

**THE READING BOARD OF HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
CITY OF READING, PENNSYLVANIA
September 16, 2025**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairperson Nigel Holloway who noted the presence of a quorum. Ms. Holloway asked if there were any conflicts of interest, and no conflicts were indicated.

A. Roll Call

MEMBERS PRESENT

Nigel Holloway - Chairperson
Aaron Booth
Suzanne Cody
Michael McDevitt
Rick Polityka

STAFF PRESENT

Amy W. Johnson

OTHERS PRESENT

Michelle Mayfield, Esquire, Legal Counsel

B. REVIEW OF MINUTES FOR PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

There were no minutes written of previous meetings submitted for review.

C. NOTIFICATION OF HARB EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

It was noted by Ms. Mayfield that the HARB held executive sessions on September 3rd and September 16, 2025, to discuss potential litigation regarding 431 – 449 Penn Street.

II. HEARING OF APPLICATIONS:

ITEM #1 – RESOLUTION #53-25 – It is to be considered that the HARB deliberate action to be taken regarding the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 concerning the former structures located at 431 and 433 (AKA 431) Penn Street, Reading, PA.

Property Owner: City of Reading, PA

Owner's Address: 815 Washington St., Reading, PA 19601

Applicant: N/A

Applicant's Address: N/A

Building description, period, style, defining features: 431 Penn St. – Originally constructed in 1912, this richly detailed Beaux-Arts façade was originally located at 22-24 North Fifth Street where it fronted the Reading News Building, home of a short-lived newspaper. It was removed to this site as part of American Bank's Project Keystone in 1982. The building stone façade features bold, large scale details including decorative brackets, a balustrade at the third floor roofline and ionic columns that extend from the first to the second floor. The building is a contributing site in the Callowhill Historic District.

433 Penn St. – This two story commercial building features coursed limestone pillars on either side of the first floor storefront that includes a recessed entranceway and a dentiled cornice. The second floor features a brick façade with decorative stone pilasters and a stone cornice that

features a decorative garland swag. The structure received a site quality rating of 84 and is a contributing site in the Callowhill Historic District.

Composite Index Rating: 431 Penn St.: N/A, 433 Penn St.: 84

Proposed alterations: It is to be considered that the HARB deliberate action to be taken regarding the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 concerning the former structures located at 431 and 433 (AKA 431) Penn Street, Reading, PA.

SIS 1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment **SIS 2.** The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided. **SIS 5.** Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved. **SIS 6.** Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

Discussion:

- The properties were reviewed by the HARB at the November 19, 2024, HARB meeting at which time the HARB approved the conceptual design for the stabilization of the front facades of 431, 433, and 441 (AKA 437 Penn St.), the demolition of the northern (rear) portions of the structures and the development of the site for a commercial use as per HARB Resolution No. 53-54.
- In the Spring of 2025, the City's Chief Building Official ordered full demolition of the structures, and the demolition was completed in June 2025. This action was deemed to be a direct violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-54.
- The properties were again reviewed by the HARB at the June 26, 2025, HARB meeting at which time the Board considered action to be taken regarding the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 concerning the former structures located at 431-433 Penn Street and authorized a Right-To-Know Law request be made on behalf of the HARB requesting records related to 431 Penn Street and 433 Penn Street.
- Ms. Mayfield inquired as to whether the Board would like to consider authorization to issue a notice of violation to the City of Reading for the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-54 as adopted by the Board on November 19, 2024. The Board concurred that the above action should be taken.

Motion: Resolution No. 53-25 – It is to be considered that the HARB deliberate action to be taken regarding the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 concerning the former structures located at 431 and 433 (AKA 431) Penn Street, Reading, PA.

OWNER/APPLICANT: City of Reading

The Historical Architectural Review Board, upon motion by Mr. Polityka and seconded by Mr. McDevitt, adopted the proposal to authorize taking action regarding the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 as described herein and specified the following:

1. Consideration of action to be taken regarding the violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 concerning the former structures located at 431 and 433 (AKA 431) Penn Street was deliberated by the HARB.

2. HARB Resolution No. 53-24, as rendered by the HARB on November 19, 2024, granted a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of 431, 433 (AKA 431) and 441 (AKA 437) Penn Street to include the stabilization and retention of the front facades of each building.
3. Due to the severe neglect and resulting deterioration and unsafe condition of 431 and 433 (AKA 431) Penn Street, the City of Reading's Chief Building Official ordered the complete demolition of the buildings of which is in violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24.
4. The HARB authorizes the issuance of a notice of violation to the City of Reading as the owner of 431 and 433 (AKA 431) Penn Street for violation of HARB Resolution No. 53-24 as rendered by the Board on November 19, 2024.

