



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

February 8, 2021
5:00 P.M.
Council Office
Virtual Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, K. Cochran, S. Smith, M. Rodriguez, E. Kraft, W. Stoudt, R. Tornielli, N. Matz, J. Abodalo, J. Kelly, A. Acevedo, J. Long, S. Rugis, A. Amoros, C. Crespo, F. Denbowski, F. Lachat (all electronically)

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 pm by Mr. Waltman. Due to the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, the public is prohibited from physically attending the meeting. The meeting is convened via virtual app.

I. Declaration of Disaster Emergency

Mr. Waltman requested an update on the snow emergency.

Mr. Amoros stated that the declaration was made on Sunday as the storm hit. He stated that it was a scramble to get the correct signatures. He thanked Ms. Kelleher for clarifying the signatures needed and stated that once he learned that information the declaration was re-executed correctly.

Mr. Amoros stated that the declaration of emergency will allow for reimbursement of expenses for snow removal. He stated that contracts have been signed with snow removal companies and snow has been removed on the City's main corridors, secondary streets and side streets. He expressed the belief that the City is in good shape and commended the proactive approach taken by Public Works.

Mr. Amoros stated that Reading received a total of 24" of snow from this storm. He stated that the City received many phone calls about the City's response and that the calls were four positive to one negative. He stated that overall this storm was handled well.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked the Public Works Department for their work. She stated that she noticed more frequent passes by her home during this storm. She questioned how the pavements were cleared on Penn St. Mr. Amoros stated that City workers monitored these sidewalks and cleared them for both residents and businesses. He stated that the Mayor was also working to assist, had a mishap and has broken his ankle. He stated that the Mayor will not be attending this evening's meetings. He noted the kindness, generosity, and caring of the Mayor.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that you can tell when looking at the Penn St sidewalks that they have been shoveled and snow blowers were not used. She noted her hope that there is video of the good work being done. She noted that this is costly work and questioned if this would be reimbursed. Mr. Amoros stated that it will be reimbursed. He stated that the Governor also declared an emergency so all costs will be reimbursed.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if snow was being removed everywhere. Mr. Amoros stated that it is anywhere within the City.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that more snow is coming. She noted the exceptional job done by Public Works. She questioned the term of the snow removal contracts. Mr. Amoros stated that they are done per storm as needed.

Ms. Reed stated that this storm was handled well and exemplary work was done. She thanked all for their hard work. She stated that Schuylkill Ave is a State highway but that cars are parking diagonally within bunkers. She questioned if PennDOT is responsible for clearing the snow. She specifically noted the problems in the 1200 block. Mr. Amoros stated that this is a State road and he will need to follow up with Public Works about who is responsible. *(Note: the City has a cooperation agreement with PennDOT to clear state roads and perform other maintenance within the City borders.)*

Mr. Marmarou stated that cars are parking diagonally between bunkers throughout the City. He noted the problem with a vehicle parked at the intersection of Linden and Amity Sts that is blocking the crosswalk.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz thanked the employees of Community Development as inspectors were also part of the snow removal team. She noted the appreciation of downtown businesses when City employees checked in on them during the storm.

Ms. Rodriguez thanked her neighbors for assisting with snow removal. She stated that neighbors across the City helped one another.

II. Recap Financial Impact of Parking Ordinance Changes

Mr. Matz thanked Parking Authority (RPA) employees for their snow removal efforts. He stated that they cleared 38 blocks of snow downtown.

Ms. Kelleher shared her screen to show the worksheet provided by Mr. Matz.

Mr. Matz reviewed the worksheet showing the revenue generated by the revised fines/fees.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the total increase. He questioned how the additional funding will be used. Mr. Matz stated that the worksheet provides the funding increase estimates. He stated that Reading will be paid \$1.7 million annually. He stated that the RPA does not decide how the City spends those funds.

Mr. Marmarou noted the need for additional discussion on this topic. He suggested that the \$1.7 million be used for parking issues only.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz reminded all that the 2021 budget was passed with no formal contribution from the RPA included.

Mr. Amoros stated that the City Administration is currently discussing how to allocate the \$1.7 million RPA contribution. He stated that he will share that decision with Council after it has been made. He reminded all that there is no restriction on how to use this contribution.

Mr. Waltman reminded all that the RPA contribution goes into the general fund and there are no restrictions on its use.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the contribution will be used toward the extra expenses required of the City since DID was not reauthorized. She suggested that Council be involved in these discussions as it will affect the budget. Mr. Amoros stated that he is unsure at this time if the RPA funding will be used to offset downtown costs. He stated that he will bring the issue to Council if necessary.

