



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY
September 12, 2022
5:00 P.M.
Hybrid Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Reed, M. Ventura, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, C. Miller (in person), C. Daubert, W. Butler (virtually)

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, M. Gombar, W. Heim, F. Lachat, M. Rodriguez, J. Kelly, J. Stoudt, E. Moran, F. Freytiz, N. Camacho (in person), S. Smith, M. Oppenheimer, D. Anspach, BCTV, WFMZ (virtually)

The meeting was called to order at 5:07 pm by Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz.

I. East Reading Pool

Ms. Reed stated that she was a dissenting vote when this issue was originally considered. She requested that the issue be reconsidered now that there are seven members of Council and the vote will not result in a tie.

Chief Torielli connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the Parking Authority (RPA) was still interested in purchasing the property. Mr. Moran stated that they remain interested but that funding will be needed from the City due to increased costs.

Ms. Lynch from the Reading Eagle connected to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Moran stated that he was speaking with RPA about this issue last week.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the next step needed to reconsider this issue. Mr. Gombar noted the need for an ordinance to be brought forward. He suggested discussing the issue to ensure that there is Council support to move forward.

Ms. Reed stated that the last vote resulted in a tie and that a dissenting vote can bring the issue forward for reconsideration.

Mr. Daubert stated that he supports selling this parcel to RPA.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that this parcel is no longer feasible as a pool. She described the parking shortage in East Reading neighborhoods. She questioned the cost to park in this lot and how residents could be leveraged into paying to park when they can continue to park on the streets at no cost.

Mr. Moran stated that there will be approximately 64 parking spaces on the lot. He stated that more than 60 people have approached him about the need for parking in this neighborhood. He stated that it is refreshing to hear that Council is reconsidering the issue.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need to introduce an ordinance. She stated that she is looking forward to further discussions.

Mr. Abodalo arrived at this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this is a City-owned property and noted the need for security as there are safety issues at the site.

II. Other Issues

Police Chaplain Camacho distributed information about National Faith & Blue Weekend. He stated that the mission of this event is to have safer and more unified communities through houses of worship. He stated that Reading will be participating for the first time with an event on Sunday, October 9 from 1 – 4 pm in City Park. He stated that faith-based organizations and Reading citizens are invited. He invited Councilors to attend and stated that Mr. Moran and Chief Torielli will also be attending. He stated that there will be a picnic, music and games. He stated that there will be prayers for Reading police officers. He stated that as a police chaplain he sees the stresses that Reading police are under. He stated that this will be a meaningful event and will allow residents and police to come together.

Rev. Camacho also described a romantic night out event that is held for active duty soldiers that has been adapted for Reading police officers. He stated that this date night will be held at the DoubleTree and will include a free overnight stay and complimentary breakfast. He stated that the event is open to active and retired officers and will include a dinner and music. He invited Council to attend the dinner on October 29 and stated that their presence would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Moran thanked Rev. Camacho for his commitment and leadership. He noted the need to collaborate and unify the police and the community. He expressed the belief that these events will raise morale and are great tokens of appreciation.

III. Agenda Review

Ms. Kelleher stated that there is one resident who pre-registered to speak at the meeting.

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Resolution authorizing the installation of banners on the Penn Street Bridge presented by the Berks Arts Fast Lane Art juried contest and exhibition to be displayed until the traditional holiday banners are installed

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned when these banners would be installed. Ms. Kelleher stated that the banners will be installed soon and will remain in place until the holiday banners are installed.

- Award of Contract to East Cost Rescue Solutions for the purchase of the All-In-One Prop for \$11,295.00 for fire personnel to practice forcible entry training

Chief Stoudt stated that this will allow fire personnel to practice forcible entry for locked doors etc. He stated that the equipment will be housed at the 9th & Marion Station once construction is complete. He stated that this equipment will last approximately ten years and that the current equipment needs to be replaced.

Ms. Ventura requested that Chief Stoudt resend the dates that live fire training is available to Council members. Chief Stoudt stated that the training will be held in October and that he will resend the dates.

