



# CITY COUNCIL

## Nominations & Appointments Committee

Monday, July 11, 2022  
Meeting Report

**Attendance:** D. Reed, C. Daubert, M. Ventura (in person), W. Butler (electronically)

**Others Attending:** M. Smith, L. Kelleher, I. Litvinov (in person), B. Murray (electronically)

The meeting was called to order at 4:07 pm by Ms. Reed.

### I. Interviews

- **Glynis Fitzgerald – appointment – Redevelopment Authority**

Mr. Daubert questioned why Ms. Fitzgerald was interested in serving on the RRA. Dr. Fitzgerald stated that she is the current Provost at Alvernia, which is very involved with redeveloping the downtown area. She noted her hope that Alvernia would continue to grow downtown. She stated that downtown needs to grow both economically and socially. She stated that Alvernia serves the underserved.

Ms. Ventura questioned if Dr. Fitzgerald could regularly attend RRA meetings. Dr. Fitzgerald stated that she will make herself available as needed.

Mr. Butler questioned what projects Dr. Fitzgerald would like to see move forward. Dr. Fitzgerald stated that she is new to Reading, only having lived here for three years. She stated that she has no preconceived ideas about redevelopment and would learn from others and work together.

Ms. Reed stated that there has been turbulence with the RRA. She questioned how Dr. Fitzgerald would restore the public's trust. Dr. Fitzgerald stated that her PhD is in communications and she keeps that as her core perspective. She noted the need to provide regular updates on works in progress. She stated that there is excitement around current projects. She noted the need to understand and listen to the issues.

Mr. Daubert questioned where the RRA's focus should be in the City. Dr. Fitzgerald stated that it is difficult for her to say. She stated that Alvernia is interested in addressing blight along Penn St because students need to feel confident in their surroundings. She stated that this is not the only reason that she is interested in serving.

Mr. Daubert questioned if Dr. Fitzgerald sees a conflict of interest if she serves on RRA and works for Alvernia. Dr. Fitzgerald expressed the belief that this is not a conflict. She stated that she is a resident with an open mind and would not be representing Alvernia.

Ms. Reed thanked Dr. Fitzgerald for her interest in serving on the RRA. She stated that there are more applicants than vacancies and that she will be informed if she will be appointed at the conclusion of the interview process.

- **Fred Thompson – appointment – Redevelopment Authority**

Ms. Reed thanked Mr. Thompson for his interest in serving and requested a brief background. Mr. Thompson stated that he has redevelopment experience in New Haven, CT and served as the chair of the Redevelopment Enterprise Committee. He stated that improving blight is a community investment. He stated that he has degrees in business and in economics. He stated that he worked for 26+ years in the telecommunications industry and noted the need to have boots on the ground to make improvements.

Ms. Ventura questioned if there were any issues that the City could assist with. Mr. Thompson noted the need to address blight, noise and quality of life issues. He stated that the project at the Buttonwood Gateway is a step in the right direction and will increase the value of the properties around it. He suggested doing similar projects in other neighborhoods.

Mr. Butler questioned how Mr. Thompson works with others. Mr. Thompson noted the need to hold everyone accountable. He stated that he is a team player and is not political.

Mr. Daubert questioned what Mr. Thompson would address in his first 100 days if he is appointed. Mr. Thompson noted the need to understand the RRA's finances and to learn their progress on projects. He also noted the need to plan and start new projects.

Mr. Daubert questioned the amount of time it took in Connecticut to get projects started and what his proudest moment was. Mr. Thompson noted the need to resell blighted properties to first time homeowners. He noted the need to screen the buyers to improve the neighborhood.

Ms. Reed stated that this has been a controversial board and questioned how Mr. Thompson would restore the public's trust. Mr. Thompson noted the need for public accountability and public meetings with more citizen interactions.

Ms. Reed questioned if Mr. Thompson was open to holding meetings in different neighborhoods. Mr. Thomson stated that he is open to this and noted the need for the buy in of residents to move projects forward.

Ms. Reed questioned where Mr. Thompson would focus redevelopment – downtown or in the neighborhoods. Mr. Thompson noted the need to change downtown parking. He expressed the belief that many people won't come downtown because of parking issues. He noted the vibrancy of Penn Ave in West Reading. He also noted the need to move people with social needs off of Penn St to improve the downtown's image. He expressed the belief that the DoubleTree should always be fully booked but that it is not.

Ms. Ventura questioned if Mr. Thompson would be able to attend meetings. Mr. Thompson stated that he is retired and would be able to attend meetings.

