



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

March 22, 2021
5:00 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Smith, M. Rodriguez, C. Jones, A. Acevedo, S. Rugis, J. Long, J. Kelly, J. Abodalo, R. Tornielli, F. Lachat, W. Stoudt, A. Amoros, M. Oppenheimer (all electronically)

The meeting was called to order at 5:06 pm by Ms. Sihelnik. She stated that Mr. Waltman is running late and will be joining the meeting shortly. Due to the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, the public is prohibited from physically attending the meeting. The meeting is convened via virtual app.

I. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Commendation

A commendation will be issued recognizing Women's History Month. The commendation will be read by Ms. Ventura.

Mr. Marmarou arrived at this time.

- Public Comment

Ms. Kelleher stated that there is one person registered to speak on a non-agenda topic.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned removing the resolution confirming the appointment of Fred Lachat as Acting City Solicitor for a 180 day period which was tabled at the last meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she had hoped that this resolution would be removed at the last meeting but it was tabled instead. She agreed that it should be removed from this evening's agenda. She stated that a motion to withdraw the resolution should be made.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that it was determined that this resolution is not needed because it is an acting position.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed and stated that the resolution should be publicly removed during the agenda approval process.

- Award of Contract for the repairs, parts, and supplies for the City's fleet vehicles to Diesel Service, Reading and Penske, Shillington
- Award of Contract for the repairs, parts, and supplies for the City's fleet vehicles to DW Classics, Lebanon; EM Kutz, Reading; and Diesel Service, Reading

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the items included in these contracts are identical and questioned why there were two contract awards. Mr. Rugis stated that it is due to the differing types of equipment that the City owns and also to have several options for repairs if one of the companies is too busy to make repairs quickly. He stated that the bid process was used.

Mr. Kelly stated that there had been a backlog of repairs over multiple departments in the past. He stated that this allows the City to work with several companies.

- Resolution authorizing the submission of a DCNR Grant in the amount of \$300,000 for the rehab of Reading Iron Playground

Mr. Jones stated that this playground needs much work and this is part of the rehab rotation for all City parks and playgrounds. He stated that the community around this playground is very active.

Mr. Waltman arrived at this time.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned the scope of the rehab. Mr. Jones stated that a soccer field suitable for competition will be installed.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned how parks are chosen for rehab and how the funding is determined. Mr. Jones stated that some parks are chosen based on the needs of the Recreation Commission and as determined by Public Works. He stated that the Administration has formed a Parks Committee which has members of Public Works and the Recreation Commission. He stated that the Committee visits parks and jointly determines project priorities.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that a comprehensive review of needs is done and all parks and playgrounds are cycled through for rehabs. She stated that Reading Iron is a very busy playground. She noted the growing popularity of soccer and the need for safe places to play.

Mr. Jones stated that a soccer field has also been installed at 11th & Pike Playground.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that she is glad to see that the community has input into rehab projects. She thanked the Administration for forming the Parks Committee and noted her hope that the City receives this funding.

Mr. Jones stated that a full size basketball court will also be installed along with new playground equipment and upgrades to the parking area and the lighting.

- Award of Contract for the comprehensive parking study to Desman Design Management, Pittsburgh at a cost of \$123,499

Mr. Kelly stated that an ordinance eligible for final passage this evening provides the funding to execute this contract.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if it was necessary to approve the funding before awarding the contract. Mr. Kelly stated that if the funding is not approved the contract will not be executed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that logically Council should approve the fund transfer first. She suggested moving this contract award to the resolution section.

Mr. Lachat agreed with Mr. Kelly that the contract will not be executed if the funding is not approved.

Mr. Abodalo explained that six proposals were received for this study. He stated that this company will complement the Downtown + Study and that Desman already works with the Parking Authority.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned the timeline of the study. Mr. Abodalo stated that the study is scheduled to begin in April.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned the timeline of the Downtown + Study. Mr. Abodalo stated that this work is moving forward. He stated that stakeholder meetings are scheduled to begin in April. He noted his hope to make a presentation to Council on the results of the Study in August.