Mr. Marmarou stated that his constituents have stated that they do not mind the increased parking fine amounts if it will assist the City.

III. RPA Ordinance Review

- Ordinance amending 576-514 and 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

Mr. Matz stated that this amendment is needed due to the License Plate Reader (LPR) system. He stated that the RPA needs the ability to mail citations if a person leaves a parking garage

without paying. He reminded all that the gates will be removed from garages after the LPR system has been installed. He stated that citations will be mailed to the vehicle's registered owner.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the portion about voiding tickets. She stated that there are language inconsistencies within the ordinance. Ms. Kelleher stated that all three parking ordinance amendments on this evening's agenda contain the same language.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if an amendment would be needed due to the language inconsistencies. Ms. Kelleher stated that the inconsistencies have been corrected.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the website shows the ordinance still includes the designee language regarding the Police Chief.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the information on the website to be correct since it is how the public accesses Council's agendas. She also noted the need for consistency throughout the ordinance and with all the parking ordinances being considered this evening.

Mr. Kelly stated that the website can be updated quickly through the "Track It" system.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need to ensure that the information on the website is correct.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that the webmaster may not have realized that the ordinance changed after introduction and before final passage.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz for catching this error.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how Council will know if corrections have been made to the agenda after it is posted to the website. She stated that she is looking forward to the update of the website because the current website is not user friendly.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to explain this correction to the public.

- Ordinance amending 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

Mr. Matz stated that this ordinance keeps the number of outstanding tickets at three before booting or barnicling but adds a dollar amount. He stated that the language is being updated and adds language to get people on a payment plan sooner so they do not need to forfeit their vehicle.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned whether a vehicle would receive a ticket on the windshield or in the mail for parking at a fire hydrant. Mr. Matz stated that the ticket would be placed on the windshield. He explained that tickets would be mailed if the vehicle is driven away while the ticket is being issued. He stated that this rarely happens.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has heard from residents who receive multiple tickets when they cannot move their cars due to illness. She questioned how these are handled. Mr. Matz stated that moving cars every 72 hours is not currently a focus of the RPA. He stated that they are focusing on enforcement of public safety issues, meters and street sweepers only. He stated that the only way the 72 hour rule is enforced at this time is if the RPA receives a complaint. He stated that if a complaint is received, the enforcement officer takes a photo to document the vehicle. He suggested that those with illnesses appeal their tickets. He stated that the hearing master is very understanding of these types of situations. *(Note: one of the residents who encountered this issue had COVID-19 and was unable to move his vehicle for several weeks for the street sweepers.)*

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that many vehicles are currently not moving at this time for fear of losing their parking space. Mr. Matz agreed.

Ms. Reed questioned the parking of large trucks in residential areas of her District. Mr. Matz stated that he has received many calls and many tickets have been issued.

Ms. Reed questioned if additional signage is needed. Mr. Matz stated that additional signage is not needed. He stated that these vehicle owners are aware of the truck parking regulations.

Ms. Reed stated that she was told in the past that this could not be enforced without signage. Mr. Matz stated that large trucks may never park in R-1 zoning districts. Ms. Kelleher stated that the zoning district was removed from the large truck parking regulations several years ago. She stated that any truck over 10,000 gross vehicle weight (GVW) is prohibited from parking anywhere within the City. She stated that she will provide this ordinance to Mr. Matz.

Ms. Reed stated that Bern Township has posted signage but Reading has not. She stated that many trucks park just within the Reading boundary.

Mr. Matz stated that he is glad to learn about the updated truck parking regulations.

Mr. Marmarou stated that this is becoming a problem in his District again.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there are many parking issues in all Reading neighborhoods. She noted the need to report them directly to the Parking Authority. She noted the need to remain on topic.

Mr. Matz stated that the Mayor will be making an announcement about the Parking Authority tomorrow. He stated that he cannot give the specific information but that it will be a cost reduction to residents.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the impact of work done to date. Mr. Matz stated that the RPA and Police have a harmonious relationship and both are fulfilling their obligations.

- Amending 576-413 and 576-514 allowing the Police Chief to void parking tickets and to require temporary changes be communicated between the Police Chief and the Parking Authority Executive Director

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked the Solicitor for amending the language as Council requested.

Ms. Kraft stated that she removed the designee and added language providing transparency and tracking of voided tickets. She stated that tickets are rarely voided by the Police Chief.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted Council's concern about voiding tickets as special favors.

