



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

December 6, 2021
Hybrid Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher (in person), S. Smith, R. Torielli, C. Crespo, F. Lachat, K. Zeiber, C. Castner, J. Kelly, M. Rodriguez, J. Long, D. Kostival, A. Amoros, J. Abodalo, A. Acevedo, M. Oppenheimer (all electronically)

The meeting was called to order at approximately 5:35 pm by Mr. Waltman.

Due to COVID-19, the public is prohibited from physically attending the meeting. People can observe the hybrid meeting through the virtual link or phone number on the posted agenda, or watch Facebook Live. Citizens without internet access or dial-in capability can view the meeting in the Penn Room.

I. Budget Final Review

Mr. Waltman noted that Council has not yet received the 5 year budget projection from PFM. Mr. Kelly expressed the belief that this projection will be prepared with the Act 47 exit documentation. Mr. Waltman stated that PFM provides this budget projection before the adoption of the annual budget. He asked Ms. Kelleher to follow up.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if the administration responded to the list of questions submitted by Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz on November 22nd. There was no response. The questions are copied in below.

Revenue Section:

Intergovernmental: Grants should be specified, what department and for what project, etc.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes \$193,105 -What organizations, how many organizations make these payments and who are they? Does this apply to all nonprofit organizations? If not, why?

Parking Authority Supplemental is empty but it's listed in the charges for services section as Parking Authority Rental = \$1,761,000. Is this correctly allocated? I thought that total reflected more than just rentals.

School District Guard \$140,000- is that the school district's portion for school crossing guards position? In the Police budget there are 29 crossing guards each at \$10,800 = \$313,200. Looks like we pay a lot more into this than the school district does- Is this normal?

Charges for Service

Admissions fee is at 0- Is that correct?

Other Revenue

Samuel Pottiger is at 0- Why?

Community Development Reimbursement: \$203,634- Is that the amount received from Reading Redevelopment Authority?

Expenditures Section

Mayor budget has gasoline allocated and highlighted?

City Council- We should consider allocating funds for the Youth Commission. Did the city apply for the gun violence prevention grant from State Rep Guzman's office?

Finance Dept: Contracted Services-Staffing Flexibility is for what? Is this the section Jamar identified as fees for temp agencies?? If so, why is this allocated in finance and not in human resources? The same line item is also allocated in the CD Department. Please clarify

Public Works- where is the allocation for services rendered by Hope Rescue Mission? Have we assessed /evaluated their work performance and determined if we are extending our contract with them? I received emails along with administration regarding some concerns Rob Turchi had regarding program and funding- Please advise

Police

Contracted Services \$21,060?

What is the difference between Special Police Academy \$35,000 and Police Academy \$205,000
Chief stated that 152 positions were filled out of 168 however these vacancies are not reflected in budget- In addition there is a position listed as (NEW) vacant= \$215,810.35 and one position listed as vacant- Please clarify

In Capital Improvements there is \$450,000 allocated for vehicles- how many vehicles and for which divisions?

NON Dept-Misc

Update on Consulting services \$27,000

DID \$200,000

P3 \$66,500

Admin Expenses \$16,000

PA League of Cities= 0

US Conf of Mayors= 0

RRA Lease Rev Note 2015 Interest \$91,235- What is this for?

RRA Lease Rev Note 2015 Principal \$479,000

MISC expense \$1,000

Is Stan Rugis acting Director? He is still not listed and where his name appears still remains at 0 allocation

What is the difference between Clean City Coordinator why is listed as Vacant and I thought I had seen Carlos Torres designated there but he's listed as Clean City Foreman? What are the differences between the two positions and what are the objectives and intended outcomes for a Clean City Coordinator? Please clarify

Another observation, what are the differences between:

Executive Assistant

Administrative Assistant

Confidential Secretary

Secretary

I found these titles in the following departments

Mayor

Finance

Public Works

Police

Zoning/ Trades

WWTP/Treatment

Recycling/ Trash

salaries range from \$45,032.26 to \$54, 855 and some positions are classified AFSCME and some Management as well as differences in salaries.

CD

Is it possible to consolidate this section to reflect the actual amounts earned and add notes that reflect funding source? There are the same positions listed under CD under different funding codes- I get that we piecemeal but it can be confusing and unclear as to totals earned by individual positions.