- Award of Contract to ProMax Fencing, Reading to upgrade the perimeter fencing around 11th & Pike at the cost of \$40,725

Mr. Lachat stated that this contract was awarded at the last meeting but contained a typo. He noted the need to approve the corrected version.

- Award of contract to Doug Lamb construction for the 18th Ward Island Project at Hancock & East Wyomissing Blvd at the cost of \$556,400

Ms. Sihelnik stated that Council had an excellent presentation on this project. She questioned if the contract award should be on the consent agenda given the cost of the project.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that it has been Council's practice to approve large projects as part of the resolution section of the meeting. She suggested that this contract award be relocated out of the consent agenda.

Ms. Kelleher explained that the consent agenda items are not based on project cost but rather on whether the item may be deemed controversial or need discussion.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the cost play a factor in the location of contract awards.

Ms. Sihelnik agreed that this is a large contract and should have a separate vote.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz requested the Solicitor to opine on this issue. Mr. Lachat stated that if Council wishes to discuss the item it should be relocated. He agreed with Ms. Kelleher that the placement of an item is not tied to the cost or size of the project.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed that this item should be considered separately.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that the agenda will also need to be amended to move this item to the resolution section.

- Administrative Report

Mr. Waltman questioned if the Mayor would be joining the meeting. Mr. Amoros stated that the Mayor would not be joining the meeting and that he would read the Administrative Report.

- Five ordinances authorizing accounting write offs for "due to/due from" transfers within City funds

Mr. Waltman questioned if the Auditor was ready to move forward.

Ms. Rodriguez stated that she emailed additional information to Council regarding a transaction between the General Fund and CD Department. She stated that she reviewed

these ordinances in detail with Mr. Oppenheimer. She thanked Mr. Oppenheimer and stated that these write offs are related to indirect costs that have not been repaid to the general fund. She stated that the ordinances can move forward and that these write offs will assist with cleaning up the City's accounts. She stated that she can share additional details with Council if needed.

Mr. Waltman read the information submitted to Council by Ms. Rodriguez. He questioned if this reimbursement was completed. Ms. Rodriguez stated that it was not. She explained that the CD Department did not and still does not have enough funding to repay the general fund.

Mr. Waltman questioned what the funds were used for. Mr. Kelly stated that in 2015 fund 32 had insufficient funds to pay for programming. He stated that the intent was to transfer funding to CD until funds were received from HUD. He stated that there was insufficient funding to repay the general fund but that the initial transaction was recorded in the City's accounts. He explained that this shows a debt by CD to the general fund.

Mr. Waltman stated that this is a five year old item. He questioned if this is part of the City's fund balance. Mr. Kelly stated that it is.

Mr. Waltman explained that this will reduce the fund balance but that there would be no impact on the current budget.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if these transactions would affect the current budget.

Mr. Waltman explained that this is similar to if Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz owed him \$1 and he owed Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz \$1 and they decided not to pay each other back the \$1. He stated that this transaction occurred five years ago. He explained that the operating budget isn't necessarily the entire general fund and that the excess money in the general fund becomes the fund balance.

Mr. Waltman stated that in this case the general fund paid CD and the accounts show that CD owes the City. He stated that the write-off would clear this "debt".

Ms. Sihelnik thanked Mr. Waltman for this thorough explanation. She questioned if these transactions comply with Act 47. Mr. Kelly stated that there is no negative affect of these transactions relative to Act 47. He stated that these transactions are positive in that the ledgers will be more accurate. He stated that these clean-ups will assist the City obtain additional debt in the future if needed.

- Ordinance amending City Code Chapter 515 Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO)

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if Mr. Savaant's suggested edits were incorporated into the amendment. Ms. Kelleher stated that Mr. Peris responded to Mr. Savaant's suggestions via email and explained why they cannot be incorporated into the amendment.

- Ordinance amending the General Fund Budget by transferring \$123,499 from the Fund Balance to the Agency Fund to finance a comprehensive City-wide parking study

Mr. Waltman stated that this study is broad based and is separate from the parking study being conducted by the Parking Authority.