Ms. Reed thanked Mr. Thompson for his interest in serving on the RRA. She stated that there are more applicants than vacancies and that he will be informed if he will be appointed at the conclusion of the interview process.

- **Robert Melendez – appointment – Redevelopment Authority**

Ms. Reed thanked Mr. Melendez for his interest in serving and requested a brief background. Mr. Melendez stated that he has been a Reading resident for 38 years. He stated that he is an entrepreneur and property manager.

Mr. Daubert questioned what Mr. Melendez believes the purpose of the RRA is. Mr. Melendez stated that the RRA should improve blight. He stated that the RRA needs help and he is the person who can help push them forward.

Ms. Ventura questioned if Mr. Melendez has experience with redevelopment projects. Mr. Melendez stated that he has assisted many businesses with their openings. He stated that he also develops and improves properties.

Mr. Butler questioned if Mr. Melendez would have time to devote to the RRA. Mr. Melendez stated that he is self-employed and can address RRA business as needed.

Mr. Daubert questioned what pushing forward looks like to Mr. Melendez. Mr. Melendez stated that the City needs much help. He stated that he would be involved and help make positive things happen.

Ms. Reed stated that this has been a controversial board and questioned how Mr. Melendez would restore the public's trust. Mr. Melendez noted the need to look at past and current issues to understand how to move forward. He noted the need to take action based on facts and stated that he is a great tool to help fix Reading.

Ms. Reed questioned how Mr. Melendez would prioritize projects at RRA properties. Mr. Melendez noted the need to address the entire City, not just downtown. He stated that constantly focusing on downtown is not fair to Reading residents.

Mr. Melendez stated that it has been his pleasure to meet with Council. He stated that he will always be involved in the City.

Ms. Reed thanked Mr. Melendez for his interest in serving on the RRA. She stated that there are more applicants than vacancies and that he will be informed if he will be appointed at the conclusion of the interview process. She stated that if Mr. Melendez is not chosen to serve on the RRA there are other vacancies that he can consider filling.

- **Kelly Lee Becker – appointment – Redevelopment Authority**

Ms. Reed thanked Ms. Becker for her interest in serving and requested a brief background. Ms. Becker stated that she has recently retired and wants to get involved. She stated that she grew up in Reading and recently moved into Millmont. She noted the need to preserve the historic value of Reading.

Ms. Ventura questioned what Ms. Becker believed was the purpose of the RRA. Ms. Becker stated that public information that she was able to locate was muddled. She expressed the belief that the RRA should improve properties and neighborhoods.

Ms. Ventura questioned if Ms. Becker had redevelopment experience. Ms. Becker stated that she has been a resident for many years and sees value in Reading. She again noted the need to preserve the City's history.

Mr. Butler questioned if Ms. Becker would be able to attend meetings. Ms. Becker stated that she would.

Ms. Reed questioned where Ms. Becker would focus redevelopment – downtown or in the neighborhoods. Ms. Becker stated that she was surprised to learn that the RRA owns property along the riverfront. She expressed the belief that this would be a great area to build up the riverfront as an attraction which would also address the noise issues. She expressed the belief that the RRA should work more closely with Mr. Shuman and stated that his work is invaluable. She expressed the belief that all developers who work with the RRA should be local.

Mr. Daubert questioned what Ms. Becker would address in her first 100 days if she is appointed. Ms. Becker noted the need to research the issues. She noted the need to be creative and energetic and expressed the belief that Reading needs new ideas.

Ms. Reed stated that this has been a controversial board and questioned how Ms. Becker would restore the public's trust. Ms. Becker noted the need for additional transparency and more public interaction so that more residents get involved.

Ms. Reed questioned if Ms. Becker was open to holding RRA meetings in neighborhoods. Ms. Becker stated that she is. She stated that she has great neighbors in Millmont with many different backgrounds all working together. She expressed the belief that meeting in neighborhoods would get more people involved.

Ms. Reed thanked Ms. Becker for her interest in serving on the RRA. She stated that there are more applicants than vacancies and that she will be informed if she will be appointed at the conclusion of the interview process. She stated that if she is not chosen to serve on the RRA there are other vacancies that she can consider filling.

Ms. Becker questioned where to find the list of vacancies. Ms. Kelleher stated that the list is updated monthly and is available on the City's website.

- **Jeffrey Becker – appointment – Redevelopment Authority**

Ms. Reed thanked Mr. Becker for his interest in serving and requested a brief background. Mr. Becker stated that he has been a City resident for 16 years and wants to serve the City. He stated that he owned a bar / restaurant for 10 years and is now a machinist by trade. He stated that he is interested in learning City operations.