Ms. Hoag connected to the meeting at this time.

- Ordinance amending City Code Chapter 36 Fire and Rescue Services to allow the City EMS to have the right of first refusal to provide emergency services for events in the City with large crowds with a \$300 penalty per occurrence and Chapter 212 Fee Schedule setting the fee for EMS standby services at \$150 per hour prorated to the nearest half hour

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz requested a simple explanation of this amendment. Chief Stoudt stated that when large events are planned the organizer should contact Reading EMS first for standby services. He stated that if there are multiple events on the same day the City can decline service and the organizer can use another EMS service without penalty. He stated that this practice has been in place but has not been clearly stated in the ordinance.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the \$300 penalty. Chief Stoudt stated that this would be charged to the organization only if they do not contact Reading EMS first and contract with another EMS provider.

Mr. Moran agreed that this practice has been in place. Chief Stoudt stated that 98% of events are handled by Reading EMS. He thanked Mr. Lachat for his assistance drafting the amendment.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if EMS standby service is only refused when there are too many events. Chief Stoudt stated that they could also be refused if there is not enough personnel available, equipment is out of service, etc.

Ms. Rodriguez questioned how the organizer knows if Reading EMS is available. Chief Stoudt stated that it is part of the event planning process.

- Ordinance amending Code Section 91-101, Salaries of designated elected officials assuming office on and after the 1st Monday in January 2024 as follows:
 - A. Mayor. The Mayor of the City of Reading shall be compensated at an annual salary of:
 - (1) For the period beginning the first Monday in January ~~2008~~, and ending the first Sunday in January ~~2009~~ **2024**: ~~\$68,100~~ **\$99,000**.
 - (2) For the period beginning the first Monday in January, and ending the first Sunday in January ~~2010~~ **2025**: ~~\$69,600~~ **\$102,000**.
 - (3) For the period beginning on the first Monday in January ~~2010~~, and ending the first Sunday in January ~~2011~~ **2026**: ~~\$71,100~~ **\$105,000**.
 - (4) For the period beginning the first Monday in January ~~2011~~ **2027**, and annually for each year thereafter: ~~\$72,600~~ **\$108,000**.
 - B. President of Council. The City Council President for the City of Reading shall be compensated at an annual salary of ~~\$5,500~~ **\$8,750** per year.
 - C. Councilmen. The District Councilpersons for the City of Reading shall be compensated at an annual salary of ~~\$5,000~~ **\$8,000** per year.
 - D. City Auditor. The City Auditor of the City of Reading shall be compensated at an annual salary of:
 - (1) For the period beginning the first Monday in January ~~2008~~ **2024**, and ending the first Sunday in January ~~2009~~ **2025**: ~~\$80,000~~.
 - (2) For the period beginning the first Monday in January ~~2009~~ **2025**, and ending the first Sunday in January ~~2010~~ **2026**: ~~\$54,600~~ **\$81,000**.
 - (3) For the period beginning on the first Monday in January ~~2010~~ **2026**, and ending the first Sunday in January ~~2011~~ **2027**: ~~\$56,100~~ **\$83,000**.
 - (4) For the period beginning the first Monday in January ~~2011~~ **2027**, and annually for each
 - year thereafter: ~~\$57,600~~* **\$84,000**.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the increases are needed but stated that she is concerned with the amount of the increases. She stated that increases this large are unheard of in the business sector. She noted the need for the City to be cautious as it exits Act 47 so that it does not need to re-enter the Act 47 process. She noted the need for further discussion and to amend the proposed increased amounts.

Ms. Reed stated that Council was not consulted before this amendment was brought forward. She expressed the belief that the increase to the Mayor's salary is obscene and a more moderate amount is needed. She stated that the median household income for Reading residents in 2020 was \$35,000 and elected official salaries should be more in line with resident income. She stated that PA Legislators earn \$95,000 and the County Commissioners earn \$98,000.