- Ordinance amending the General Fund Budget by transferring \$92,000 from the Fund Balance to the Agency Fund for construction costs related to the new 9th & Marion Fire Station project

Mr. Kelly stated that this transfer will allow the City to spend down the grant funding for engineering work at the site.

- Ordinance amending City Code Chapter 576 Vehicles and Traffic, Part 4 Parking, Section 576-404 Blocking Garage Entrance by adding rear parking areas and Section 576-408 Storage of Vehicles by removing the language regarding the parking of tractor / trailers bringing the section into compliance with the prohibition on tractor / trailer parking in Chapter 564

Ms. Ventura requested an explanation of this amendment. Ms. Kelleher stated that this will clean up language to address Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz's concerns regarding rear parking and correct conflicting regulations regarding the parking of tractor / trailers.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that the parking of tractor / trailers should be discussed in the future. She stated that in addition to parking throughout the City, they also travel on streets and through neighborhoods inappropriately. She stated that this is also causing road damage.

Ms. Reed described an issue in Riverdale with tractor / trailers driving through the neighborhood to get to a nearby industrial building. She stated that GIS systems guide the trucks through residential areas inappropriately but that this is difficult to address.

Dr. Fetrow joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he has been working on improper parking of tractor / trailers in District 4 for 4 – 5 years. He stated that he thought it was handled but it is starting up again. He stated that when citizens call the Police they are directed to the Parking Authority and vice versa. He stated that this confuses people and they stop reporting issues.

Mr. Waltman agreed that this should be a future topic of discussion.

Ms. Reed stated that RATS is offering a summit on truck parking. She stated that the Parking Authority will be attending and that she has also invited the Administration to attend.

Ms. Sihelnik expressed the belief that inter-agency communication is key. She agreed that tractor / trailers are problematic throughout the City.

Adelle Schade and Brian Pinto joined the meeting at this time.

Ms. Reed stated that she has additional information to share regarding RATS and will do so later in the meeting.

- Ordinance amending the Police Chief's contract by adding the benefits he is entitled to under the PA Chief's Act due to his extended service as a Police Officer on June 1, 2000 followed by his promotions to Sergeant, Lieutenant and Captain working in multiple capacities for the City of Reading

Mr. Waltman requested an explanation. Mr. Amoros stated that there have been internal discussions about this contract amendment, the PA Chief's Act and the current contract. He stated that Mr. Cortes negotiated the initial contract. He stated that the Chief is owed other compensation and reimbursement for some trainings. He stated that this is the final draft and the Administration is comfortable moving forward.

Mr. Lachat stated that the current heading is based on an earlier draft. He stated that Chief Tornielli has risen through the Reading police force. He stated that the Chief is not entitled to overtime but to some other FOP benefits.

Ms. Ventura questioned the benefits he would receive. Mr. Lachat stated that this information is included in the ordinance in the agenda packet.

Fire Chief Stoudt explained that these extra benefits are because of civil service regulations. He stated that the Chief would get the same benefits of the rank and file officers but not overtime. As an example he explained that the Chief would receive the 2.5% salary increase due to management and also the increase to rank and file members.

Mr. Amoros stated that the Chief is entitled to this benefit and it does not go above and beyond that.

Mr. Lachat stated that the agenda packet also includes the Memorandum of Agreement and explains this information.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that this information is not included in the agenda packet. Ms. Kelleher stated that it is pages 122 – 124. *(Note: Ms. Kelleher also indicated in the chat feature that former Chief Broad received the same compensation.)*

- Ordinance authorizing the acceptance of the MS4 Pollution Reduction Plan by adding two rain gardens in District 5 to benefit the Tulpehocken Creek

Ms. Reed stated that a community Zoom meeting was held with residents around Warren St. She stated that these rain gardens will have positive community impacts. She thanked Mr. Jones and Mr. Amoros for assisting with arranging the meeting.

Ms. Reed stated that one of the rain gardens will enlarge an existing community garden and it is a win-win situation. She stated that this area of the City was constructed without storm sewers and that this will assist with water run-off. She stated that she is looking forward to the project.

