



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
BY MAYOR EDDIE MORÁN
JANUARY 28, 2022

.....

Good morning and welcome, everyone.

I greatly appreciate all of you making the time to be here today and for those joining us virtually.

Even with City Hall officially closed to the public and our employees working from home, it was important for me to provide this hybrid format to demonstrate to the public that our work goes on...regardless of Covid.

Our residents deserve nothing less.

I am also pleased to announce that City Hall will reopen on Monday, January 31st, with safety protocols in place for our employees while visitors will be required to wear masks at all times...with no exceptions.

I also want to thank Bill Evans, chief of staff to state Sen. Judy Schwank, state Rep. Manny Guzman, members of the City Council, our County Commissioners, our City Auditor, Maria Rodríguez along with our Directors that made it here today.

Most importantly, I'd like to acknowledge my wife, Ruthie, and my son, Danny, who are also here with me today and have been so supportive of me in these past two years.

I often say we should count our blessings on a daily basis and today is no different.

Once again, I share with all of you how thrilled I am to serve as your Mayor and how fortunate I feel to have this opportunity.

Wow. What a year it was.

In 2021, the City of Reading experienced quite a bit of change.

It began with great news when we learned that Reading is now the fourth largest City in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania....95,112 residents strong!



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During the 2020 Census, our residents stepped up, were counted, and took this process seriously.

As a result, the City of Reading will receive the necessary resources from the federal and state governments that it deserves.

This means more money for essential programs such as Head Start, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program...also known as SNAP.

Even during our second fully-blown year with Covid, we accomplished quite a bit.

For many families and individuals, the struggle and pain caused by Covid is STILL all too real.

Thanks to the help of Penn State Health - St. Joseph Medical Center along with Latino Connection, more than 2,000 residents were vaccinated in 2021 at 20 City-sponsored events.

From April 21st through July 7th alone, St. Joseph's alone administered 2,743 doses.

It's definitely a step in the right direction but we need everyone to do their part by getting doubly vaccinated along with a booster. Do it for yourself...your family...your neighborhood and your entire community.

Covid not only presented physical and health challenges but economic ones, too.

Let me begin by highlighting how our Human Relations Commission, led by Executive Director Kimberly Talbot, processed 500 applications and assisted 305 individuals and families with utility and rental assistance.



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Since the rental assistance program began in July of 2020, the City has spent more than \$1 million to keep our residents safe and warm in their homes.

The HRC helped more than 100 walk-ins and answered nearly 1,500 calls for help.

We are definitely each other's neighbors.

Yes, even with change and occasional challenges, Reading continues to move in the right direction.

It's a direction that began with our Administration's foundational pillars:

- Safe Streets and Safe Neighborhoods
- Education and Workforce Development
- Community and Economic Development
- And Responsible Leadership.

Everything we've done in the last year has centered around these foundational pillars and 2022 will be no different.

Our guiding principles will continue to be:

- Accountability in government.
- Equity and Inclusion in our hiring practices.
- Integrity in all of our dealings.
- Transparency and honesty with members of the public.

Due to these pillars and the public's faith in my Administration, calls, and requests for assistance have increased.



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Calls to the Citizens Service Center increased by more than 2,730 last year.

Service requests increased by 787 for a total of more than 29,500.

Our Reading iRequest app also saw an increase of more than 860 users last year with more than 4,000 residents using this valuable app.

Our administration has also been focused on the City’s bottom line as we continued to provide services to our residents in a cost-effective manner.

This year also marks the final year of Act 47 as we worked tirelessly to ensure a successful exit which will take place during the third quarter of this year.

With that said, I’d like to thank Gordon Mann and his excellent team from Public Financial Management...known as PFM...for helping us get through this hurdle...along with all of the fine professionals at DCED.

The monthly meetings were always useful and allowed our administration to always get clear and accurate numbers while planning for the future.

The city’s finances remain solid.

Our revenues were stable from tax collections, even during the most difficult economic time in recent memory due to the pandemic.