Ms. Kraft stated that Ms. Kelleher has updated all the ordinances with the same language for consistency.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned why these tickets would not be appealed. Ms. Kraft stated that there are times when the ticket is clearly issued in error. She stated that when the Chief learns about the error the ticket can be voided rather than having the vehicle owner need to go through the appeal process. She stated that this is only done on rare occasions when the ticket is issued in error. She noted the need for documentation to prevent special favors.

Police Chief Tornielli stated that this will allow him to void the ticket when it is clearly issued in error rather than forcing the ticket issued in error through the appeal process.

III. Building Collapse Updates

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested updates on the roof collapses on Miltimore St and Maple St. Fire Chief Stoudt stated that the emergency portion of the demolition is complete and the remainder of the buildings will be demolished.

Ms. Reed stated that a building on Moss St also collapsed.

Chief Stoudt stated that the remainder of the demolition is underway. He stated that the City is working with the utilities at this time. He stated that there are issues with the loss of electricity for a time while children are learning virtually. He stated that these details are being worked out.

Mr. Amoros stated that electricity must be cut to the neighborhood for a few hours. He stated that the City is working with the library and other local non-profits as learning locations during the power outage.

Ms. Reed suggested that the City contact Olivet. Mr. Abodalo stated that Olivet has been contacted. He stated that these roofs were not able to withstand the load created by the large amount of heavy snow. He stated that the power will need to be out for approximately four hours at the Miltimore St location due to the crane working around power lines. He stated that there are also elderly needs being considered.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there are many abandoned buildings. She questioned if they have been assessed so the City is prepared for future collapse events. Mr. Abodalo stated that the City is aware of some of them and that there is a Do Not Enter list. He stated that discussions with owners have begun. He stated that Law has also been involved to better address the long-standing violations.

IV. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Commendation

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she will read the commendation for Black History Month.

- Award of Contract for the Video Safety Unit (VSU) infrastructure upgrade to Lets Think Wireless for \$526,137.89 to upgrade the core infrastructure of the camera system

Chief Torielli stated that this will allow the camera system to be expanded and the entire system upgraded. He stated that the core infrastructure needs to be upgraded to allow for the expansion. He stated that additional cameras will be placed in locations based on crime analysis and that additional cameras will also be placed downtown. He stated that this is phase one of several phases.

Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that cameras are critical to solving crimes. Chief Torielli agreed. He stated that the camera surveillance is reviewed once the Police learn that a crime was committed. He stated that there are also officers in the VSU monitoring the cameras and can deter or prevent crime when they relay to officers on patrol what they are observing.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how long the system will last before another upgrade is needed. Chief Torielli stated that the core has never been upgraded in the past and that this upgrade is expected to last approximately 20 years.

- Resolution forgiving CDBG loans made to small businesses through the federal PPP loan program

- Resolution forgiving EZ-FRED loans made to small businesses through the federal PPP loan program

Mr. Abodalo explained that it was learned that the initial round of federal PPP loans did not assist small businesses as was hoped. He stated that the EZ-FRED loans are the City's microloans and that \$1 million was received and provided to businesses. He stated that an additional \$388,000 was generated in this fund by those paying back microloans that they received in the past. He stated that the COVID-19 situation has not improved and the loans will be forgiven. He stated that the businesses will have too much difficulty paying them back. He stated that most loans are for \$5,000.

Mr. Abodalo stated that additional funding from unprogrammed CDBG action plans was also used for struggling businesses.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the total amount being forgiven. Mr. Abodalo stated that 127 loans were approved for a total of \$972,000 (\$650,000 microloans and \$350,000 CDBG).

Mr. Marmarou warned against repeating past loan forgiveness due to non-payment. He questioned if any business got multiple loans. Mr. Abodalo stated that Community First Fund vetted all the applications and he does not believe any business received more than one loan through this program.

Mr. Marmarou noted the need to deny forgiveness to any business that defaulted on past loans. Mr. Abodalo agreed.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the difference between the two resolutions. Mr. Abodalo stated that it is two different pots of funding.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if loans from both programs would be forgiven. Mr. Abodalo stated that they would both be forgiven.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that these resolutions be moved out of the Consent Agenda and to the Resolution section of the agenda. She noted the need for public transparency.

Mr. Waltman agreed.

- Resolution authorizing the City's 2021 bank accounts

Mr. Kelly explained that an additional bank account has been created to absorb the DID function after the wind down period expires.

