



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS  
BY MAYOR EDDIE MORÁN  
JANUARY 29, 2021



Good afternoon and welcome, everyone. I greatly appreciate all of you making the time to be here today and for those joining us virtually. We continue working through the challenges the pandemic has thrown our way by practicing social distancing. I especially want to thank state *Sen. Judy Schwank*, state Rep. *Manny Guzman* and many others for taking time from their schedules to be with us today.

What a difference one year makes....not just in our daily lives ...but for our entire city, region, state and nation. 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. In just over one year, the *City of Reading* has experienced quite a bit of change. Sadly, that change has largely come about as a result of COVID-19 which literally brought the wheels of our city's government to a screeching halt in March. And for that, I'd like to take a moment of silence to remember those residents whose lives were taken by this awful infection.

For those who have survived COVID, we are very grateful and hope that you have regained your strength or are on your way to a full recovery. As you know, I also experienced a challenging first year in office having contracted Bell's Palsy while also assisting my wife with her battle with cancer.

Thankfully, it's under control with the proper medical care and I thank everyone for their continued prayers and support. While *City Hall* remains closed to the public and our employees continue working from home until *February 16th*, residents can still rely on quality services. Yes, even with change and occasional challenges, Reading continues to move in the right direction.



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

*Safe Streets 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 pillars and 2021 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. Calls to the *Citizens Service Center* increased by more than 5700 while service requests from the previous year jumped by more than 2000. The City has also been active in providing rental assistance to residents who have been faced with evictions as we fielded more than 650 requests in 2020. Our Administration has done a stellar job in working to keep up with the demand and continues working with *District Justices* and landlords to ease the burden on families. I especially want to thank the *Human Relations Commission and the Community Development Departments* for working tirelessly on this issue. We are also pleased that the Biden Administration has postponed evictions through the end of March. 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.



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This year also marks the final full year of *Act 47* as we work diligently to exit from it in 2022. The City’s finances remain solid, with revenues stable from tax collections, even during the most difficult economic time in recent memory. Our current budget was reduced as a result of the pandemic, along with cost-saving measures that still allowed us to reach our goals.

On October 1st, I presented a *94.5M* dollar budget to the *Reading City Council* that originally called for a *10%* property tax increase. Through proactive collaboration and weekly working groups, our administration and Council were able to cut that increase not once... but twice. In the end, Council approved a very small *2.49%* increase— a dramatic *75%* decrease from the original figure –in proposed property tax bills.

Our administration...through the *Finance Department*...and in conjunction with all of the City’s directors...provided strong and accurate numbers to the public during this process. I also want to thank Council members – led by *Council President Jeff Waltman* - for advocating passionately for their constituents through this process. His leadership in 2020 has been absolutely indispensable to our City. *Council President Waltman* is to be commended for navigating the legislative body throughout the year. To the rest of *City Council*, I simply say “thank you”. Thank you for establishing a close working relationship. Thank you for helping to create a healthy and positive synergy. Council members asked tough questions not only during public meetings but also throughout the months-long process.



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Having an engaged public body bodes well for everyone and I am proud of the ongoing, working relationship that my administration has cultivated with all members of the *Reading City Council* in 2020 along with other elected officials, including our *City Auditor, Maria Rodriguez*. I look forward to continuing that trend in 2021.

It should also be noted that the *2019 Financial Statement Audit* was completed much sooner than in recent years without any new findings. This is a significant improvement from the previous two years where the City had three blemishes that needed corrective action. The City also developed a local forgiveness loan program to assist small and medium-sized businesses during COVID-19...*such as beauty salons, barbershops, restaurants, child care facilities and bodegas*...similar to the federal *Payroll Protection Program*. These five to twenty thousand dollar loans benefited 127 businesses for a total of one million dollars in assistance.

Residents want to know that their communities are safe, clean and vibrant. They deserve no less. They also want to know that their Mayor along with the Administration are always looking for ways to improve their quality of life. This year, the City will embark on an aggressive street-paving program that will fully utilize more than *10M* dollars in Liquid Fuels Funds that have sat untouched over the years. Last year, the City paved the *North 5th, North 13th and 8th Streets*. Knowing that the City has many needs yet few precious resources, our *Public Works Department* has worked with my office to create a list of paving priorities. Look for that list to be released soon with our initiative kicking off this Spring to be in effect for three years.