Last fall, I presented a \$95.4 million budget to the Reading City Council.

Through proactive collaboration and weekly working groups, our administration and City Council worked on a budget with no tax increases.

I want to thank Councilmembers – led by Council President Jeff Waltman - for advocating passionately for their constituents through this process.

To the rest of City Council, I simply say “thank you”.



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Thank you for asking questions and for representing your constituents in the best ways that you can.

I appreciate Council's role in this process and look forward to a close and productive working relationship for years to come.

Residents want to know that their communities are safe, clean, and vibrant.

A viable and strong workforce is the key to that success.

That's why I was pleased that the City was able to successfully negotiate two-year collective bargaining agreements with the Police, Fire, and Municipal Workers unions.

I thank the leaders of those fine unions for their willingness to work with the City along with our Director of Finance, Jamar Kelly, for taking the lead in these discussions.

I would also like to thank the FOP and its leadership for approving a very workable 12-hour shift agreement that allows for maximum efficiency.

It greatly benefits our residents along with our police force.

The Finance Department has had quite a year, having processed more than 3,200 purchase orders and putting out 33 bids, Requests for Proposals, and Request for Qualifications.

Major projects include:

- The 9th and Marion Fire Station
- The purchase of two new fire trucks
- Buttonwood Gateway Project
- Americans with Disabilities Act improvements at Angelica Park
- Bernhardt's Dam Spillway Removal Project
- And the Downtown Plus Strategic Master Plan.



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Public Works also had an incredibly busy year, having paved nearly six miles of streets, including the complete reconstruction of the 200 and 300 blocks of Penn Street along with all of McClellan Street in the Oakbrook area.

I'm also pleased to announce that all of the reconstructed sections along River Road, Spring Street, and Bridge Street are completed.

Completion of the Lincoln Street extension is also slated for a few short weeks from now in March.

None of these sections would have been completed without the cooperation from RAWA, UGI, MetEd, and six telecom companies that assisted us with a significant amount of heavy utility relocations.

I'm also pleased to announce that six more miles of construction are scheduled for 2022 at an investment of \$6 million, along with 300 curbs.

Many of you have also been paying close attention to dangerous intersections.

Last year, Public Works – after collaborating hand-in-hand with the Reading Police Department - worked diligently with Gannet Fleming and McCormick and Taylor to complete traffic studies at five intersections.

As a result, there will be new stop signs and other modifications that will improve pedestrian and vehicle traffic safety at the intersections of 2nd and Buttonwood - which is heavy with children walking to and from school - and 13th and Perry Streets.

As a quality of life issue, the City also installed traffic control islands and gates at the Pagoda that will restrict traffic and parking, especially during afterhours that will eliminate safety and noise concerns.

Public Works also provided safety improvements at the Pagoda as it addressed issues surrounding its foundational wall.



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Last year, Public Works also completed the 5th Street Pruning Project from Canal to Spring Streets and replaced 760 streetlights with energy-efficient LED illumination.

The 18th Ward Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Trail project is also under construction as a contractor removed an existing curb and replaced it with nearly 7,000 feet of new materials.

This project widened the existing traffic islands along East Wyomissing and Hancock Boulevards.

In addition, the 18th Ward Liggett Avenue Intersection design phase has been 90 percent completed and will be finished this spring. These improvements include significant stormwater and road realignments.

Our Community Development Department was also quite busy last year as the City of Reading was awarded a Federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services for \$3.9 million.

This grant – through the Office of Minority Health – focuses on forming progressive partnerships for social determinants of health.

The City of Reading was the only recipient of these funds in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Our administration is partnering with PennState Health, Reading Area Community College, and Latino Connection to offer programs for our vulnerable communities.

The program addresses behavioral health, mental health, substance abuse disorders, healthy lifestyles, and disease management for cardiovascular and diabetic diseases.

We also offer a special thanks to the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Centro Hispano, and I-LEAD for their cooperation in this process.



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The City also received two grants for lead-based paint abatement in residential dwellings that were built prior to 1978.