Mr. Waltman provided background and stated that the bank accounts are authorized annually.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how the City determines which bank to use. Mr. Kelly stated that the City reviews the bank fees and evaluates the need for a new RFP every several years.

- Resolution authorizing the submission of an application for a PA DCED study on the change to 12 hour police shifts which includes overtime costs and pension calculation implications

Mr. Kelly stated that he has been working with Chief Torielli on this issue. He stated that the study will provide the financial impact of making the change to 12 hour shifts. He stated that the study will analyze the overtime and pension calculations. He stated that if the resolution is approved a letter of intent will be send to DCED and the application submitted.

Mr. Waltman questioned if this studies the financial impacts only. Mr. Jamar stated that it does.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if 12 hour shifts would become permanent. Mr. Kelly stated that this would need to be bargained with the FOP.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the cost of the change. Mr. Kelly stated that this study would determine the potential costs.

Chief Torielli stated that he is currently reviewing the Department's deployment. He stated that the operations are being reviewed and he has been working jointly with Mr. Kelly. He noted that the deployment was never re-evaluated after the 2010 manpower reduction.

- Ordinance amending the 2021 Position Ordinance by reclassifying one position in HR from Human Resources Assistant to Training & Employment Coordinator

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if this is a title change. Ms. Acevedo introduced herself as the HR Director.

Ms. Kraft suggested that this discussion occur in executive session as it is a personnel matter.

Mr. Waltman stated that an executive session will be held at the end of the public Committee of the Whole meeting.

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

Mr. Kelly stated that he is one of the Administrative representatives on the Pagoda Foundation. He stated that this annual allocation assists the Foundation with maintenance issues at the Pagoda. He stated that the City did not provide the 2018, 2019, or 2020 allocation. He stated that this will be corrected in 2021 and staff will insure that future allocations are made. He stated that Carlos Torres from the Mayor's office is the Administration's second representative.

Mr. Waltman questioned why the Foundation did not bring this issue forward sooner. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she is the current Foundation president. She stated that she has questioned the Solicitor if she may vote on this ordinance. Ms. Kraft opined that Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and Ms. Reed should abstain from the vote as they serve on the Pagoda Foundation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Foundation made the request for the allocation but it was not received. She stated that the Pagoda's finances are stretched thin due to the closure from COVID-19. She stated that the closure has also reduced expenses. She stated that this funding will help the Pagoda when it reopens.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if this funding is used for Pagoda repairs. Mr. Kelly stated that it is and is a general fund non-departmental line item.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned where this allocation is documented besides being a line item in the budget. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there is an MOU between the City and the Foundation which outlines the roles and responsibilities of each. She suggested that the MOU be reviewed as background information for Councilors. She stated that it was challenging during past Administrations for the Foundation to receive the funding.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Foundation is discussing a part time staff caretaker.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that past Administrations took a poor view of the Pagoda. She stated that she is glad that the Foundation is on the same path as this Administration. She noted the great value of the Pagoda to the City. She noted the need to move forward together and thanked the Administration for working together.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the Pagoda is a large tourist attraction. She noted the need to further develop opportunities at the Pagoda and increase the income stream. She expressed the belief that it can become more than it recently has been.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz, the Administration and Public Works. She stated that additional information will be coming forward shortly. She stated that the Pagoda is a 100 year old wooden structure that was not intended for high capacity usage.

Ms. Sihelnik noted the need for Council to receive an update from the Pagoda Foundation. Ms. Smith typed in the chat that the Foundation is scheduled to make a presentation to Council at the February 22 meeting.

- Ordinance increasing the Property Maintenance Manager salary from \$61,398.10 to \$69,000

Mr. Waltman noted the need to keep salaries below the salary caps in the Act 47 Exit Plan.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that several salaries have already been increased in 2021. She questioned the internal process used to evaluate the need for the salary adjustments before they are presented to Council.

Mr. Waltman stated that this is good information to know. He suggested that it be discussed at a future Committee of the Whole meeting.

Ms. Acevedo stated that the City is currently not using performance evaluations. She stated that this is a promotion based on the merits and additional duties. She noted the need for additional analysis.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she is glad to see internal employee growth. She noted the need for performance evaluations.

Ms. Acevedo stated that promotions and raises are not granted unless they are justified.

V. Executive Session

The seven members of Council, Ms. Kelleher, Ms. Smith, Ms. Kraft, Mr. Amoros, Ms. Acevedo, and Mr. Kelly remained in the meeting.

Council entered executive session at 6:43 pm.

Council exited executive session and the meeting adjourned at 6:59 pm.

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