**What are the 4 Development & Insp positions? Are these RRA positions?
Please refresh my memory on the 2 vacant SWEEP positions listed in blue?**

Also why are the 3 new positions listed and highlighted designated AFSCME when these positions are not permanent as they are a result of grant funding?

I also noticed a paid intern position in TRASH at \$10,400 - how much is the hourly rate for this person?

ARP FUNDS

When are we expected to approve 3million allocation for Stadium, I know we voted in favor of designating the funds.

Neighborhood Liaison Coordinator- what is the objective of this position, how many positions are designated and what is the intended outcome for said positions? Where is the job description?

PA Americana Visitors Bureau- what kind of marketing do they provide for the city?

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the final draft of the budget has been uploaded on the City website.

Ms. Sihelnik inquired if funding for the spring 2022 completion of the Schlegel Park Pool has been earmarked. Mr. Amoros stated that he will follow up with Mr. Rugis.

Ms. Sihelnik inquired if the salary increases she requested for the Deputy City Clerk and Legislative Aide have been included in the final version of the budget. She noted that the salaries for these positions are now under Council's control. She inquired if there is flexibility to provide increases. Mr. Kelly stated that there is flexibility in 2022.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that these salaries were stagnant during the Act 47 process. Mr. Kelly noted that these are management positions and were provided with the salary increases received by all other management employees during the Act 47 process.

Ms. Sihelnik suggested reviewing the job descriptions.

Mr. Waltman suggested addressing this issue in 2022 as a budget amendment. Making this change now may delay the vote on the budget.

Ms. Sihelnik noted that she also requested increased funding for downtown operations and for the greenhouse.

Ms. Rodriguez questioned if the part-time position for her office is included in the budget and Position Ordinance. Mr. Kelly replied affirmatively.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the importance of aligning the CIP, ARPA and CDBG projects and funding.

II. Downtown Update

Mr. Waltman stated he met with Mr. Amoros and Mr. Moran last week about the Stantec Downtown Plus report, which was shared with him. He stated that the plan is not as bad as he originally thought. Although he was told that the report was on the website, it could not be located so he shared the plan that he received with Council this morning. He asked Council to review the report and assist in developing an implementation Action Plan by the end of January.

Mr. Amoros asked Mr. Abodalo to provide a briefing on the report.

Mr. Abodalo stated that the report about the vibrancy of the downtown is not finalized as the implementation policy must be created. The policy will cover the “what, why and how” components. He stated that the final report must include the results from the parking study prepared by Desman. He noted that the two (2) reports are dependent on each other. The reports are still a work in progress. He stated that the Stantec report suggested increasing the number of residential apartments and adding a second hotel.

Mr. Marmarou left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Sihelnik stated that she was unclear on the explanation Mr. Abodalo just provided. She inquired about the cost of the Stantec report. Mr. Abodalo stated that the City spent approximately \$150K, \$272K is the final cost and the amount spent to date is \$250K.

Mr. Abodalo stated that Stantec provided their six (6) month analysis at the end of July and started seeking additional input. He stated that a public presentation on the draft report was provided by the Berks Alliance in early October, noting that the administration received the final report at the end of September.

Ms. Sihelnik inquired about when the report will be finalized. Mr. Abodalo stated that Stantec will continue working with the City as the City prepares the Action Plan noted by the Council President. He noted the failure of the City to implement other plans that were prepared for the commercial core. He noted the need to relax parking, SALDO and zoning regulations, etc. which is not a simple process.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned when the plan will move forward for a Council presentation and approval. Mr. Abodalo stated that the comprehensive plan is dynamic and makes many recommendations. He described the additional outreach required.