Lead poisoning is a determinate to the future of our children, particularly those of color.

For the first time in decades, the City was awarded yet another Federal grant for \$3.4 million dollars in addition to \$127,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

The lead hazard reduction program requires cleaning 160 homes that are occupied with children having elevated blood lead levels.

We are currently working to find local certified professionals who will assist us in this effort.

The City was also awarded a WalkWorks grant offered by the State Department of Health through the State Physical Activity and Nutrition program...also known as SPAN.

These funds will be used to develop active lifestyles encouraging walkability, bicycling infrastructure, and street connectivity.

Understanding the importance of education, our Administration played an important and key role in offering multiple grants to Albright College.

The Science Research Institute offers a framework for our young men and women through a state-of-the-art center to bring creativity and innovation.

We are also partnering with Albright College to include a community center at the library which will be dedicated to cultural history.

This will include the Nolan local history collection, the Lakin Holocaust Resource Center, and pieces from the Central Pennsylvania African American Museum.



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The college also recently unveiled the addition of a student campus building at Exeter Hall that will host 350 students. It is expected to be ready by May 2023.

Recently, Albright College shared with our administration a state-of-the-art, 10,000 square foot e-sports center.

The center will be open to the public and will attract events from Berks County and beyond.

This is another example of how our Administration is building the City to be the hub of education and entertainment.

We're also incredibly pleased to have welcomed Alvernia University with its new CollegeTowne campus of Penn Street.

The modern facility offers many opportunities for students to receive a quality education in engineering and business administration...not to mention the largest Starbucks in the nation.

CollegeTowne created a center for assisting small businesses in Reading to establish strong foundations.

This includes guiding business owners on how to form their business plans, providing website architecture, and launching a marketing plan.

Our Administration believes in the need for creating and supporting small local businesses.

For the first time, we dedicated \$30,000 to the 2022 Action Plan under the Community Development Block Grant or CDBG to assist in this effort.



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We also welcome new ventures to Reading, and the City welcomes Betty and Ramin Arasheben, along with Hilda and Ramin Ahdoot, who are here today.

They are the owners of Fashion Apparel who purchased the property on 8th Street known as the Hershey Building.

Fashion Apparel will use 300,000 square feet for distribution while catering to numerous big box stores such as Walmart, Costco, and Target, just to name a few.

When completed, the distribution center will create 120 good-paying, family-sustaining jobs with wages starting at \$15 to \$18 an hour.

A medical marijuana growing facility located on Center Ave., known as Franklin Lab, also commenced the second phase expansion of its facility.

Upon the completion of construction activities, it is anticipated to add 30 full-time employees with benefits and a competitive hourly rate.

Economic Development in the City is also a hallmark of this administration.

Several developers - starting with the Schuman Development Group - continue to believe in the City as a fertile ground for residential and commercial development.

At the front of the room are visuals of several projects beginning with the Berks County Trust Building at 35 N. 6th St. that includes a food court at the main level, professional offices, and market-rate residential apartments.

The Medical Arts Building, located at 230 N. 5th Street, is also being repurposed for market-rate and luxury apartments. In comparison, the Trexler Mansion-Elks Lodge at 46 S. Fifth Street will be renovated as a center for entertainment and social activities.



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The Scharf Group continues to repurpose the Madison Building, which will have 83 market-rate apartments along with a fine dining restaurant, and anticipates the completion of the Berkshire Building for students in late 2022 to early 2023.

Heights Advisors, which purchased several properties for repurposing residential units, is also adding to market-rate housing in the City at Turner and Franklin.

Their work in the City will pay off greatly in dividends.

Our administration is also committed to the fight against blight.

As many of you know, the City of Reading has already received half of its \$61 million appropriations through the American Rescue Plan Act, also known as ARPA, with the rest coming to the City by the end of March.

These dollars will be used wisely to invest in our infrastructure, including sidewalks, streets, playgrounds, and façades.

These are generational investments that will be felt for quite some time.

