

City of Reading - Electrical Examining Board
Report to City Council – November 27, 2023

Good Evening,

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the City of Reading Electrical Examining Board and the work we do as it pertains to the electrical trade in the City of Reading.

The City of Reading Electrical Examining Board consists of 7 members all appointed by Council.

Geoff Litwin-Chairman

Todd Rathman

Tim Pelter

Jose Delfi

Our 2 newest members:

Bryan Anderson

Jeff Hartman

And myself, Timothy Waldman

Some of you may remember that I was the City of Reading Electrical Inspector from May, 2006 until retiring from full time employment in December, 2020.

There is also an 8th member...The liaison to the City of Reading that has always been the full-time Electrical Inspector.

This Board consists of a great wealth of knowledge and experience in the electrical trade, and I thank my colleagues for allowing me the opportunity to speak for them this evening.

I am a licensed City of Reading Master Electrician, and a certified Electrical Inspector/plans Examiner in the Commonwealth of PA.

I still work as an Electrical Inspector/Plans Examiner for the Borough of Mt Penn and the Borough of Spring city on a part time basis after my “semi” retirement from the City of Reading.

During my employment as the City of Reading Electrical Inspector, I acted as the liaison between the City of Reading and The Electrical Examining Board.

I wanted to continue to have some input, and there was an opening on the electrical board, so I requested to be appointed by Council to serve as a board member after my retirement.

I told you these things because I want you to understand what I am about to report comes directly from mine, and my Board colleagues continued involvement and interaction with electrical contractors, and inspectors all over Reading, and Berks County.

To put it very clearly, the state of the electrical trade in the City of Reading can best be compared to the WILD WEST!

To be very blunt, things are not well.

There was a time, not too long ago, when we thought the Electrical Examining Board had some clout in the City of Reading.

Right now, we are feeling irrelevant, unimportant, and seen as an obstacle for the Administration to placate.

Many of us are left to wonder **“WHY EVEN BOTHER”**

My use of the term “Administration” could refer to the Mayor, Managing Director, CD Director, or Chief Building Official, as, when I was an employee, I ended up in every one of those offices at one time or another depending on who was doing the complaining.

My colleagues on the Board agree with these following observations.

1st and foremost is the lack of a permanent Electrical Inspector on staff in the Building/Trades Division.

Electrical contractors are now required to hire, **and pay for**, their own electrical inspection/inspector in addition to paying the City of Reading for a permit. Yet there are no inspections performed by the City of Reading nor is there any job site oversight to check if there are licensed personnel on the job.

There is also no way for the City of Reading to know if an electrical contractor even obtained a required permit or inspection for a particular job. Who’s doing the checking?

It is of utmost importance that this position gets filled, and the new inspector has the ability to enforce the National Electrical Code and the City of Reading Electrical Ordinance in the way it always has been enforced in the past...free from political interference, as well as being the un-influenced liaison between the City of Reading and this Electrical Board.

I was given that freedom; my successor was not.

It is our hope that the City of Reading “Administration” would like the close relationship between the Electrical Board and the Electrical Inspector to continue.

I relied heavily on Electrical Board input, and I conferred with the Board on a regular basis when issues arose concerning licensing and code enforcement when I was the liaison. The Electrical Board was a great asset for me during my tenure.

It is our fear, given the current atmosphere, that the new Electrical Inspector will be given “marching orders” to avoid involving the Electrical Board on these matters.

This is the National Electrical Code (NEC) – our bible. Sometimes code officials need to say **“no, that’s not allowed”**, or make a contractor perform changes and corrections. When this happens, it’s of utmost importance that the code official can count on the “higher ups” supporting the decision...as long as there is “black and white” to back it up.

As a Certified Code Official, I don't have the luxury, or the statutory authority of letting the cost of a change or correction influence my decision.

If its "black and white" ...in this book, then that's how it must be. If an inspector has to constantly worry about important safety decisions being overridden for the sake of politics, then that inspector is now irrelevant, and just a rubber stamp for the higher ups.

My former and current bosses here and elsewhere understood that and continue to agree with those principles.

The 2nd issue is not the fault of anyone.

Our on-site testing company...Prometric...which has been providing trades testing since the 80's, has ceased offering on-site testing. This was brought on by COVID, and their difficulty in finding proctors to travel to distant sites to administer their tests.

The Electrical Board was created primarily to screen and approve candidates for the City of Reading Electrical License Examinations. Before on-site testing was the norm, in the 70's-80's, the Electrical Board wrote and administered their own electrical trade tests. The lack of transparency made this method difficult to continue with confidence, that is why the City of Reading transitioned to a 3rd party test administrator.

Having a 3rd party testing company, that the City of Reading contracted, allowed the 3 trades boards to strictly control the testing and licensing process.

The loss of the on-site testing company has caused us to completely change the way electrical license testing is accomplished. The City of Reading lost some of its ability to control the process. This change affects not only electrical testing, but plumbing and mechanical testing also.

We now require candidates to schedule and take their electrical license test at an ICC accredited testing center.

The whole process needed to be reconfigured.

This brings me to my final issue.

It is very important that ALL of the Trade Boards retain some of the control that was lost by not having on-site testing.

The City of Reading Electrical Ordinance - an ordinance that the current Chief Building Official has openly told the board he doesn't agree with - has language that requires the Electrical Examining Board to approve electrical testing candidates **before** they proceed to go get tested.

This procedure is not being followed. The Chief Building Official is pre-approving candidates and actually issuing electrical licenses before the board gets a chance to examine the applications.

The board is not in agreement with this procedure.

The Chief Building Official, who has no electrical certifications, has told us that he is approving license applications for testing or reciprocal license issuance in order to reduce the waiting time for the applicants.

This is not a valid excuse to eliminate the Board from the decision-making process, in our opinion

The Chief Building Official has told us that if we disagree with his decision, we can just rescind the license at the next board meeting, but that pretty much equates to closing the barn door after the horse is out, and again has us asking **“WHY ARE WE EVEN HERE”**

Waiting time should not be a deciding factor in issuing a trade license. This is a person responsible for the code compliant, safe installation of electrical wiring in homes and businesses. The City of Reading is taking the responsibility of vouching that person has the required training and knowledge to do so by issuing a trade license to them. Other City of Reading boards have set deadlines and meeting dates. Our board should be afforded the same procedure as required in the Electrical Ordinance.

It is our feeling that the current administration is just doing what they want, ignoring the Electrical Ordinance, and ignoring the Electrical Board. Right now, we do not feel that we hold any significance or value to the electrical trade in the City of Reading.

We serve at the pleasure of this Council, and it's your call as to what happens to this Board.

I am a cynical person, and by nature, I am not leaving here tonight expecting anything to change but I am hoping it does.

Continuation of the status quo, I fear will cause more board members to question their continued membership.

I very much appreciate your time and attention this evening.

I would like to continue to be of service to the Electrical Examining Board.

If I can be of any assistance to Council outside of this meeting, you have it. I am more than happy to help.

I can now answer any questions you may have.

Thank you, and good evening.