoom meeting is also scheduled.

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

Council President Waltman called Council's attention to the agenda for this meeting, including the legislation listed under the Consent Agenda heading, and the minutes from the January 25<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting and the summaries from the COWs held on January 25<sup>th</sup> and February 1<sup>st</sup>, along with the summary from the Nominations Meeting on February 1<sup>st</sup>. He stated that Consent Agenda Resolution 15 will be moved to the Resolution Section so they can be addressed individually.

*Note the two Resolution headings listed as No. 15 and 18 are covered by a single resolution covers the forgiveness of all loans issued to Reading small businesses and approved under*

*two separate motions as Resolution 15.*

**The minutes from the January 25<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting and the summations of discussion as listed and the agenda, as amended, were approved by acclimation.**

## **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 acclimation 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 VSU (Video Safety Unit) infrastructure upgrade to LTW, Lets Think Wireless, LLC for \$526,137.89 which will upgrade the core infrastructure (street level) of the current camera system, removing and replacing the current 10-12 year old cameras, radios, and associated equipment within the core network

**B. Resolution 14-2021** – ratifying the Snow Declaration of Emergency

**D. Resolution 16-2021** – authorizing the City's 2021 bank accounts

**E. Resolution 17-2021** – authorizing the submission of an application for a State DCED study on the change to 12 hour police shifts which will include overtime costs and pension calculation implications

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT**

Council President Waltman noted that the mayor is excused due to his injury over the past weekend.

The managing director highlighted the report attached to the agenda and distributed electronically; in summary:

- The Community Development Department announced the selection of Stantec Urban Pace for the Downtown Plus strategic planning study. A kickoff meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm.
- The CD staff has begun assisting the Human Relations Commission with invoicing verification and payment approval process for the rental assistance program to prevent homelessness. 784 total applications for rent and utility assistance were received (an addition of 23 applications since the last report).
- The Reading Police Department achieved a 22% reduction in Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Part 1 Crimes for the year of 2020. This includes over a 27% reduction in property crimes and a 3% reduction in violent crimes.
- The Public Works Department increased sweeping in the following areas:
  - 18<sup>th</sup> ward

- Northmont
- Glenside
- Hessian Camp
- Riverdale
- Hampden Heights
- The Public Works Department announced that the contract for the 18th Ward curb ramps project was executed. This project is scheduled to begin as soon as the weather permits.
- The meetings of the COVID-19 work group are held every other week to discuss pandemic related issues.

## AUDITOR'S REPORT

The Auditor highlighted the report attached to the agenda and distributed electronically. In summary:

- Real Estate Transfer - the City budgeted \$4.2 million for this revenue line item and as of December 31, 2020, the City collected \$6,591,062.41. During the month of December, \$993,086.79 in revenue was collected and overall the City ended with a surplus of \$2,391,062.
- Per Capita Tax - the City budgeted \$275,000 for Per Capita Tax and as of December 31, 2020, the City collected \$288,738.21. For the Per Capita Tax Prior line item, the City budgeted \$60,000.00 and as of December 31, 2020, the City has collected \$249,645.41. For these two line items, the amount collected has exceeded the budget target by \$203,383.62.

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

None.

## ORDINANCES FOR FINAL PASSAGE

**A. Bill 5-2021** – amending City Code Chapter 576 Section 416 Stopping & Parking regarding the authority of the Police Chief to void parking tickets and requiring the Police Department and Parking Authority to provide notification regarding temporary changes to parking rules/regulations ***Introduced at the January 11 regular meeting; tabled at the January 25 regular meeting***

**Councilor Marmarou moved, seconded by Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz, to enact Bill No. 5-2021.**

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz explained that this practice has existed for decades and the need to have this language in writing was brought forward during discussions about the Cooperation Agreement with the Parking Authority. She stated that the City Clerk consulted with the Police Chief and Solicitor to craft this Bill and those Parking Ordinance amendments

that follow on this agenda. She noted that the Chief uses this authority to void tickets that are issued in error and that the authority to void tickets applies to the Chief alone.

Councilor Sihelnik expressed the belief that tickets should be adjudicated through the appeals process.

**Bill No. 5-2021 was enacted by the following vote:**

**Yeas: Cepeda-Freytiz, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, Ventura, Waltman,  
President – 5**

**Nays: Reed, Sihelnik - 2**

**B. Bill 10-2021** - amending the City Code Section 576-603, Daytime Parking Restrictions Notice of Violation; Violations and Penalties; Waivers to modify the manner in which notice of a violation is provided and to change the threshold for the immobilization or removal of a vehicle and providing the Police Chief with the authority to void parking tickets ***Introduced at the January 25 regular meeting***