Ms. Ventura questioned what Mr. Becker believes is the purpose of the RRA. Mr. Becker expressed the belief that the RRA determines how to spend grants to improve the City.

Mr. Butler questioned where Mr. Becker would focus RRA projects. Mr. Becker noted the need to preserve the City's historic areas and to increase the number of businesses and jobs.

Ms. Ventura questioned if Mr. Becker had redevelopment experience. Mr. Becker stated that he does not.

Mr. Butler questioned how Mr. Becker works with others. Mr. Becker stated that working together is key as a machinist to ensure that projects get completed on time and at high quality.

Mr. Daubert questioned if Mr. Becker would be able to attend meetings. Mr. Becker stated that he has recently started working a lot of overtime which may interfere with meetings but that he is usually done working by 3:30 pm.

Ms. Reed stated that this has been a controversial board and questioned how Mr. Becker would restore the public's trust. Mr. Becker noted the need to improve blight and to sell the properties to new homeowners.

Ms. Reed questioned where Mr. Becker would focus redevelopment – downtown or in the neighborhoods. Mr. Becker noted the need to address what’s critical at the time. He noted the need to move the best projects forward.

Ms. Reed thanked Mr. Becker for his interest in serving on the RRA. She stated that there are more applicants than vacancies and that he will be informed if he will be appointed at the conclusion of the interview process. She stated that if he is not chosen to serve on the RRA there are other vacancies that he can consider filling.

Mr. Gombar arrived at this time. Mr. Butler disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Maria Laboy – appointment – Redevelopment Authority**

Ms. Reed thanked Ms. Laboy for her interest in serving and requested a brief background. Ms. Laboy stated that she has been a Reading resident since she was nine years old. She stated that she currently resides in Hampden Heights and owns a business downtown.

Ms. Ventura questioned the type of business owned by Ms. Laboy. Ms. Laboy stated that she owns a chiropractic office on S 5<sup>th</sup> St.

Ms. Ventura questioned what Ms. Laboy believes the purpose of the RRA is. Ms. Laboy noted the need to do what is right for the people. She stated that she is not political and there is much work to be done.

Ms. Ventura questioned if Ms. Laboy had redevelopment experience. Ms. Laboy stated that she was exposed to grant writing during her time as an employee of COCA and stated that she is a business owner.

Mr. Daubert questioned if Ms. Laboy would be able to attend meetings. Ms. Laboy stated that she would since she is self-employed.

Mr. Daubert questioned how Ms. Laboy works in a group. Ms. Laboy stated that she is good with people and is very familiar with confidentiality. She expressed the belief that she would fit in easily.

Ms. Reed stated that this has been a controversial board and questioned how Ms. Laboy would restore the public’s trust. Ms. Laboy stated that this would be challenging. She stated that most residents don’t trust the government. She noted the need for extensive outreach and the need to listen to residents.

Ms. Reed questioned if Ms. Laboy would be open to holding meetings in neighborhoods. Ms. Laboy stated that she is open to this and expressed the belief that officials cannot know the real issues by sitting in their office.

Ms. Reed questioned where Ms. Laboy would focus redevelopment – downtown or in the neighborhoods. Ms. Laboy noted the need to focus on downtown. She expressed the belief that Reading is very far behind in developing its downtown compared to its sister cities.

Ms. Laboy stated that getting more residents involved is key to improving Reading. She expressed the belief that conditions will worsen if the public doesn't know what the government is doing or doesn't like what is being done. She suggested holding RRA meetings at Olivet locations.

Ms. Reed thanked Ms. Laboy for her interest in serving on the RRA. She stated that there are more applicants than vacancies and that she will be informed if she will be appointed at the conclusion of the interview process. She stated that if she is not chosen to serve on the RRA there are other vacancies that she can consider filling.

## **II. Appointment Recommendations**

Ms. Kelleher stated that appointments can be made this evening if Council is prepared to move forward.

Ms. Reed suggested waiting for Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz to return.

Mr. Daubert noted the need to make the appointments before the next RRA meeting so that they can reach a quorum.

Mr. Gombar stated that enough appointments can be made to reach a quorum but that not all seats need to be filled immediately.

Ms. Reed suggested making two appointments now and the rest at a later date. She noted the need for Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz to participate and called her on speakerphone.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned how Council would decide on which candidates to appoint.

Ms. Reed suggested holding a special meeting on July 18 to make the appointments. All present agreed.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:13 pm

Respectfully submitted by,  
*Shelly Smith,*