Our administration has already offered two public forums allowing residents to choose their priorities and comment on submitted proposals.

Our team continues to receive requests on a weekly basis and looks forward to engaging City Council in the allocation approval process.

I have also instructed my staff to prepare legislation that will properly allocate funding for the façade improvements, parks, and playgrounds, sidewalk repairs that I mentioned, along with an initiative to prevent homelessness and assist with displaced residents.



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In 2021, the City conducted two studies for the Downtown district and a comprehensive parking study.

Recommendations of these studies will be unveiled in the second quarter of 2022 and will highlight the integration of mixed housing, commercial development, restaurants, and shops.

The Stantec Plan addresses urban innovation through affordable housing, a mobility plan, integrating arts and culture, historic preservation, all while recommending incentives for key investments.

We look forward to engaging in more discussions with elected officials along with the public on the vibrancy of our downtown, which just last month received another boost.

In December, I announced Cindy Castner as the City’s full-time downtown coordinator.

Through our major partners, we will begin our First Fridays, once again, and look forward to the continuation of National Night Out, our holiday parade – which brought more than 17,000 of our closest friends and neighbors to the downtown corridor – along with Halloween events and a successful job fair.

The City also looks forward to making passenger rail a reality with service to Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, D.C.

Our voice in the Tri-County Passenger Rail initiative is a strong one moving forward.

I thank County Commissioner Christian Leinbach for making the City an integral part of the discussion with updates, briefings, meetings and for taking the lead to add our voice to this proactive and exciting conversation.



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Keeping our residents safe is clearly of the utmost importance to our administration.

For that reason, I am thrilled to announce that overall crime was reduced last year by 3.1 percent compared to 2020.

This includes nearly a four percent reduction in violent crime with a 2.9 percent drop in property crimes.

In 2021, we reduced crime under the three-year trend by more than 21 percent, including a 24 percent drop in property crimes and a 12 percent reduction in violent crime.

In a 20-year assessment, UCR Part 1 Crimes dropped by 68 percent since 2001, driven by a 72 percent reduction in property crimes along with a 51 percent drop in violent crimes during that period.

These statistics are impressive.

It shows that we've come a long way in reducing crime in the City not just over the past 20 years but in recent yearly comparisons.

In 2021, crime in Reading dropped while most of the country experienced significant increases.

These accomplishments are the direct result of the hard work performed by the dedicated men and women of the Reading Police Department on a daily basis.

I also applaud the fine efforts of the Reading School District and our faith-based community leaders and concerned residents that assisted with crime reduction.



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Last February, the Reading Police Department launched Operation Cease Fire, a multi-pronged approach to reducing violence in our City by using enforcement, education, and community engagement tactics.

More than 600 police officers, detectives, probation and parole officers, state troopers, and federal agents participated in this effort.

As a result of the 35 details, 225 firearms were recovered, 54 warrants were served, leading to 33 felony arrests, 35 misdemeanor arrests along with 275 home checks conducted on individuals under supervision.

Officers and investigators from the Reading Police Department were also assigned to the U.S. Marshals Service Task Force, which was responsible for apprehending 160 fugitives in 2021.

A majority of those were wanted for violent crimes by the Reading Police Department or had warrants.

The Reading Police Department also partnered with local agencies and organizations to create a diversity training program provided to all employees.

Representatives from the NAACP, LGBT Center, and Abilities in Motion delivered the training program to our personnel.

We also recently re-established the Reading Police Youth Academy in partnership with the Olivet's Boys and Girls Club has recently welcomed 45 cadets to the program.

And – lastly – you may have noticed a change in my appearance.

This past November, I joined Chief Tornielli and began growing a beard. This small gesture helped the Department raise more than \$16,000 in donations for Breast Cancer Support Services of Berks County through their Pink Patch and No-Shave November fundraisers.



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During Covid, many of our residents discovered the wonders of our Library System.

By visiting any of our four branches, patrons saved more than \$2 million in digital and hard format from January through November 2021 by borrowing rather than buying.