**Councilor Marmarou moved, seconded by Councilor Ventura, to enact Bill No. 10-2021.**

**Bill No. 10-2021 was enacted by the following vote:**

**Yeas: Cepeda-Freytiz, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, Ventura, Waltman,  
President – 5**

**Nays: Reed, Sihelnik - 2**

**C. Bill 11-2021** – amending the City Code Section 576- 514 and 576-517, Parking Meters or Kiosks Notice of Violation; Violations and Penalties; Waiver to modify the manner in which notice of a violation is provided and providing the Police Chief with the authority to void parking tickets ***Introduced at the January 25 regular meeting***

**Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Marmarou, to enact Bill No. 11-2021.**

**Bill No. 11-2021 was enacted by the following vote:**

**Yeas: Cepeda-Freytiz, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, Ventura, Waltman,  
President – 5**

**Nays: Reed, Sihelnik - 2**

**D. Bill 12-2021** - amending the 2021 Position Ordinance by reclassifying one position in the Human Resources Department from Human Resources Assistant to Training &

Employment Coordinator *Introduced at the January 25 regular meeting*

**Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Sihelnik, to table Bill No. 12-2021.**

**Bill No. 12-2021 was tabled 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 ordinances into the record.

**A. Ordinance** – authorizing a budget transfer in the amount \$60,000 for the Pagoda Foundation to make the contributions from 2018-2020 that were never made, as per the agreement with the Foundation

**B. Ordinance** – increasing the Property Maintenance Manager’s salary from \$61,398.16 to \$69,000

## **RESOLUTIONS**

- **From The Consent Agenda**

*Note the two Resolutions headings listed below, originally numbered as 15 and 18 under the Consent Agenda heading cover the forgiveness of all loans issued to Reading small businesses and are approved under two separate motions for Resolution 15.*

**C. Resolution 15-2021** – forgiveness of CDBG and EZ-Fred small business loans issued approved by City Council April 18, 2020

**Councilor Sihelnik moved, seconded by Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz, to adopt Resolution No. 15-2021.**

The CD director provided an overview, noting that a variety of loans were issued to 127 Reading small businesses (161 applications were received). The process was managed by Community First Fund. The average loan had a value of \$5,000. As the pandemic continues, businesses continue to struggle and the administration suggests forgiving the loans.

**Resolution No. 15-2021 was adopted by the following vote:**

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

**Nays: None – 0**

**G. Resolution 15-2021** – authorizing the forgiveness of the loans issued to Reading small businesses affected by COVID-19 using the State EZ FRED and Microenterprise Loan re-payment funds the City had on account with the verification by Community First Fund that the business remained open and job retention was obtained

**Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Reed, to adopt Resolution No. 15-2021.**

**Resolution No. 15-2021 was adopted by the following vote:**

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

**Nays: None – 0**

**A. Resolution 19-2021** – approving the appeal of MoraviaHealth, applicant, for the use of an LED internally illuminated sign at 525 Penn Street; but directing MoraviaHealth to reduce the size of the sign to comply with the current zoning requirements and HARB Sign Policy and remanding the approval of the size of the sign to HARB

**Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Ventura, to adopt Resolution No. 19-2021.**

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked the applicant for agreeing to modify the size of the sign to bring it into compliance with the City's sign regulations. She expressed the belief that the decision reaches a good compromise.

**Resolutions No. 19-2021 was adopted by the following vote:**

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

**Nays: None – 0**

**B. Resolution 20-2021** – reappointing M. Angella Singletary to the Board of Ethics

**C. Resolution 21-2021** – reappointing Thomas Lynam to the Fire/Building Code Board of Appeals

**Councilor Marmarou moved, seconded by Councilor Ventura, to adopt Resolutions No. 20 and 21-2021.**

Councilor Marmarou spoke about the merits of these two reappointments and the value they bring to their respective boards.

**Resolutions No. 20 and 21-2021 were adopted by the following vote:**

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

**Nays: None – 0**

## **COUNCIL COMMENT**

Councilor Marmarou thanked the Public Works team for their great response to the recent snow events.

Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz thanked those who submitted public comment for tonight's meeting. She expressed the belief that the current draft of the Loitering and Panhandling ordinance creatively pulls in social services and accountability. She suggested the creation of a task force to address gun violence with government and community stakeholders.

Councilor Reed noted that guns do not shoot; people shoot and she stressed the need to address gun control on a national level while building in accountability and responsibility.

Councilor Sihelnik agreed with the comments made about gun violence and gun control, noting the availability of community agencies and organizations for support and outreach opportunities. She stated that she is pleased that the City recognized Black History month and she announced the Chamber virtual meeting on the COVID vaccination on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup>.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Public Works crews for doing a great job on snow removal under very difficult conditions and she thanked all those who assisted their neighbors. She suggested that neighbors attempt applying that same neighbor to neighbor mentality when addressing conflict. She agreed with the need to bring government and stakeholders together to discuss gun violence and best practices.

Council President Waltman stressed the need for people to report what they observe to the police, as that type of information is critical to the police who work to protect our neighborhoods. He noted the recent shooting involving juveniles, stressing the need to identify the adult that provided the gun.

