



# ***COMMITTEE of the WHOLE***

## ***CITY COUNCIL***

**SUMMARY**  
**November 1, 2022**  
**5:00 P.M.**  
**Hybrid Meeting**

### **COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

D. Reed, C. Miller, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Cepeda-Freytiz, C. Daubert - in person

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

S. Smith, J. Kelly, F. Lachat, M. Gombar, W. Heim, H. Guldin - in person and M. Adams, B. Rivera, H. Ramos, M. Oppenheimer, BCTV, M. Lynch - virtually

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz called the COW to order at 5:04 pm.

*Note: During Budget Review this symbol → will be used in all meeting summaries to show items referred into the Parking Lot for further consideration.*

## **I. Budget Review**

### **Library**

Mr. Kelly shared his screen.

Mr. Kelly explained that the City budgets for Library management employees and seven AFSCME employees. He stated that management will receive a 5% salary increase and the AFSCME employees will receive a 4% salary increase.

Ms. Adams stated that the Library does reimburse the City for employee benefits.

Mr. Daubert expressed the belief that the Fringe Benefits line should be higher. Mr. Kelly stated that many times the actual costs of Fringe Benefits are lower than the projections. He stated that the Fringe Benefits have not yet been updated because the City has not received the cost of healthcare for 2023. He reminded all that some costs of healthcare are paid by the employees.

## **Human Resources**

Mr. Kelly stated that all employees in Human Resources (HR) are considered management. He stated that there is an increase in Part Time Wages so that a front desk receptionist can be hired. He stated that the cost of the Risk and Safety Coordinator is funded through the Self-Insurance Fund (Fund 52).

Mr. Daubert questioned the VACA line item. Mr. Kelly stated that this is the vacation allowance that was begun during Act 47. He stated that the City budgets for seven vacant positions annually.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned who trains employees. Mr. Kelly stated that the Training Coordinator uses a combination of online training and in person trainings.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if these costs are contracted services. Mr. Kelly stated that there is a contract with Tralient for the digital trainings.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned who would be responsible for updating the Employee Handbook. Mr. Kelly stated that this responsibility lies with the HR Director.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for all employees to have core competencies and noted the need for these competencies to be verified during the evaluation process. Mr. Kelly agreed with the need for core competencies. He stated that the evaluation process is not yet completed so the core competencies are not yet tied to the employee's evaluation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to ensure that these core requirements are included in the Employee Handbook. She expressed the belief that this is good practice. Mr. Kelly stated that Directors do receive reports of employees who have not completed their required trainings.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that employees have whistleblower protections. She questioned who an employee would report issues to. Mr. Kelly stated that the employee should start with their supervisor or Department Director. He stated that they can also speak with the City Solicitor. Mr. Lachat stated that they should follow their chain of command.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested clarifying this information so employees understand that their jobs are not at risk. Mr. Lachat expressed the belief that no two situations are the same and it is difficult to provide a clear path. He suggested that this issue be discussed further after the budget review is complete. He stated that he will collaborate with Mr. Gobar on the issue.

Mr. Daubert suggested making employees aware of the whistleblower process during onboarding. He expressed the belief that this is most important for management employees

since rank and file employees can gain the assistance of their union representatives. He suggested creating a flow chart.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if employees can take issues to HR. Mr. Kelly stated that they can.

### →Whistleblower process

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if HR also monitors Police Department personnel files. Mr. Heim stated that the Police Department manages their personnel files.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if Police officers are onboarded by HR or by the Police Department. Mr. Heim stated that it is a combination. He stated that most issues in the Police Department go up the chain of command if the person is not satisfied with the results. He stated that sexual harassment, for example, can be anyone in the chain of command or HR. He expressed the belief that management employees have a good idea of how to report whistleblower issues and suggested that they follow the chain of command before going outside their Department or outside City government.

### Self-Insurance

Mr. Kelly stated that Self-Insurance is part of HR.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that Mr. Kelly explain the purpose of this fund for new Councilors.

Mr. Kelly stated that the City provides its own insurance pool to fund the healthcare of its 600+ employees. He explained that the City uses a broker to find the best premiums and that the City is part of the Lehigh Valley Health Care Consortium. He stated that Act 47 placed a cap on the amount of the premium paid by the City and the remainder is paid by the employee.