Ms. Sihelnik questioned Mr. Abodalo’s use of the term “comprehensive plan”. Mr. Abodalo stated that this report is not the City’s comprehensive plan but a plan about the commercial core that needs to dovetail with the Desman parking study. (*Note the existing comprehensive plan was adopted in 2001*)

Ms. Sihelnik noted the need for the City to follow a defined process including a presentation to Council, Council’s adoption of the plan and funding for implementation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned why the Reading Redevelopment Authority (RRA) was not included in the process to develop the plan. She stated that Stantec should have included all the City’s partners. She noted that Downtown Coordinator’s work with the RRA on improvements to two (2) parcels – one at 9th and Penn and the second behind the 6th and Penn Santander building. She expressed impatience with the delay in the redevelopment of the 5th and Penn properties and properties owned by the RRA. She noted that the City has owned the

5th and properties for approximately 10 years. She added that without projects completed by private developers there has been very little progress made in the downtown.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stressed the need to include improvements to the brick and mortar issues such as the brick walks and the boarded up windows. She stressed the need to include clear timelines into the Action Plan. She noted the importance of making right-of-way improvements which are currently only performed by private developers.

Ms. Reed stated that she is curious to see the differences between the plan distributed by Mr. Waltman today and the final plan. She said that she was told that the PUMA group is returning for interviews prior to the finalization of the plan.

Ms. Reed questioned the administration's capacity as there has been limited focus on the downtown and lengthy delays in the process to get the 5th and Penn properties developed, noting that responses to the RFP were recently delayed until February 2022. She stated that Reading's downtown lags behind other 3rd class sized cities. She stated that Reading has many plans and no results, stressing that it's time to stop giving beautiful PowerPoint presentations with no follow through.

Ms. Reed noted the number of downtown properties owned by speculators and the serious lack of code enforcement which has caused various areas to deteriorate. She noted the debilitating loss of the Planning Manager and she again questioned the administration's capacity, adding that the Downtown Coordinator cannot handle all the downtown issues singularly.

Mr. Amoros stated that the current administration has only been in office for two (2) years and they immediately took the bull by the horns regarding the downtown. He noted that when the City leaves Act 47 the administration will be able to add employees. He added that the former Planning Manager can continue to assist on a contractual basis.

Mr. Abodalo stated that to date they have had two (2) developers express interest in the 5th and Penn properties and four (4) developers toured the properties. He stated that the City made zoning modifications to support the Colletowne project and additional modifications can be made to encourage other projects such as a 2nd hotel. He noted that the City has been approached by an entity interested in building a new hotel and that things are moving very quickly.

Ms. Sihelnik noted the importance of moving forward with the plan in partnership – the administration, City Council and citizens.

III. Greenhouse

Mr. Zeiber stated that stakeholder meetings have started to develop resources, new uses and funding for Greenhouse improvements. He stated that the USDA, State Ag Department and

the Berks County Conservation District are included. He noted the importance of expanding urban ag opportunities. He stated that the initial step is obtaining an assessment of the Greenhouse structure.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and Ms. Sihelnik thanked Mr. Zeiber for taking this approach and for bringing these partners together to determine the best uses for the Greenhouse.

Mr. Zeiber noted the need for the restoration of the Dove statue. Ms. Reed agreed, noting that the last restoration project seems to have compromised the statue further. She added that this piece was added prior to the formation of the Memorial Review Committee. She expressed the belief that this group will now oversee the restoration which will ensure that it is properly completed.

Ms. Sihelnik inquired if there is a Master Plan for City Park. Ms. Smith, via chat, stated that the plan was adopted in 2008. This plan was shared with the administration.

IV. Parking Tickets via Mail

Mr. Waltman inquired if Council is interested in further discussion about this issue. He stated that a number of dissatisfied citizens have complained to him about this change.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the Parking Authority (RPA) can provide their prospective and make requests but many issues require Council approval. She noted the need for citizens to become educated on the use of the mobile parking app.

Ms. Sihelnik suggested having the RPA Executive Director attend a future meeting to discuss this issue and update Council on the implementation of the recommendations made at previous meetings.

Ms. Ventura stated that she received a parking ticket via mail on December 3rd and the date of issuance was November 14th. She stated that the RPA's policy states that payment is due 30 days after issuance, not 30 days from the date mailed, as the RPA Executive Director previously stated.

V. Other

Ms. Kelleher stated that Mr. Waltman had her resend the Conditional Use decision for 238 N 6th Street and ask for Council input by the end of the day but she received only two responses. Mr. Waltman asked the others to provide a response by the end of the day tomorrow.

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 pm.

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