The motion to authorize action to be taken by the Board as described above was approved unanimously.

ITEM #2 - RESOLUTION #54-25 – It is to be considered that the HARB deliberate action to be taken regarding the existing conditions and the preservation of the structures located at 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street, Reading, PA.

Property Owner: City of Reading, PA

Owner's Address: 815 Washington St., Reading, PA 19601

Applicant: N/A

Applicant's Address: N/A

Building description, period, style, defining features: 445 Penn St. – The first building on this site was a stone tavern built in 1763. This later became the Federal Inn, where George Washington stayed during his visit to Reading in 1794. The Farmer's National Bank acquired the building in 1814 and converted it into a bank which over the years became a familiar landmark of downtown Reading. The old Federal Inn came down in 1925 when the Farmer's National Bank erected the present bank building. Built in the Classical Revival style, the structure is built of steel frame construction with brick curtain walls and a granite façade. The floors and roof are concrete. The structure received a composite index rating of 124 and is an outstanding contributing site in the Callowhill Historic District.

449 Penn St. – The Colonial Trust Company was established in 1900. Early in 1901 it purchased and demolished the Curtis & Jones Building on the northwest corner of Fifth and Penn Streets. L.H. Focht & Son began construction for a nine-story office building later the same year, taking two years to complete, and was Reading's first skyscraper. The building had its own steam and electric plants for heating and lighting. The Commercial style structure is enriched with Beaux Arts style ornament and features an elaborate cornice and arched windows with balconies at the ninth floor. Of particular interest are the ram's head brackets that support the running bay windows that extend from the third to the eighth floors. The Colonial Trust Building occupies the site of the house of Daniel Rose, a well known early nineteenth century clockmaker. This landmark structure received a site quality rating of 124 and is an outstanding contributing site in the Callowhill Historic District.

Composite Index Rating: 445 Penn St.: 124 / 449 Penn St.: 124

Proposed alterations: It is to be considered that the HARB deliberate action to be taken regarding the existing conditions and the preservation of the structures located at 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street, Reading, PA.

SIS 1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment **SIS 2.** The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided. **SIS 4.** Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved. **SIS 5.** Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved. **SIS 6.** Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

Discussion:

- The properties were reviewed by the HARB at the June 26, 2025, HARB meeting at which time the Board authorized Ms. Johnson to enter the building to inspect and document the existing conditions authorized a Right-To-Know Law request be made on behalf of the HARB requesting records related to 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street.
- Ms. Mayfield inquired as to whether the HARB wished to authorize the issuance of a notice of demolition by neglect to the City of Reading noting the condition of both of the structures' roofs, the vaults under the sidewalk at each structure, and the masonry veneer at 449 Penn St.
- Mr. Booth noted that the Board has received a report dated March 21, 2022, from a structural engineer relative to the structures at 445 and 449 Penn Street, with photos, which identified structural deficiencies including the failing structure under the sidewalk, failing brick and concrete veneer at 449 Penn, the failing parapet, and moisture issued related to the failing roofing.
- Mr. Booth noted that the response from the City to the HARB's Right-To-Know request for documentation revealed that no permits have been issued for any maintenance or stabilization work for the buildings. Mr. Booth further noted that since the City has owned the buildings, they have not undertaken any efforts to address the deficiencies or implement the recommendations as identified in the above mentioned report.
- Mr. Polityka noted that the City intends to sell the buildings to a developer to develop the buildings and site and recommended that the focus be on addressing the most critical structural deficiencies in order to stabilize the buildings.
- Mr. Polityka inquired as to how long the City is going to hold onto the buildings.
- Mr. Polityka inquired about the failing brick veneer and failing parapets at 449 Penn St. Mr. Booth replied that the parapets at 449 Penn St. are failing and moisture is entering the building from the roof level and infiltrating the exterior wall assembly which is causing erosion of the anchors of the veneer causing it to separate from the structure. This can be repaired but has not been repaired to date.
- Mr. Booth stated that a full assessment of 449 Penn St. is warranted and noted that the evaluation in the March 2022 report is not comprehensive and in order to properly maintain the building and identify all of the deficiencies, a study similar to the one that was done for 431, 433, and 441 Penn St. should be undertaken and corrections should be made.