Mr. Kelly stated that Self-Insurance also oversees the City's workers compensation and liability policies. He stated that the City plans to incorporate Fringe Benefit costs into the Munis system.

Mr. Kelly stated that Fund 52 supports one employee – the Risk and Safety Coordinator.

Ms. Ventura connected to the meeting virtually at this time. Ms. Adams disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Kelly stated that the City has not yet received its quotes for the costs of these premiums for 2023. He stated that they are expected this week and noted his hope that they are locked in by

the end of November. He stated that minor adjustments may be needed and that he will provide the final amounts when the Parking Lot items are reviewed.

→ **Actual costs of healthcare and other fringe benefits**

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if there were wellness programs. Mr. Kelly stated that there are. He stated that the City receives \$10,000 in Wellness Bucks from Capital Blue Cross annually and that the City's Wellness Committee determines how that funding is spent. He stated that biometric testing was suspended during COVID but may restart in 2023.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that it will be interesting to see the cost increases in premiums due to COVID. Mr. Kelly stated that the City receives quarterly reports on employee health issues currently under treatment. He stated that the City encourages employees to improve their health so that it will reduce their premiums. He stated that currently several employees are having ergonomic issues (back, neck, shoulder) and the City is encouraging the purchase of new desks, chairs, and foot rests to alleviate some of these issues.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the City Hall gym remains. Mr. Kelly stated that it does. He stated that the gym contains a stationary bike, tread mill, free weights and tension bands.

Ms. Guldin left the meeting at this time. Ms. Ramos disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Rodriguez joined the meeting at this time.

**Law**

Mr. Kelly explained that there are City Solicitor, Deputy Solicitor and Assistant Solicitor positions. Mr. Lachat explained that the expectations of all the positions are the same and that the titles are less important than the competency of the attorneys.

Mr. Kelly stated that a new line item Legal Settlements has been added to the budget. Mr. Lachat explained that there can be legal settlements outside the self-insurance payments. He stated that this line item would be used in those cases.

Mr. Kelly stated that this line item allows the City to better track these expenses.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Special Counsel area is used for labor counsel. He stated that he did the majority of the current labor negotiations and that saved the City money. He stated that the labor counsel will review the draft agreements to ensure they are proper before they are signed. He noted his hope that the negotiations would be complete by the end of November and that there may not be a need for this line item in 2023.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the Position Ordinance does not contain a Deputy Solicitor. Mr. Kelly stated that one Legal Specialist position has been eliminated.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if there has been a shift in responsibilities now that Council has a separate solicitor. Mr. Lachat stated that there has been a shift. He stated that the Law office is now managed well with two solicitors and Mr. Gombar. He stated that he receives fewer questions and requests from Council now which allows him to focus on other projects. He stated that consulting with Mr. Gombar has been a tremendous benefit.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked City voters for amending the Charter to allow City Council to have a separate solicitor.

**Board of Ethics (includes Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), Animal Control Board, Youth Commission, Board of Ethics, and Charter Board)**

Ms. Reed questioned what the Youth Commission intends to use their \$15,000 budget for. Ms. Smith explained that they are working on several projects and would use their budget for youth engagement including a tripod to assist with their social media posts and tee-shirts to identify them when they are working in the community.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that it will be difficult for the Youth Commission to determine the amount they need until they learn this new skill. She expressed the belief that it is important for the Commission members to go through this process.

Mr. Kelly stated that the City does not receive a breakdown of the uses of these boards' budgets.

Ms. Reed stated that there have been issues with the Charter Board budget in the past. She noted the need to better understand the needs of the Youth Commission.

Ms. Smith stated that she is staff to all these boards and will provide more detailed information.

Ms. Reed noted the need to add this issue to the parking lot and that the budgets in this category may need to be revised.

**→Breakdown of the use of the independent board budgets**

Ms. Ventura questioned the increase in the amount requested by the Charter Board. Ms. Smith explained that Investigation #54 is active again and the Board expects to have higher expenses in 2023.