- Ordinance authorizing the change of the median width of the 100 – 400 blocks of Hancock Blvd and the 800 – 900 blocks of East Wyomissing Blvd

Mr. Jones stated that this is needed as part of the 18th Ward island project. He stated that this is the second project in this area and that handicap ramps are currently under construction. He stated that these changes will make the medians consistent for the area and will also include the addition of curbing where there currently is none. He stated that adding the curbing will prevent parking on the islands in the future and will allow the installation of bike paths on the medians.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that this project will improve pedestrian and bike safety throughout this area. She stated that it will also calm traffic. She stated that much planning has been done for this area and it is exciting to see the projects moving forward.

Ms. Reed questioned if this would affect Yarnell Park. Ms. Sihelnik stated that it would not. She stated that other uses are being considered for Yarnell Park included a community orchard or additional parking areas.

Ms. Reed noted her support of a community orchard or community garden. She stated that the orchard/garden could also be educational with Berks Catholic High School.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that a garden is not feasible at this location due to the condition of the soil. She described the Oakbrook community garden project nearby. She suggested that Yarnell Park become a food forest.

- Award of Contract for the municipal ERP project to Tyler Technologies at a cost of \$1,100,468 with \$700,000 available in FY 2021 and the remaining costs covered in FY 2022

Mr. Waltman thanked Mr. Kelly for the excellent presentation on the capabilities of this program.

- Resolution making ten appointments to the Youth Commission

Mr. Waltman stated that other applicants are still under review.

Ms. Sihelnik thanked Ms. Smith for her hard work moving this project forward and stated that the project would not have progressed without this work. She expressed the belief that these are excellent candidates and that there has been a great response from the community. She also thanked Ms. Ventura for her assistance and Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz for her feedback. She stated that the inaugural meeting is being planned for March 31 and that John Zabala will serve as the moderator.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the ages of the candidates. Ms. Smith stated that they are aged 15 – 22 years old.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Ms. Sihelnik for her work on this project.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the differing terms. Ms. Smith noted the need to stagger the appointments so that the terms did not all expire at the same time. She also explained that all terms expire on July 1 and that members are no longer eligible to serve as of the July 1 after turning 23. She stated that based on this information, she determined the length of terms for this initial group.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this is typical when creating a new BAC. She also thanked Ms. Smith for her work.

- Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute an MOU for the use of 339 S 7th St by the South of Penn Task Force for community events

Ms. Sihelnik stated that this is a very active task force.

Mr. Lachat stated that this has been in the works for a long time. He stated that the City tried to sell this parcel but the transaction was not completed. He stated that the MOU will be in place until a lease agreement is completed. He stated that Barrio Alegria is the parent agency for the task force.

Mr. Lachat stated that a meeting was held with Mr. Veloz, Ms. Sihelnik, Ms. Lopez, and Mr. Abodalo to discuss the use. He stated that Mr. Peris is also working to provide zoning relief to install fencing to prevent cars from parking on the lot and a shed to store equipment.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that residents in the neighborhood want to help with the neglected lots.

II. Albright College Camp Building Renovation Project

Dr. Fetrow thanked Council for allowing this presentation. She introduced herself and stated that this project would expand the Science Research Institute. She stated that the program will be housed in the camp building next to the stadium. She introduced Adelle Schade, Dean of Pre-College and Summer Programs.

Ms. Schade stated that the Institute began at Conrad Weiser High School with funding through the Berks County Community Foundation. She stated that Albright is a perfect fit to expand the program and described total experience learning. She stated that students choose a field that interests them and complete projects.

Ms. Schade stated that the Institute is skill based and has been operating for six years. She provided some statistics and demographics:

- 2,000 students from 21 different schools have participated
- The Institute was recognized as one of the top ten STEM programs nationally (any discipline can be chosen by the student)
- 9 students have applied for patents on their final projects
- The Institute served as the incubator for Gallina Glass LLC
- Participation
 - 68% female
 - 32% have IEP's (not only gifted IEP's)
 - 28% are Hispanic
 - 27% attend RHS
 - 8% attend Northeast
 - 5% attend Northwest
 - 6% attend Southern
 - 3% attend Southwest

It was noted that the Reading School District is a strong partner and the most creative time for the human brain is 5th – 9th grade. She stated that participants will have additional opportunities at Albright and that dual enrollment will be available along with graduate courses.