- Ms. Mayfield noted that if the Board desires, the Board could issue a notice of demolition by neglect noting that the following items, including but not limited to, making the buildings watertight and addressing the structural deficiencies.
- Mr. Booth noted that there may be other deficiencies that have not been identified.
- Ms. Halloway asked if the Board could request a study. Ms. Mayfield responded that the Board could recommend, not request, a study but immediate action should be requiring the buildings to be made watertight and addressing the structural deficiencies of the vaults under the sidewalk.
- The Board concurred that a notice of demolition by neglect should be authorized to be sent to the City and discussed the content of the violation notice noting that the notice is all encompassing and applies to the general maintenance and preservation of the entire structures.
- The Board discussed requiring that the City provide a plan for the stabilization of the buildings.
- The Board discussed the time frame that the City would be required to follow for making the required repairs to stabilize the buildings.

Motion: Resolution No. 54-25 – It is to be considered that the HARB deliberate action to be taken regarding the existing conditions and the preservation of the structures located at 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street, Reading, PA.

OWNER/APPLICANT: City of Reading

The Historical Architectural Review Board, upon motion by Mr. Booth and seconded by Mr. Polityka, adopted the proposal to authorize taking action regarding the preservation of 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street as described herein and specified the following:

1. Consideration of action to be taken regarding the existing conditions and the preservation of the structures located at 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street was deliberated by the HARB.
2. The HARB authorizes the issuance of a notice of violation for demolition by neglect to the City of Reading as the owner of 445 (AKA 443) and 449 (AKA 443) Penn Street for the neglect by the City to address issues that have been identified previously as matters of building deterioration, public safety and that are detrimental to the ongoing preservation of the structures as per documentation received by the HARB through a Right-To-Know Law request.
3. The HARB requires that the City undertake necessary repairs to make the structures watertight within 30 days and present a plan for measures to be taken to repair, preserve, and protect the structures.

The motion to authorize action to be taken by the Board as described above was approved unanimously.

ITEM #3 - RESOLUTION #55-25 – Review of applications approved by Staff.

Motion: The Historical Architectural Review Board upon motion by Mr. Polityka and seconded by Ms. Cody adopted the proposal to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work described herein:

The work proposed in applications approved by Staff as follows:

- a. **Address:** 1274 Hill Rd.
Owner: Jazmin Cruz
Replacement of gutters on all façade in kind.
- b. **Address:** 901 Centre Ave.
Owner: Jorge DeJesus, Owner
Replacement of rotted wood beadboard and staining of the wood beadboard at the first floor front porch ceiling in kind and painting of exterior wood trim at the first floor front porch in kind.
- c. **Address:** 432 Oley St.
Owner: Wayne and Kelli Roberts, Owners
Painting of exterior wood surfaces in kind.
- d. **Address:** 942 Madison Ave.
Owner: D & L Reading Property, LLC
Painting of exterior wood and masonry surfaces.
- e. **Address:** 25 S. 11th St.
Owner: Jocelyn Muniz Astacio & Angel Vazquez Morales, Owners
Repair of deteriorated wood trim at the second floor front bay window in kind.
- f. **Address:** 916 Centre Ave.
Owner: Daryl Zimmerman
Painting of exterior wood surfaces the first floor front porch in kind.
- g. **Address:** 449 S. 7th St.
Owner: Teodocia Arana Macedo
Replacement of an existing mailbox in kind and painting of wood, masonry, and metal surfaces.
- h. **Address:** 127 Wood St.
Owner: Lazaro Pepen
Installation of two 3' x 4' temporary vinyl banners at the northern and southern facades of the building.

The motion to approve the above work was approved unanimously.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Education and Outreach Committee Report: Ms. Cody reported that the GRCA Building Berks Awards were held on September 9th and noted that the City's Community Development Director attended the awards ceremony. Ms. Cody recommended that HARB members attend functions such as these. Ms. Cody informed the Board that she has spoken to Mike Lauter of the Centre

Park Historic District about having the Board do a presentation regarding the HARB review process and dates for the presentation can be discussed. Ms. Cody stated that RBAR is having a housing forum in October and they recognize that there needs to be a discussion between the HARB and RBAR members regarding providing information to new property owners in historic districts. Ms. Cody stated the Green Building Alliance is a big initiative that the City is putting together right now and they are lining up housing initiatives and giving presentations to the community regarding what green building is. Ms. Cody noted the potential for the HARB to align themselves with community events and initiatives and being proactive instead of reactive.

2. Policy Committee: Mr. Booth stated that there was no report from the Policy Committee.

IV. Adjournment

As there was no further business, a motion for adjournment was made by Mr. Booth and seconded by Mr. McDevitt. The meeting was adjourned at 7:39pm.