Library staff, led by our former executive director Bronwen Gamble, and our new director, Melissa Adams, also helped patrons access Covid vaccine appointments.

Each interaction took as long as one hour of intense one-on-one assistance in English and Spanish.

The Reading Public Library also went FINE FREE in June!

The Wyomissing Foundation contributed funds to pay off fees for lost and damaged items for children, teens, and families.

Library items are also being returned at a greater rate than in 2019, allowing more residents to enjoy materials.

The Senior Outreach Coordinator visited 12 senior housing sites with library materials and activities.

Residents don't need to worry about getting to a library branch.

We bring the library to them!

The library's two Mobile Tech vans made stops at National Night Out, Sterling Mansion concerts, Family Promise, Earth Day, Juneteenth, Berks Community Health Centers, parks, and playgrounds.

WiFi hotspots, laptops, and professional library staff helped residents sign up for the Child Tax Credit, create resumes and look for jobs while taking the *Summer@RPL* activities on the road.



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I am also proud to report that since our re-opening to the public on July 6, 2020 – 21 months ago, there has not been one reported Covid transmission between library staff or between patrons and staff.

I thank the City’s Emergency Management Coordinator for guidance and support as they have been outstanding to work with.

I intentionally left this part for last as it’s bittersweet for the City. The City’s Fire and Emergency Services Department’s biggest accomplishment was the official groundbreaking of the New 9th and Marion Station on November 5th.

Contracts were awarded, and site work has begun. The project’s expected completion date is in the last quarter of this year.

In August, the Department was awarded a FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Regional Grant for EMS equipment totaling more than \$980,000 of which \$480,000 was for the upgrade of Reading’s EMS equipment.

In July, the 2021 Firefighter Recruit Class of 12 Firefighters graduated from the Academy and were assigned to their Platoons.

On November 19th, the Paramedic Recruit Class of 3 Paramedics graduated from the Department’s 1st Ever Paramedic Academy and have been assigned to their respective platoons.



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The Emergency Management Team consisting of Fire Marshal Jeremy Searfoss, Lt. Kirk Litzenberger, and EMS Deputy Chief Michael Sninsky, have continued throughout 2021 to provide the Administration assistance in addressing the guidelines being provided by the CDC.

In addition, they have been very diligent in their efforts to ensure there is adequate stock of Personnel Protective Equipment and clothing for all City Departments as well as cleaning and decontamination supplies.

We cannot thank them enough, and they deserve a round of applause.

And speaking of applause, it pains me to do this, especially in January; but I must acknowledge that effective the end of April, Chief William Stoudt will be retiring.

Let me say a few words about this outstanding public servant.

While I have been Mayor, he has not disappointed me.

Not once.

Chief Stoudt has run his Department efficiently...with class...distinction...and dedication.

I know how seriously he takes his role as he has strongly advocated for his men and women in the Department.

He has also made himself available to me at all hours under the most difficult circumstance and, at times, has had the misfortune of delivering bad news as it relates to the loss of either life or property.

Make no mistake about it.

His steady, efficient, and competent leadership will be sorely missed.

So on behalf of more than 95,000 residents, Chief, allow me to take the lead in thanking you ahead of your official retirement.



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In conclusion, I want to thank our entire workforce in the City of Reading.

Our men and women come to work every day with one mission: leaving the City a little better today than it was yesterday.

It's quite simple.

They deserve respect...they deserve consideration...and they deserve patience...especially as we are still in the midst of Covid.

We are working as hard as possible to continue providing the very best public services we can.

You all know me by now.

I'm an optimist.

I choose to see the good in everyone and what he or she can bring to the table.

If you see a problem-bring a solution.

If you have an issue or concern-share it with me or my Directors.

But above all, do it respectfully with an eye on improvement.

I often say that Reading is a City on the Rise.

I believed it when I became Mayor, and I still believe it today.

I ask that you help me to continue lifting it up as our best days are ahead.

May God bless the City of Reading, Berks County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the United States of America.

Thank you; muchas gracias.