There was a discussion about the February 16<sup>th</sup> COW agenda and the need to limit topics to allow sufficient time to focus on the Panhandling and Loitering Ordinance. Councilors



Goodman-Hinnershitz and Sihelnik stated that they have conflicts on Tuesday evening and suggested reserving the COW on Wednesday if need be.

**Councilor Marmarou moved, seconded by Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz, to adjourn the regular meeting of Council.**

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*

-----Original Message-----

From: Christopher E [mailto:cmichaelellis@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, February 8, 2021 9:25 AM

To: Council <council@readingpa.gov>

Subject: Comment for City Council

WARNING : This email originated from outside the system DO NOT CLICK links or attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

I humbly request that you all shelve any attempt to criminalize poverty and homelessness. Possible legislation that would purport to help those without homes by moving them into services can be done without having it on the books and can be done without involving the police department. The moment you involve law enforcement, any number of reasons to arrest someone will be introduced.

A person without a home is allowed to stand on a public street or be in a public park. One person's "loitering" is another person's moment with friends during a tough time. People attempting to judge others for how they are surviving their day should look inwards instead. It shouldn't be illegal to ask others for money. "Aggressive" panhandling can already be covered by existing law..

We know why this is being discussed. Some want to "clean up" 4th and Penn Streets in advance of CollegeTowne. Let's just be truthful with what any possible legislation is hoping to achieve. It isn't being spurred out of a need to help those without the money to gain housing; it's out of a need to move away a supposed problem to make the area more palatable for college students to walk around.

If we want to help those without housing, we should offer them housing! The idea of offering services is great. But there is no reason we have to loop this in with law enforcement The City should work with the County to continue to accumulate housing for those with nowhere to go. As the pandemic showed, we have the will when we are faced with a problem. We just have to decide what the problem is: is it the people themselves or that they don't have the money to procure housing and purchase food and pay bills?

Chris Ellis, Reading

**From:** Becky Ellis [mailto:beckyellis531@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Monday, February 8, 2021 8:25 AM

**To:** Council <council@readingpa.gov>  
**Subject:** Public Comment for Tonight's Meeting

**WARNING:** This email originated from outside the system

DO NOT CLICK links or attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good morning,

I would like to submit the following for public comment for this evening's City Council meeting. I was in complete shock as I read the Reading Eagle article on Saturday "16-year-old girl fatally shot in Reading; 14-year-old boy was gunman, police say" ([https://www.readingeagle.com/news/crime/16-year-old-girl-fatally-shot-in-reading-14-year-old-boy-was-gunman-police/article\\_988a20ea-6890-11eb-8fba-fb88f80f4f47.html](https://www.readingeagle.com/news/crime/16-year-old-girl-fatally-shot-in-reading-14-year-old-boy-was-gunman-police/article_988a20ea-6890-11eb-8fba-fb88f80f4f47.html)). I am a mother, and I am a school board director for the Reading School District. It hurts me deeply any time that I hear of our youth being harmed. I realized on Saturday night that I am not the only person tired of hearing the words "thoughts and prayers" in relation to the city shootings that are taking the lives of our children and our residents. Actions speak louder than words, and taking action such as having a quarterly gun buyback program the first Saturday of March, June, September, and December would go a long way in showing that we are taking action against gun violence in our City. For gun violence to end, we must make the object that is being used to perpetuate the violence less accessible and less likely to fall into the wrong hands. That is why gun buyback programs are so important. The gun drop off should occur outside, with no questions asked, with the person dropping off the gun receiving a \$50 gift card per gun and gun locks for any other guns that they may have in their home. That way, it's a win/win situation for our City and its residents. The excess guns are off the streets and residents can receive something in return for taking that extra step to keep our City safe. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Thank you,  
Becky

**Becky Ellis**  
(610) 780-3140  
[BeckyEllis531@gmail.com](mailto:BeckyEllis531@gmail.com)

**From:** shannon leonhard [mailto:shannonleonhard@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 3, 2021 1:17 PM  
**To:** Council <council@readingpa.gov>  
**Cc:** Michelle Singleton <a.michellesingleton@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** Address Council - District 5 - Donna Reed

**WARNING:** This email originated from outside the system

DO NOT CLICK links or attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Greetings,

I, Shannon Leonhard and my wife Michelle Singleton, of 138 W Douglass St, Reading, PA 19601, would like to address the Council in regard to two matters:

1. the disrepair of the alley behind our block specifically, but the problem stretches beyond just our block creating a zero clearance issue for vehicles at each end and the bricks have developed a deep tire groove that leaves a hump in the middle that can scrape under your car.
2. low hanging wires that we've had no success in matching to a utility or service.

We would rather not visit in person due to the pandemic if at all possible. However, if hearing these issues can only be accomplished as such do let us know and we will seek to attend on 2/8.

Thanks,  
Shannon & Michelle