

Youth Commission
Wednesday, March 2, 2022
Zoom Virtual Meeting
6:00 pm

Members Present – B. Hernandez, G. Arias, R. Flores, B. Gonzalez, N. Lopez

Others Present – S. Smith, J. Zabala, C. Crespo, M. Delgado, P. Seaman, G. Gerdeman, L. Reppert, W. Butler

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Zabala called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

Mr. Zabala stated that a quorum is present. He welcomed Ms. Gonzalez to the Commission. Ms. Gonzalez stated that she is a resident of District 2. She noted her hope to provide community service outside the school setting. She noted her hope to reduce youth violence.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MEETING SUMMARIES

Motion was made by Mr. Hernandez, seconded by Ms. Arias, to approve the meeting summaries for October 6, 2021, October 13, 2021, November 3, 2021, December 1, 2021, January 5, 2022 and February 2, 2022 as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Zabala questioned if there would be changes in the way the agenda was followed since a quorum is present. Ms. Smith stated that the quorum does not change the way the agenda is followed. She stated that she worked with Ms. Arias and Mr. Hernandez on this month's agenda and recommended that the Commission allow guests to make their presentations at the beginning of the meeting so that they do not need to be present for the full meeting. The Commission agreed to hear from guests first.

READING'S 275TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms. Reppert introduced herself and provided a brief background. She thanked the Commission for the invitation to attend and noted her hope that the

anniversary would be inclusive and relevant to the City's youth.

Ms. Reppert invited the Commission members to the March 16 breakfast kick-off. She stated that a block party is planned for New Year's Eve and that the actual 275th Anniversary will be on March 16, 2023. She noted her hope that the day will include events at Reading schools. She stated that a parade will be held in May and she is planning a social media project "Porch Portraits" of residents. She noted her hope to instill pride within the City and within the County.

Mr. Flores stated that he likes the "Porch Portraits" idea. He agreed that those who live outside Reading have a negative view of Reading residents. He stated that most residents speak Spanish and suggested that this fact be highlighted.

Ms. Reppert also noted the need for visual aspects of the anniversary and suggested using historical photos and plantings.

Ms. Arias agreed with the need for visual aspects and expressed the belief that the City looks dull.

Ms. Reppert stated that there is also planning to have banner flags of all residents' nationalities on the City's bridges and noted the Penn St, Buttonwood St and Bingaman St Bridges.

Ms. Arias suggested placing historical photos on the bus stops.

Ms. Reppert noted her hope that if neighborhoods look nice it will instill more pride in residents.

Ms. Arias noted the need for additional summer events at 5th & Penn.

Ms. Reppert expressed the belief that some Reading neighborhoods feel that they've been forgotten. She noted her hope to highlight all of Reading's neighborhoods, parks, etc. She stated that the "Porch Portraits" will be based on the "Humans from New York" Facebook posts.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith questioned if all of Reading's bridges would have flags. Ms. Reppert replied affirmatively but again listed only three of the City's bridges.

Ms. Reppert noted her hope that Youth Commission members would be willing

to serve on Anniversary Committees. She questioned what type of events would interest the Youth Committee.

Ms. Arias suggested inviting City teams and organizations to participate. She stated that participant's friends and family will then also attend these events.

Mr. Hernandez suggested including the RHS marching band.

Mr. Zabala suggested including elements of Reading's past and suggested a program on Reading's Underground Railroad sites. He suggested using performance to tell stories.

Ms. Arias thanked Ms. Reppert for attending. She reminded her that college students need community service hours and suggested that they may volunteer.

Ms. Reppert thanked the Commission for their ideas.

Mr. Zabala thanked Ms. Reppert and stated that the Youth Commission is excited to be part of the celebration.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Mr. Zabala stated that this topic has come up during youth violence discussions. He questioned how the Youth Commission can collaborate.

Ms. Seaman, Berks County Office of Mental Health, noted the need to increase awareness of existing programs. She stated that she was referred to the Youth Commission by Mr. Denbowski. She explained that her office addresses public mental health and has a network of providers.

Ms. Seaman stated that there is a student assistance program (SAP) that is offered at the middle and high schools. She stated that the pandemic caused additional mental health struggles but there has been no increase in the use of these services. She noted the need for an anti-stigma campaign. She stated that she is looking forward to hearing the youth perspective. She stated that her office works with Children and Youth Services and Juvenile Probation.

Mr. Gerdeman stated that, surprisingly, the number of youth in the Berks juvenile probation system is lower than in the last thirty years. He expressed the belief that the stigma is being removed and people are getting the counseling they need. He

stated that there were difficult transitions back into the classroom, especially with grade transitions. He stated that he is glad that people are recognizing their need for services and are becoming more comfortable talking about mental health issues. He noted the need to find roadblocks to getting services.

Mr. Zabala agreed that it is surprising that the juvenile probation numbers are down. He expressed the belief that this is impressive work.

Mr. Lopez stated that he has seen mental health issues at Reading High School. He stated that most students don't know about the SAP program and noted the need to promote it more. He expressed the belief that there are not enough social workers at RHS and stated that there are approximately six social workers for 4,000 students. He suggested working more closely with Avedium Club.

Ms. Seaman stated that her office does work with Avedium Club and she described several programs that they have done together, including a suicide prevention event. She stated that she currently has several radio ads playing.

Mr. Hernandez stated that he trusts Mr. Lopez's observations since he is a current student at RHS. He agreed with the need to increase awareness of programs and noted the need to find new ways to promote them.

Mr. Zabala agreed with the need for increased awareness. He suggested integrating the availability of these programs at City events and RHS sporting events. He questioned which radio stations are playing the ads. Ms. Seaman stated that they are playing on Y102, WEEU and the Hispanic station and stated that they are playing at different times to reach different audiences.