Ms. Reed stated that she is unsure of the rationale for these increases and noted the need for elected officials to determine if they desire high salaries or to do good public service. She suggested a more moderate increase that is not incremental. She stated that the Auditor requirements in the Charter include education and experience. She stated that she agrees with the increases proposed for the Auditor. She noted the need for all elected officials to determine if they are truly public servants. She stated that she does not support the proposed increases for Mayor and she does not support any increase for Councilors.

Mr. Daubert stated that he agrees with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz's position and Ms. Reed's suggestion to remove increases for Councilors. He expressed the belief that these increases will not improve the quality of candidates and he reminded all that School Directors receive no salary for their service. He agreed that additional discussion is needed.

Ms. Ventura questioned who determined the increases. Mr. Heim stated that PFM was consulted and that a survey of other elected officials was done. He expressed the belief that these increases are in line with other PA cities.

Ms. Ventura questioned if the salaries are based on the population of the municipality. Mr. Heim stated that this is partially the case. He stated that it is in line with other strong Mayor municipalities. Mr. Lachat stated that the increases were also based on inflation rates since the last increase. He stated that he would circulate the memo from PFM regarding these salary increases.

Mr. Butler expressed the belief that these salaries are in line with elected officials in other municipalities. He stated that Ms. Kelleher recently emailed the results of the survey. He noted his support for the increases.

Mr. Miller stated that he can see both sides of this discussion. He noted his agreement with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz that the City must work to remain out of Act 47. He noted that it is difficult to predict the future economy and expressed the belief that it is important for the City to be conservative at this time.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the current salary of the Mayor of Allentown. Ms. Kelleher stated that it is \$95,000.

Mr. Moran stated that the last increase of the Mayor's salary was in 2014. He noted the need to align the increases with the increased cost of living and to attract quality candidates in the future. He stated that there are supervisors who earn more than the Mayor including an employee in the Clerk's office. He stated that he would serve for nothing but that he must support his family.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed that the City needs to be cautious and to remain outside of Act 47. She questioned how increases were determined in the past.

Ms. Rodriguez stated that many management employee salaries have been frozen for many years.

Ms. Reed noted the need for elected officials' salaries to be in line with median income. She stated that anyone can run for City Council or Mayor and there are no specialized requirements. She expressed the belief that if these salaries are increased to this level that candidates will run for the money and not for public service. She stated that the President of the United States is not the highest paid person in federal service. She again noted the need to be a public servant and the need for more moderate increases. She noted the need to be extremely conservative at this time and not need to raise taxes because of the increase in public officials' salaries.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for middle ground and to increase the salaries conservatively. She stated that Councilors cannot be paid enough for the personal sacrifices they make and that the Auditor has educational requirements. She noted the need for fair consensus. She stated that Councilors give more than part-time and are true public servants.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that Council is far removed from taking action on this ordinance. She requested that PFM be part of future discussions on this issue. She noted the need for discussions in open meetings for transparency.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if there is a need to clarify language for future increases.

Ms. Reed stated that the Charter is silent on part-time and full-time status. She stated that elected officials can have other work if there is no conflict of interest.

Mr. Moran questioned if Ms. Reed would like him to have an additional job. Ms. Reed stated that it is allowable.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need to clarify this process for future increases.

Mr. Moran stated that previous Mayors did not attend Council meetings even though attendance is required.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested a written opinion from the Solicitor. She suggested that Charter amendments may be needed to clarify the part-time and full-time status of elected

officials. She stated that there are large burdens placed on Councilors and that Council members do much more than what is included in the Charter.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz suggested that this ordinance be tabled and added to the next Committee of the Whole agenda for further discussion.

Mr. Daubert suggested linking increases to the CPI in the future and not awarding four year increases at one time. He stated that this makes it seem like a contract. He stated that annual CPI increases keeps the salary in line with reality.

Ms. Reed agreed with the need for a written opinion from the Solicitor regarding part-time and full-time status of elected officials. She noted the need to move a Government Study Commission forward. She expressed the belief that this form of government is not working and was a failed experiment. She stated that Reading citizens deserve better.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed that there are many demands placed on Councilors. She stated that some Councilors are able to do more than others. She expressed the belief that it is expected that the Mayor be full-time. She noted the need to clarify the role of the Mayor.