Dr. Fetrow stated that the Institute will be housed on the second floor of the former camp hosiery building. She stated that the building will be a creativity center and that the music and fashion programs will also move into this building. She stated that the Institute at Albright

will be the only STEM program in the nation with advanced labs that are safe for middle and high school students.

Ms. Schade stated that there are national and international firms ready to set up the labs. She stated that there will be extensive safety protocols and noted her hope that the labs will lead to unprecedented creativity. She noted Albright's hope to have students in the building from 8 am until 9 pm.

Dr. Fetrow opened the floor to questions.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the President was in attendance. Dr. Fetrow stated that she is.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how the public can get information about the Institute. Dr. Fetrow stated that there is information on Albright's social media platforms, the website and that there has been press coverage.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he refers interested people to the Administration building. He questioned if there was a better place to refer them. Dr. Fetrow stated that they should visit Albright's website since staff is still working from home. The web address was placed in the chat feature.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the enrollment process, if there was a limit on those admitted and the fee to attend. Ms. Schade stated that all this information is available on the website. She stated that there are registration fees but that grants and donations are available to assist. She stated that most students who qualify for free or reduced lunch receive scholarships to attend.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz thanked Albright for their work with Reading's youth.

Ms. Reed thanked Albright for the presentation. She expressed the belief that this is a wonderful program and appreciates the adaptive reuse of the hosiery building. She suggested that the building's history be posted describing how it was used in the past.

Dr. Fetrow agreed and stated that she also loves the building. She stated that the history will be represented in some way.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that she is proud to see two women leading this effort. She stated that she has been watching the program and it is incredible to see how it has grown. She expressed the belief that this is a great educational opportunity. She stated that she will continue to advocate for the program and share it with the community. She thanked Albright for focusing on Reading's youth and expressed the belief that this will help to retain these youth as adult residents. She stated that she is glad that the participants reflect the demographics of the City. She questioned how the City can be a strong partner.

Dr. Fetrow stated that she is willing to share this presentation with any interested group. She stated that the Institute will be applying for grant funding and letters of support from the City would be very important to the grant's success. She also requested that the City help tell this story to others, especially to those who can provide grant funding opportunities and donations.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Albright for the presentation. She stated that it is always exciting to see what is new at Albright. She stated that this is a great way to recruit young women to pursue STEM careers. She stated that young women need to see opportunities from other women. She noted the need to continue making community connections.

Mr. Waltman stated that it is expected that in the next ten years technology will advance farther than the last 100 years. He stated that there is much potential in this project. He stated that advances in energy and medicine are under rapid development. He also thanked Albright for this presentation.

Dr. Fetrow, Ms. Schade, and Mr. Pinto left the meeting at this time.

III. Other Matters

- RATS

Ms. Reed noted the impact on the City due to the malfunctioning street lights on the West Shore and Warren St bypasses. She stated that the County and Med-Ed own and should maintain the lights. She stated that a meeting is scheduled this week to discuss the issue.

Ms. Reed explained that the underground conduits were severely damaged during repaving and restructuring work and that there is hesitation to address the lights since more work will be done in the future. She explained that this future work will not begin until at least 2027.

Ms. Reed noted the need for the City to use its influence to get the lights repaired. She stated that Reading and West Reading officials should also be included in the meetings since their residents are directly affected by the malfunctioning lights. She stated that this is a safety issue and requested that the Administration advocate for repairs being completed sooner.

Mr. Waltman suggested that this be a separate discussion topic at a future meeting.

IV. Executive Session

The seven members of Council, Ms. Kelleher, Mr. Lachat, Ms. Smith, Chief Torielli, Chief Stoudt, and Mr. Amoros remained in the meeting. All others were removed.

Council entered executive session regarding litigation at 6:53 pm. Council exited executive session and the meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.

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