Ms. Ventura stated that it would be helpful to have additional information on the other boards.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested that a Councilor mentor the Youth Commission through this process.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the importance of social media to the youth and expressed the belief that this equipment is needed. She noted the need for the Youth Commission to have a strong social media presence.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Council is working on beginning the Citizens Initiative Commission and questioned if there should be a line item for this group.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz expressed the belief that there should not be a budget allocation until after the Citizens Initiative Commission is formed. She stated that the Youth Commission did not have a budget to begin with and have determined their needs after meeting regularly.

Ms. Ventura questioned if there are applicants for the Citizens Initiative Commission. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that there are none. She noted the need for Council to continue to promote this opportunity and to encourage residents to apply.

*Note: Membership to the Citizens Initiative Commission is as follows:*

**§ 23-303. Citizen Initiatives Commission Appointments.**

A. Two members of City Council shall be appointed by City Council as liaisons to the Commission.

B. Three citizens shall be appointed by the Mayor for four-year terms and affirmed by City Council.

C. Six citizens, one citizen nominated by each of the six District Councilors shall be appointed by City Council for four-year terms.

Mr. Kelly questioned the purpose of the Citizens Initiative Commission.

*Note: the purpose of the Citizens Initiative Commission is:*

**§ 23-302. Purpose.**

The Citizens Initiative Commission shall work to improve the overall effectiveness of local government by:

A. Recommending policy changes to the Administration and legislative recommendations to City Council.

B. Suggesting operational improvements to the Administration.

C. Educating the general public on the mechanics of City government, as well as the status of major issues being addressed by City government.

D. Shall dedicate one session annually to review the Charter.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there was a similar group in the past that was very active. She noted the need to reinvigorate this process. Ms. Reed agreed.

## **Finance**

- Finance Director's office

Mr. Kelly explained that the Contracted Services line item is to pay an agency to assist with staffing issues. He stated that he anticipates that a grant writer and contract manager will be needed in 2023. He stated that contracts will be coming to Council in the near future.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Contingencies line item will assist with unforeseen expenses. He used the purchase of DocuSign as an example.

Mr. Daubert stated that he supports budgeting for contingencies so that there is funding available for expenses outside the norm. He expressed the belief that this is responsible budgeting.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the contract grant writer expense would be for recruiting someone into the position or for writing the grant applications. Mr. Kelly stated that the City has had difficulty filling the vacant grant position but noted that reports continue to be submitted and grants managed. He expressed the belief that the cost would be for a contract for someone to perform these functions until a replacement has been hired.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the grant writer and contract manager would be two people. Mr. Kelly stated that large cities do have two people but Reading does both with one person. He stated that the salary has been increased with the hope that a good candidate will come forward.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that Reading should have two people. She stated that some Departments do their own grant writing but suggested that they should all be managed by the same person. She stated that the City has minimized the qualifications for the grant position and noted her concern.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz. She stated that the grant position generates additional resources for the City to enhance its budget.

Mr. Kelly stated that more grants means more work. He stated that he can separate the responsibilities and agreed that there is extensive work done with all the Departments. He stated that he hesitates filling one position if the other position cannot be filled.

Mr. Lachat expressed the belief that there isn't enough workload for two full-time employees. He noted the need to hire someone who is highly proficient. He noted the need to pursue only grants that are right for the City.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that Mr. Kelly was recently named Deputy Managing Director. She questioned if the 2023 salary includes the recent salary increase. Mr. Kelly stated that it does.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if Mr. Kelly acts as Managing Director when the Managing Director is absent. Mr. Kelly stated that either he acts as Managing Director or the Mayor does.

- Purchasing

Mr. Kelly stated that the advertising line item is increased for 2023. He stated that the City is doing more projects which requires additional advertising.

Ms. Rodriguez questioned the 2023 costs for leases and maintenance agreements. Mr. Kelly stated that he reduced this line item from \$150,000 to \$100,000 at this meeting. He stated that there are long-term leases on equipment outside the Fraser contract.

- Accounting

Mr. Kelly stated that one additional Accountant is being requested for 2023.