Mr. Lachat stated that pay freezes began in 2011. He stated that salary increases for elected officials must be in place six months before the general election preceding the next municipal election. He stated that salary increases for elected officials are not tied to Act 47 but that the election cycle determines when increases are proposed.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Auditor salary was increased in 2017.

Mr. Lachat stated that the Auditor salary language in the Charter is different but noted that he would prefer to follow the same process for all elected officials.

Ms. Rodriguez agreed that the Charter language needs to be clarified. She noted the need for the Auditor to have a college degree. She expressed the belief that the Auditor cannot do the work that is required unless he / she serves as full-time.

Ms. Reed noted the need for all to remember that this discussion will center on position titles and not the people currently serving in those positions. She stated that people will change and that comments should not be misinterpreted.

Ms. Rodriguez agreed with Ms. Reed.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz also noted the need to consider the term limits on elected officials. She again noted the need to table this ordinance and to have further discussion at a Committee of the Whole meeting.

Mr. Kelly stated that he will share PFM's written analysis of these increases. He reminded all that PFM no longer works with Reading as it has exited Act 47.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that work will soon begin on the 2023 budget. She noted the need for the City to retain what it learned while in Act 47 and stated that one action may have many reactions. She stated that it was never acceptable to request salary increases when Reading was a distressed City and she questioned what has changed.

Mr. Kelly expressed the belief that the Mayor is not a ceremonial position. He stated that PFM has encouraged the City to make difficult decisions. He expressed the belief that significant salary freezes and reductions are no longer practical. He stated that potential increases will assist with filling currently vacant positions. He encouraged additional deliberations on this issue.

Ms. Rodriguez agreed with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz that the 2023 budget must be examined carefully. She cautioned all against falling asleep at the wheel.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that these increases begin with the 2024 budget. She questioned if the increases are sustainable.

Mr. Kelly stated that negotiations with three of the bargaining units are underway. He stated that once those contracts are in place there will be approximately 75 management employees that will need to have their salaries adjusted by Council.

- Resolution forgiving the \$1,475,000 loan for River Oak Apartments

Mr. Daubert stated that some information about this issue is not public. He stated that without divulging confidential information, he will state that he opposes forgiving this loan and is prepared to vote.

Mr. Gombar stated that if further discussion is needed it will need to occur in executive session. He stated that the vote must take place in public session.

- Resolution reappointing Lee Olsen to the Planning Commission
- Resolution appointing Rodney Ridley to the Planning Commission

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that both of these applicants cannot serve as the Planning Commission regulations allow two non-residents and this would put that number at three.

Mr. Gombar agreed. He stated that as one non-resident is currently serving both of these gentlemen cannot serve at this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she is unsure how to resolve the issue. She stated that both interviewed well.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed. She stated that they would both be assets to the Planning Commission. She agreed with the need for further deliberations.

Mr. Gombar stated that deliberations would need to be done in public session as this is a business decision and not an executive session matter.

Ms. Kelleher suggested withdrawing the resolutions and discussing the matter at a Committee of the Whole meeting. All agreed.

- Resolution authorizing the execution of the Cooperation Agreement with the Reading Redevelopment Authority, as amended

Ms. Reed requested an outline of the changes for the public. Mr. Abodalo stated that this amendment would clean up inconsistencies and update the restructured office.

IV. Other Matters

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned participating in the Puerto Rican Parade this weekend. Mr. Moran suggested contacting the organizers.

V. Executive Session

Mr. Gombar noted the need for an executive session on litigation and real estate matters.

The seven members of Council, Mr. Gombar, Mr. Lachat, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Lieberman from Cipriani & Werner, Ms. Miller from EHD, and Mr. Focht from EHD entered executive session at 6:33 pm to discuss litigation matters.

At the conclusion of the litigation matters discussion, the seven members of Council and Mr. Gombar remained in executive session to discuss a real estate matter.

The executive session ended and the meeting adjourned at 7:05 pm.

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