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Public Works also had a very busy year having:

- Completed more than three miles of street paving.
- Installed more than 100 curb ramps under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Started construction on the 18th Wonder ADA curb ramps project.
- Reconstructed the 6th and Laurel intersection.
- Completed the Citywide Traffic Signal operation and maintenance assessment.
- Upgraded the 3rd and Spruce Hockey Rink and Fence.
- Renovated Pendora Park with new playground equipment along with a phase one upgrade to include basketball and tennis courts.

This year, we also have several groundbreaking ceremonies tentatively scheduled including:

- The River Road extension
- The 9th and Marion Firehouse
- The start of the Pagoda Safety Project
- The Schlegel Park Pool – the city’s only pool – expecting a complete renovation with a planned opening on Memorial Day.

And after years of delays and change orders, our administration is completing a *150M* construction project of the Waste Water Treatment Plant. The new, state-of-the-art facility will have a life of 50-years. In addition, we will begin construction on the City’s Sewer Collection System, which was delayed by four years. Both of these milestones are significant to exiting the United States Department of Justice consent decree.



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Another exciting announcement is a 250K dollar state grant from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for the Third and Spruce All-Abilities Playground. This has special meaning for me, personally, as I am the father of a son with special needs. This playground will have all-abilities play equipment, safety surfacing and upgraded lighting. The playground will be located next to the hockey rink and handball courts at the Third and Spruce Playground.

I'm also pleased to announce that this project will receive an additional 250K match from the City of Reading's Keystone Funds. We are also thrilled to announce the Reading City Skatepark, which is expected to be a 500K dollar project with funding provided by the City of Reading and the Reading Skatepark Association. This is what happens when community members – such as JD Turner from Holistic Skateshop – partner with the City. The Skatepark will be located in Heritage Park.

In 2020, the Reading Recreation Commission received an Excellence in Recreation Award for their work in helping to improve 26 homes in the 300 block of S. 3rd St. This effort – the South of Penn Façade Improvement Program – was a joint collaboration of the Reading Recreation Commission, Wyomissing Foundation, the Berks County Redevelopment Authority, and the City of Reading. It began over 3 years ago with community meetings and culminated in 26 homes receiving new paint, windows, minor repairs, lighting and more.



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Since last March, the *Reading Recreation Commission* has prepared and delivered over 240,000 healthy meals and snacks to kids in our community. Just last Friday, over 600 meals were distributed to kids in 30 minutes at *3rd and Spruce*. Meals are distributed by the Rec Commission three days a week at three locations – *3rd and Spruce, 11th and Pike, and City Park* – with more than 300 pantry boxes distributed every week thanks to our friends at *Helping Harvest*.

I'm also pleased to announce that the Rec Commission will reopen its centers on *Monday, February 8th*, following all necessary COVID-19 regulations.

Providing activities for our youth is something we take very seriously. In that regard, I also want to commend the employees of the *Reading Public Library* in all four locations for the outstanding work they've done during the pandemic. Not only have they have been able to keep up with demand, but they have also done a terrific job in keeping our users and themselves safe. They have been kept very busy with the amount of requests they've received for books, music and visual materials.

I am also very pleased to announce that our administration worked successfully with the *Reading Parking Authority* to keep parking affordable and as low as possible with no rate increases. In addition, the new arrangement with the City will allow the *Reading Parking Authority* to contribute 1.7M dollars annually to the city's coffers.



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Just last month, we publicly welcomed the great news that *Alvernia University* will soon be developing *CollegeTowne*. This welcomed initiative capitalizes on a 4M dollar grant from the state's *Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program*. *CollegeTowne* will be an exciting part of a thriving downtown. Just this past month, I spoke at an event and had a chance to smash a wall to kick off construction for the schools of *Engineering and Business Administration for Alvernia University*.

The City has also welcomed *The Scharf Group*, which will be developing the *Madison Building* at 400 Washington Street. The *Madison Building* will house market-rate luxury apartments in its 12-story tower with a five-story annex and two-floor atrium. It will have 11 floors of single and two-bedroom luxury apartments. Its grand lobby with gilded ceilings wrapped in marble will replicate an era of prosperity in our downtown. The lobby will house professional offices, a cafeteria, and a bookstore. Construction is projected to be completed *by the end of the third quarter in 2021* with more than half of the units already sold.