Mr. Zabala suggested advertising on La Mega to target Reading residents and to elevate the conversation. He noted the need to go where people already are and provide information. He suggested advertising during the RHS morning announcements.

Ms. Arias stated that it is great that this is being advertised on Spanish radio. She noted the need to inform parents about these programs so they realize that they can get help for their child.

Ms. Seaman stated that she would be happy to attend events. She described the "RU ok?" campaign.

Mr. Lopez suggested sending a flyer home with students or having a presentation for parents. He noted the need for parents to understand how they can handle these situations. He suggested holding a basketball tournament and donating the entry fee to a mental health charity.

Ms. Seaman stated that tournaments have been held at schools that were impacted by suicide. She stated that the schools printed t-shirts with the "RU ok?" logo.

Mr. Zabala suggested attending sports, entertainment and arts events to increase awareness. He agreed with the need to reach out to parents and encourage parents to open these conversations. He suggested collaborating with RHS and noted the need to think outside the box.

Ms. Delgado questioned if there was a hotline number. Ms. Seaman stated that the Service Access Management crisis intervention number is 610-236-0530 is manned 24 hours a day 7 days a week. She also stated that information can be found at RUokBerks.com.

Mr. Zabala stated that he is excited to work together and noted his appreciation for this conversation. He noted the need to spread the word and help alleviate fears and stigmas. He thanked Ms. Seaman and Mr. Gerdeman for attending this meeting.

Ms. Seaman and Mr. Gerdeman disconnected from the meeting at this time.

UPCOMING RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Mr. Crespo described the block parties that will be held on the first Friday of the month beginning with April 1 in the 400 block of Penn St. He stated that April 1 will include tours of CollegeTowne and the grand opening of Starbucks. He stated that there will be food, music and art activities. He recommended that the Commission have a table at the event to meet the public and recruit new members.

Mr. Zabala agreed that this is a great opportunity to meet the community. He noted the need to determine who will attend and what materials are needed.

Ms. Smith described the Great American Clean-up and Earth Day on April 23. She stated that if Commission members wish to participate she will register the group for the events.

Mr. Crespo described a community event being held this Saturday at 11th & Pike Rec Center from 10 am – 2 pm and invited the Youth Commission to participate.

BANNER

Mr. Zabala stated that the banner is complete and is in Ms. Smith's office to be used as needed.

RECRUITMENT VIDEOS

Mr. Zabala stated that this project is coming together. He stated that he is working with Mr. Hernandez and Ms. Arias to finalize it.

Ms. Arias stated that she and Mr. Hernandez will create the videos and share them.

Mr. Zabala questioned the time needed for Mr. Crespo's review. Mr. Crespo stated that he can finish the review quickly.

Ms. Arias stated that the Commission relied on Mr. Crespo for the "Let's Keep Talking Tuesday" videos and she noted her hope to begin working more independently.

Mr. Zabala suggested the recruitment videos be posted throughout the spring.

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Ms. Arias shared the draft flyer.

Mr. Flores stated that he must get the RHS principal's permission in order to distribute it.

Mr. Zabala suggested including a QR Code on the flyer with a link to the application form.

POSSIBLE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Zabala stated that he and Ms. Smith have met with several organizations on ways to collaborate. He stated that some are appropriate while others are not. He suggested collaborating with the YMCA because of their access to young people. He stated that the YMCA also offered their facility as a meeting space. He stated that he and Ms. Smith will provide additional information at the conclusion of these meetings.

OFFICE SPACE

Mr. Hernandez questioned if the Commission could have its own space inside City Hall.

Ms. Smith explained that there currently isn't enough space for City employees. She offered the City Clerk's office to store records and to hold small meetings (reminding all that no more than four members can meet at a time without the need for advertising a public meeting) in the Clerk's office and the constituent meeting space as needed. She stated that members can contact her and she will coordinate a space and time.

COMMISSIONERS TERMS AND EXPIRATIONS

Ms. Smith reviewed the current member's terms. She explained that members age out on the July 1 after their 22nd birthday and that members, if they are not yet 22, may be reappointed for one additional two year term.

Mr. Zabala thanked Ms. Smith for clarifying. He stated that this information will help with recruiting in specific Council Districts.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Zabala asked Ms. Smith to lead the elections because she is more familiar with the process.

Ms. Smith explained that the group can develop a slate of officers and hold one vote or vote on each office individually. The Commission decided to hold a vote on each individual office.

- Chair

Ms. Arias nominated herself for chair. Mr. Hernandez seconded the nomination. There were no further nominations and nominations were closed. **All voted in favor of the motion.**

- Vice Chair

Ms. Arias nominated Mr. Hernandez for vice chair. Mr. Hernandez accepted the nomination. **Mr. Flores seconded the motion.** There were no further nominations and nominations were closed. **All voted in favor of the motion.**

- Secretary

Ms. Gonzalez nominated herself for secretary. Mr. Hernandez seconded the motion. There were no further nominations and nominations were closed. **All voted in favor of the motion.**

- Timekeeper

Mr. Hernandez nominated Mr. Flores as timekeeper. Mr. Flores accepted the nomination. **Ms. Arias seconded the motion.** There were no further nominations and nominations were closed. **All voted in favor of the motion.**

Ms. Smith congratulated the new officers.

Mr. Zabala also congratulated the new officers. He expressed the belief that this will allow the Commission to rise to the next level and stated that this is very exciting.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Youth Commission will be held on Wednesday, April 6 at 6 pm via Zoom.

Motion was made by Ms. Arias, seconded by Mr. Hernandez, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk