



# ***COMMITTEE of the WHOLE***

## ***CITY COUNCIL***

### **SUMMARY**

**January 4, 2021**  
**5:00 P.M.**  
**Council Chambers**  
**Virtual Meeting**

#### **COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

L. Sihelnik, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, D. Reed, J. Cepeda-Freytiz (all electronically), M. Ventura, S. Marmarou (via dial in)

#### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

L. Kelleher, K. Cochran (physically), S. Smith, M. Rodriguez, A. Amoros, F. Denbowski, W. Stoudt, R. Tornielli, N. Matz, F. Lachat, M. Boyer, T. Profit, D. Klahr, J. Abodalo, J. Kelly (all electronically) E. Moran (via dial in)

The meeting was called to order at 5:06 pm by Ms. Sihelnik. She explained that Mr. Waltman is continuing his recovery and is resting. Due to the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, the public is prohibited from physically attending the meeting. The meeting is convened via virtual app.

#### **I. 9<sup>th</sup> & Marion Fire Station Update**

Fire Chief Stoudt stated that Council approved the project in spring 2019. He stated that the Project Manager was hired in April 2020 and the architect and civil engineer were hired in September 2020. He stated that the firms are enthusiastic about the project and are ready to proceed. He stated that a kick-off meeting was held in October 2020.

Chief Stoudt stated that meetings continue every other week and much progress has been made. He stated that the bay size and gear storage and other needs are being analyzed. He stated that the station will be ADA compliant and that the interior layout is almost complete.

Chief Stoudt stated that the phase 1 environmental review is complete and no issues were found. He stated that the geotechnical engineering work is upcoming. He stated that the zoning and planning processes have begun and noted his hope for groundbreaking in the

third quarter of 2021. He stated that he will provide an overview of the drawings to Council later in 2021.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that this is great news.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he is glad the project is moving forward. He stated that this has been his pet project and that many residents are also excited to see it moving forward.

Chief Stoudt stated that Mr. Marmarou will be invited to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony. He stated that the geotechnical borings will begin shortly.

Mr. Marmarou thanked Chief Stoudt for his hard work. Chief Stoudt thanked all for their hard work.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz took a moment to thank the Fire Department and all first responders who responded to the fatal fire on Chestnut St. Chief Stoudt stated that the fire had tragic consequences despite the Department's best efforts to get inside quickly.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if there are recreational plans for the site of the current fire station. Ms. Klahr stated that there are several options at the site. She stated that a Park Committee has been formed. She stated that this is an interesting situation as there is funding tied to the site so a recreational option is required but it may or may not be at the site of the current station.

Ms. Reed questioned if the current station will be demolished. Chief Stoudt stated that the intention is to demolish it. Mayor Moran agreed and stated that the current conditions require demolition. He agreed that the new recreational option may or may not be at that site. He stated that he is aware of past discussions and is also working with the City's grant coordinator.

Ms. Reed suggested that the Artifacts Bank be contacted before demolition to remove any architectural items. Mayor Moran agreed and stated that the Fire Museum will also be provided an opportunity to remove historic firefighting items.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if this location could become a hands-on fire museum. Mayor Moran clarified that the current Fire Museum would be removing some items prior to demolition.

Ms. Sihelnik thanked the Chief for his presentation and expressed the belief that it is good for the public to understand the length of time required for projects. She encouraged all to visit the Fire Museum at 5<sup>th</sup> and Laurel Sts after COVID restrictions have been lifted. She also suggested that the Chief consult with the EAC to ensure the new building is sustainable.

## II. Park and Open Space Plan

Mr. Denbowski stated that an updated Plan is required every ten years and will become a part of the City's Comprehensive Plan. He stated that Council will be requested to adopt the Plan at its January 11 meeting via resolution.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the purpose of the plan is to guide programming and improvement projects and the use of space. He stated that the Plan includes five goals:

- **Stability** – ensure the long-term stability of the Reading Recreation Commission as a thriving public service recognized as essential in addressing the City's core issues, enhancing the quality of life, improving public safety, and advancing the prosperity of the City of Reading
- **Plentiful Recreation Opportunities** – continue to provide the creative, high-caliber public recreation programs and related services primarily for children, youth, and families that meet the needs of the community for crime prevention and safety; nutrition, health and wellness; human development; and strengthening families
- **Clean, Functional, and Beautiful Parks** – plan, manage, maintain, and improve City parks and recreation facilities as safe, clean, functional, and beautiful city assets that will build a sense of community and attract and retain knowledge workers and businesses
- **Rivertown** – establish Reading as a “river town” with improved access and public awareness of the value of the Schuylkill River to the community
- **Safe Places to Walk and Bicycle** – develop a citywide pedestrian and bicycle plan. Expand the bicycle network to attain Gold or Platinum Status as a Bicycle Friendly City by the League of American Bicyclists

Mr. Denbowski stated that having this Plan in place will assist when DCNR reviews grant applications. He stated that the term of the Plan is 2019 – 2028 and was finalized during the end of the Scott Administration. He stated that the Plan was reviewed after the transition.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the Plan has been reviewed with the City's Planning Commission and they will provide comment. He stated that after Council comments and adopts the Plan it will be submitted for filing with DCNR. He expressed the belief that this is an ambitious plan but that Mayor Moran is committed to it. He noted the need for additional public participation in recreation.

Ms. Klahr stated that this is a unique plan. She stated that DCNR waived the required 50% match and allowed a 10% in kind match instead. She stated that this is an \$80,000 plan and that all parks were assessed. She stated that Reading School District students participated in the plan process and that there were several commonalities:

- Safety concerns
- City Park is the most popular park followed by the park/playground closest to home
- Soccer is on the rise – the City's first dedicated public soccer field has recently been installed at 11<sup>th</sup> & Pike

- The number one requested programming was cooking – Chef Sprout teaches healthy cooking with common items found at local corner stores

Ms. Klahr stated that the Plan will serve as a road map to improvements but that there will be adjustments along the way as needed. She reiterated that DCNR requires the Plan and stated that some items within the Plan have already been started. She thanked Public Works for their work and expressed the belief that the Plan is a good blueprint to success.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she is in the process of reading the Plan. She questioned if other organizations such as the Hispanic Center, Abilities in Motion and Olivet were involved in drafting the Plan. Ms. Klahr stated that the organizations that participated are listed on page 81 of the Plan. She noted the importance of the stakeholder interviews.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she is looking forward to addressing the riverfront area. Ms. Klahr expressed the belief that this is a key asset. She noted the need to address river safety to prevent future drownings.

Ms. Reed questioned if the Sasaki or River Place Plans were reviewed in drafting this Plan. Ms. Klahr stated that the River Place Plan was reviewed. She noted her hope for collaboration with Schuylkill River Greenway as they already have programming at the river. She stated that she is not familiar with the Sasaki Plan.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Plan has been reviewed at Rec Commission meetings. She questioned if the mountains are included in the Plan. Ms. Klahr stated that the mountains are included. She noted that they contain Bronze status trails but that those who participated in interviews did not know about them. She noted the need to engage residents about the trails and increase activities on them.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to work with the Mt. Penn Preserve. She questioned if the greenhouse and community gardens could be integrated into the Chef Sprout program. She suggested that the participants cook what they grow. Ms. Klahr stated that when Perma Cultivate managed the greenhouse there was this opportunity. She stated that she would love to bring this back.

Ms. Sihelnik expressed the belief that this Plan is exceptional and timely. She questioned the approval timeline. She noted the need to bring all stakeholders together and the resurgence of the importance of recreation and the outdoors during COVID.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the next step is Council approval at the January 11 meeting. He stated that the Planning Commission will be submitting comments but that there is no date for a formal vote.

*Note: Mr. Peris provides the following requirements:*

1. *City staff should forward the Plan to the Berks County Planning Commission, Reading School District, and adjacent municipalities for comments;*
2. *City Planning Commission should hold another public meeting to consider any comments received from the above entities and then may adopt a resolution to refer/forward this to City Council;*
3. *City Council must hold a public hearing (no sooner than 45 days after step 1 above);*
4. *Council may, by resolution, adopt the Open Space Plan as a component of its Comprehensive Plan.*

Ms. Sihelnik suggested that Council questions be submitted to Ms. Klahr.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz thanked all for the Plan. She stated that this will help make everyone aware of recreational offerings and locations. She noted the beauty of Reading. Ms. Klahr agreed and expressed the belief that Reading has one of the most beautiful park systems in the United States.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that when the weather is warmer that each Councilor highlight a park in their district to share with one another and to reconnect with nature.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that having this Plan will also help guide other organizations with projects so that all are working toward the same goals.

Mr. Abodalo questioned if including a “fee in lieu of” was considered for the Plan so that developers can contribute to local recreational locations and programs. Ms. Klahr stated that the Plan does touch on funding sources and this is included. She stated that she is currently working with RKL on a five year financial plan.

Mr. Abodalo stated that he would like to meet with Ms. Klahr and Mr. Peris to discuss this option further. He stated that there are river to trail projects under consideration but that they have been delayed due to COVID.

### **III. Review Parking Authority Agreements and Ordinances**

Ms. Sihelnik thanked all for the time spent on these agreements and ordinances. She noted the need for additional questions to be answered and that several amendments have been amended and resubmitted.

Mr. Denbowski stated that he is the outgoing chair of the Parking Authority (RPA) and has worked hard to avoid a conflict with his position as Chief of Staff.

Ms. Reed stated that she and Council President Waltman are concerned about expanding meters into the 400 block of N 9<sup>th</sup> St. She also noted her concern about adding meters to loading zones. She questioned the impacts to local businesses.

Mr. Matz stated that the RPA receives many complaints about double parking in the 200, 300 and 400 blocks of N. 9<sup>th</sup> St due to residents parking on the street. He expressed the belief that this blocks cars from parking to utilize these businesses and creates a double parking driving hazard.

Ms. Reed stated again that she and Mr. Waltman are requesting that the 400 block not be included.

Ms. Sihelnik suggested reconsidering the addition of the 400 block after implementation of the 200 and 300 blocks.

Mr. Matz stated that the parking study will examine that area and can provide a more expert opinion.

Ms. Reed stated that she and Mr. Waltman are also concerned about the business impacts of adding meters to loading zones.

Mr. Matz stated that he has also spoken with Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz about this concern. He stated that the business is not the target of the meter but rather it is the delivery company. He stated that payment can be made via mobile app and this is a prudent way to try this approach. He stated that further adjustments can be made after implementation and that this affects 100 parking spaces with a \$500,000 annual impact. He stated that he will follow up with Council if there are problems to make additional adjustments.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned if the fee at these spaces would be the same for local delivery companies and national companies. Mr. Matz stated that the fee would be the same.

Ms. Sihelnik suggested a discount to Reading-based delivery companies to enhance local economic development. Mr. Matz stated that he is open to this suggestion.

Ms. Reed questioned if this discount could be legally challenged. Mr. Boyer stated that he will research this and confirm.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested that the loading zone meters be tested at specific locations to determine the impacts. Mr. Matz expressed the belief that this is not practical. He noted the need for education to delivery companies and this may make it more complicated for them.

Ms. Sihelnik suggested that there be a trial period of 3 – 6 months.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested tabling this ordinance until all questions can be answered. She also suggested that the ordinance be amended to require evaluation and a report to Council in 3 – 6 months to determine the impacts.

Ms. Sihelnik noted her hope that votes would be taken on all the legislation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she will offer an amendment. She questioned how using an electronic meter system will assist.

Mr. Matz stated that all meters are now able to be paid with the largest mobile provider in the US. He stated that the app is simple to use and can also be used to manage a delivery fleet. He stated that the License Plate Reader (LPR) scans parked cars and can determine if there are violations. He stated that additional time can be added to a meter as needed without having to go outside to the location. He expressed the belief that this is a great benefit.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the app is available throughout the City. Mr. Matz stated that it is available at all the City meters. He stated that each meter contains a zone number. He noted his hope to also begin using the app at the garages. He stated that this will allow users to reserve a space in the garage and allow for on street event parking.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned how this would be utilized in loading zones. Mr. Matz stated that the app and LPR can be used at any time in a restricted parking area. He stated that RPA no longer chalks tires. Instead the LPR takes photos of all vehicles in the area including the valve stem and GPS location. He stated that if vehicles are not moved within the required time a violation can be issued. He stated that the fleet location can also be displayed on a map. He expressed the belief that this is an amazing system.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how these new regulations will be enforced with a minimum number of people that cannot handle the current workload. Mr. Matz stated that there were 8 FT parking enforcement officers and there are now 12 with additional hires onboarding. He stated that COVID creates some issues with quarantine requirements but the RPA does its best to respond when called. He stated that when staff is low there is enforcement of public safety issues and complaints only.

Mr. Marmarou stated that during the Korean War when the Police Department was short on help retired officers were brought back without benefits. He stated that the retired officers already know the regulations and would be cheaper to hire. He stated that he drove from Spring St to the city line along N. 13<sup>th</sup> St, N. 12<sup>th</sup> St, and N. 11<sup>th</sup> St. He stated that he found 26 violations in 30 minutes.

Mr. Matz stated that there is a collective bargaining agreement that governs the RPA. He stated that he will look into this in the future.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that there is also a multi option agreement to review and another updated draft was just received this afternoon.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the financial impact and requested input from the Administration.

Mr. Denbowski suggested that Mr. Matz explain the three tiered approach and then the Administration can give the financial implications.

Ms. Sihelnik requested that the three tiers be screen shared. Ms. Kelleher shared the document.

Mr. Matz stated that the 2010 fee is noted along with three options for increased rates, in general in \$5 increments. He stated that increasing the fee by \$5 will provide the City with \$1 M annually; by \$10 with \$1.5 M annually; and by \$15 with \$2 M annually. He stated that the public safety violations are highlighted in red. He stated that the fees for no parking signs are also increasing along with a potential meter rate increase. He stated that the booting fee will be reduced from \$200 to \$100 to encourage payment plans.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested piecemealing violations rather than choosing one tier for all violations. Mr. Matz stated that piecemealing is fine as long as rates increase.

Mr. Moran stated that the 2021 budget was created using tier 1 but he sees a benefit to tier 2.

Mr. Kelly humbly suggested that Council move forward with tier 2 to provide additional revenue to make up for the increased expenses for downtown needs since DID was not reauthorized.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this is very complex. She stated that the agenda attachment does not match the spreadsheet that is being screen shared. She noted the need to be certain what is being voted on and that this is not easily amended at the table.

Mr. Kelly stated that the agenda shows a comparison to 2010. He expressed the belief that the information is the same but that more detail is currently being shown.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz again noted that Council would be voting on Exhibit A as attached to this ordinance.

Ms. Sihelnik agreed with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz. She stated that there cannot be discrepancies.

Ms. Kelleher screen shared Exhibit A. The 3 tier options are not included in the exhibit.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned if there is a non-profit rate for no parking signs. Mr. Matz explained that the church rate is \$1 each. Other non-profits would pay the corporate rate.



Ms. Sihelnik noted her concern with this approach. She stated that many non-profits are not faith-based. She suggested that this be adjusted. Mr. Matz stated that a \$10 per day rate is possible for these non-profits.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz again noted the need for clarity. She stated that Council is not all together at one location and each must be sure what is being voted on.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned if Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz would suggest an amendment to enact tier 2.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz also stated that only tier 1 are contained on the agenda.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested making the safety hazards (highlighted in red) tier 3. Mr. Matz stated that this would make those violations \$100 each.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned if Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz would put the other violations in tier 1. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she would.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz for this suggestion. She agreed that the red highlighted items are egregious. She expressed the belief that this violation amount may cause behavior changes. She stated that two amendments would be required.

Ms. Reed questioned if RPA and Police can enforce these violations. Mr. Matz stated that this is a joint effort and both entities issue thousands of tickets.

Ms. Ventura stated that she sees many of the red violations often. She expressed the belief that if there was better enforcement behavior would change without the need for these higher fees.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned if the Administration preferred tier 1 or tier 2. She also noted the need to address the agreement regarding the City's parking spaces.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the payment due dates for both agreements. Mr. Matz stated that they are paid on a monthly basis.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the dates were flexible. Mr. Matz stated that they are.

Mr. Denbowski reminded all that the Act 47 Exit Plan requires these agreements.

Mr. Kelly stated that when the City entered Act 47 employees did not pay for parking but that they do now pay. He noted the importance of paying for parking to increase RPA revenue.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned if Chief Tornielli's concerns had been addressed. Chief Tornielli noted the good working relationship between the Traffic Division and the RPA. He stated that all his concerns have now been addressed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to finalize the tier of enforcement rates.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she is caught between tier 1 and tier 2 but is leaning toward tier 2. She noted the need to consider the reduction in revenue due to the pandemic. She questioned if the police respond to illegal parking calls when they are called or if they are deferred to the RPA. Chief Torielli stated that the police will handle the call when they are able.

Mr. Moran stated that tier 2 is an additional \$5 increment but will be much more beneficial to the City. He noted the need to increase revenue to assist with costs to address downtown.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that she also favors tier 2 so the City can respond to the additional downtown expenses.

Mr. Marmarou and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with Ms. Sihelnik.

Ms. Ventura stated that she supports either tier 1 or tier 2.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she supports tier 2 with the safety hazards at tier 3.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if amendments are necessary or if Council can simply state what has been agreed upon. Mr. Lachat stated that amendments are necessary. He stated that the agreement resolution will also need to be amended. He stated that he is not clear what is being proposed. He noted the need to reflect the increased violation rate and the increased contribution.

Ms. Kelleher noted via chat that the increase in fees would need to be re-advertised.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed that the agreement needed to be amended to reflect the increased contribution. Mr. Matz stated that the contribution will increase by \$500,000.

Mr. Lachat stated that the agenda does not include the complete spreadsheet and agreed with Ms. Kelleher that the increased fees must be re-advertised. He stated that the vote cannot occur until January 25.

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 pm.

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