Mr. Kelly stated that subscriptions will increase due to the Munis expansion and the use of Intergov (will be used by CD and Treasury). He stated that Munis will expand to include HR and Capital projects. He stated that capital funds were used for the initial purchase and now there are costs for maintenance. He stated that approximately \$15,000 will be used to maintain USL legacy information.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if there are accounting positions in the CD Department. Mr. Kelly stated that the CD Fiscal Officer operates under HUD, which is not a traditional grant process. He stated that Reading gets direct funding from the federal government.

- Citizen Service Center

Mr. Kelly stated that the Fees line item will pay for Acela (iRequest app) for 2023 and then will shift to a new app through Munis.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if iRequest will inform users of the need to download a new app. Mr. Kelly stated that a push notification can be sent through iRequest.

Mr. Kelly stated that Maintenance Agreements is being reduced due to the discontinuation of Hansen. He stated that these costs have been moved into Accounting as the Munis maintenance fees.

- IT

Mr. Kelly stated that one additional position is being requested as a System Analyst to focus on issues with Munis. He stated that Part Time wages is being increased to allow a part time employee for the full year rather than having seasonal interns. He stated that the Fees line item is increasing to install fiber to the City's remote sites to increase the bandwidth.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if an additional purchase will be required to increase the City's bandwidth. Mr. Kelly stated that it will be required and stated that he is participating in Infrastructure Investment Act webinars to participate in this program.

Mr. Kelly stated that Consultant Services are needed when rewiring needs to occur or if offices are relocated.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned when the website would be upgraded. Mr. Kelly stated that there has been a recent upgrade to the website. He stated that there are continuous updates.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need for the website to be translatable into Spanish. Mr. Kelly stated that the City is currently exploring this need. He stated that an RFP is being prepared to translate the City's documents and for on-demand translation services.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that Council budgets for translation services for Blighted Property Review Committee meetings as needed. She stated that she has received many requests for live translation of Zoom meetings.

Ms. Reed stated that there are 60 nationalities currently living in Reading. She noted the need for additional languages beyond Spanish. She expressed the belief that almost any language should be available and noted the need to reflect this in the RFP.

Mr. Kelly stated that the City does not want to exclude anyone.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz also noted the need for advertising to appear in Spanish.

Mr. Kelly expressed the belief that this should be a professional service and not current staff responsibility. He noted the need for a certified professional.

→Website and City document translation

→Advertising in Spanish

## **II. Salary Ranges for HR and Public Works Directors**

Mr. Heim stated that a pay study for these two positions has been completed. He stated that data was collected by surveying other similarly sized PA cities and through national statistics. He stated that the information has been interpreted and there is a need to develop updated salary ranges to make the positions more attractive to applicants.

Mr. Heim stated that the City has identified finalists for both of these positions. He noted the need to not discuss the salary specifics at this time due to final negotiations.

Mr. Heim stated that the salary range information is on page 12 of the summary that has been provided to Council. He stated that the interviews for HR Director are scheduled for next week.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the updated salary range information is included in the 2023 budget. Mr. Heim stated that it is not included. He expressed the belief that there will be a salary increase but that it will not be extensive.

Ms. Rodriguez questioned if the Position Ordinance needs to be amended as well. Mr. Heim expressed the belief that the salary listed on the Position Ordinance is within the updated range.

Mr. Lachat reminded Council that they approve the hiring of all Directors and approve the starting salary.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the new Director's salary will remain the same in 2023 since they will be hired so late in 2022. Mr. Lachat stated that this will be discussed with the candidates during their interview but expressed the belief that the starting salary will remain in place for 2023.

Ms. Reed noted the need to be careful during this discussion because of the current negotiations. She stated that Council will learn the specifics when the candidate comes forward.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed that Council should be cautious since negotiations are underway.

**→Update HR and Public Works Director salaries as needed**

### **III. Executive Session**

Ms. Reed noted the need for an executive session this evening or on Monday.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed that there is a pressing personnel matter.

Mr. Gombar stated that the executive session can occur this evening.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz announced that Council will be closing the public portion of the meeting and moving into executive session to discuss a personnel matter. The public portion of the meeting concluded at 6:47 pm.

The six members of Council and Mr. Gombar met in executive session until 7:15 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by  
Michelle Smith, CMC  
Deputy City Clerk*