Another project by the *Scharf Group* is the development of the *Reading Eagle Building*, a 160,000 square foot building that will house several businesses, including a produce market, a nationally recognized four-star restaurant, a fitness center, a state of the art smoking lounge, an indoor swimming pool, and a theater. How exciting is that, folks? Let's also mention the *Schuman Development Group* as it continues to invest in the *City of Reading* by addressing commercial blight and bringing back to life unused and vacant buildings. We are pleased that the *Schuman group* remains as a fixture in Reading in the commercial plaza downtown.



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Our administration is also pleased to be working closely with the owners of the *Berkshire Building*. This project will renovate the third through seventh floors of the building into one and two-bedroom apartments for international students attending *Alvernia University* this fall.

Last year, the *Mediplex Property Group* also made its mark when it acquired *Rockland Hall*. This 105,000 square foot mixed-use property will feature *Tower Health's* outpatient healthcare services on the ground floor, with four floors of student housing for *Albright College* students.

Our administration is also focused on providing affordable housing to our residents. Just this past November, the city formally charged the *Redevelopment Authority* with renovating five homes to qualifying families.

The City also supported residential improvements in the *Buttonwood Area* to construct 47 apartments...a mix of single, two, and three-bedroom units. In addition, *Habitat for Humanity* will construct eight townhouses on *Miltimore Street*.

Lastly, the *WODA Cooper Companies* completed 57 apartments on *South Second Street* for seniors to provide them with affordable housing.

When I say “we’re open for business,”  
you know why...and I mean it.



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Just this past Monday, our Administration announced that *Stantec*, a highly-respected consulting firm with experience in economic development, will be assisting the City with its *Downtown Plus Strategic Plan*. Guided by our Administration, *Stantec* will work on downtown improvements for the decade with a focus on achievable and realistic goals over the next five years. It will examine best practices adopted by cities similar to ours in size and we are truly excited to get started.

Our administration is also focused on maintaining key services in the downtown area and continues to engage the *Departments of Public Works, Community Development and Police* to ensure that our business owners and residents have a safe and clean working the environment in the downtown area.

With safety as another key component of my administration, I'm pleased to announce that we've hired an additional 23 police officers, implemented the use of *body-worn cameras* – partially funded by a federal grant – and installed *video cameras in patrol wagons* used to transport prisoners. I'm also happy to announce the addition of seven firefighters in 2020, two new engines, one new ladder truck and two staff pickup vehicles. In just a few weeks, we will also announce the hiring of more firefighters.

My most sincere thanks are extended to *Police Chief Richard Tornielli* and *Fire Chief William Stoudt, Jr.*, along with the courageous men and women who keep our city safe on a daily basis and who – literally – put themselves unselfishly in harm's way to protect all of us.



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Looking ahead, I am pleased to announce that the City will unveil a *new website* that is filled with valuable and useful information. With a new layout and design, the website will become even more user friendly and will be able to direct residents to necessary departments for more information or services.

Lastly – and most importantly – I wish to thank all of the *City’s staff* which have done an extraordinary job under the most challenging of circumstances. Their ability to keep the City moving forward under duress is not lost on me as Mayor, nor should it be lost on our residents. These remarkable men and women are the *backbone of our City* and without them, I would not feel as optimistic about the future as I currently am. I have done my level best to meet as many employees as possible – even with a limited schedule in City Hall due to the pandemic. However, I look forward to seeing as many of our 596 city employees that make our community warm, livable...a great place to work, play and raise a family. Gandhi once said: *“The best place to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”* That pretty much sums up how I feel about our employees, the residents of the *City of Reading* and our friends in *Berks County*.

During the past year, I have tried to attend as many events as possible. *I have listened to your concerns. I have heard many different voices and I will continue to do the best that I can to represent you.* And when we’ve tackled the pandemic, I look forward to doing even more.

I often say, *“We are each other’s neighbors.”* Let’s continue building a better Reading...*together*. May God bless the City, our county, Pennsylvania and the nation. Thank you.