

Youth Commission
Wednesday, July 7, 2021
Schlegel Park Pavilion
6:00 pm

Members Present – G. Munoz Arias, K. Shapiro, B. Hernandez, J. Tineo

Others Present – S. Smith, J. Zabala, M. Ventura, A. Amoros

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Zabala called the meeting to order at 6:14 pm.

Ms. Smith stated that a quorum is not present. She stated that the group can hear the presentation but no formal actions can be taken, including the election of officers.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

PRESENTATION BY MANAGING DIRECTOR

Mr. Amoros introduced himself and provided a brief background including that he has lived in Allentown, York, and Harrisburg. He stated that he received his Bachelor's Degree in Journalism from Penn State and his Master's Degree in Government Administration from the University of Pennsylvania. He stated that he was born in Puerto Rico and his first language is Spanish.

Mr. Amoros stated that he coordinates seven departments – Police, Fire, Public Works, Finance, Human Resources, Community Development and the Reading Public Library. He stated that the City has 596 employees and a \$95 million budget. He stated that Reading is the fifth largest city in PA.

Mr. Amoros explained that State legislators have approved the sale of fireworks but that it is illegal to shoot them off in Reading.

Mr. Amoros stated that the City will begin a quality of life campaign in August that will focus on respect – of self, neighbors, and property. He explained that cleanliness and public safety are the City's top two focuses. He expressed the belief that Reading is a diverse and livable city that is vibrant and thriving. He noted the need to inspire residents to do better and to help one another.

Mr. Amoros encouraged the members to vote and to get involved in the community. He expressed the belief that they are the next generation of leaders.

He described his passion for public service and expressed the belief that local politics is the most important. He stated that he also enjoys practicing his Spanish when interacting with residents.

Mr. Tineo questioned Reading's approach to public safety. Mr. Amoros stated that Reading will receive \$61 million from the American Rescue Plan. He stated that the plan is to focus on streets, sidewalks and parks. He stated that the City has 28 parks and they all need attention. He stated that the City has begun conversations with the Recreation Commission to use the Rescue Plan funds as matching funds for other grant programs. He stated that public safety is the largest portion of the City's budget. He expressed the belief that there are many more good people than bad in Reading within all the City's neighborhoods. He stated that the projects that will be completed will last for generations and that the process will be transparent and include resident input.

Ms. Munoz Arias questioned the City's response to homelessness. Mr. Amoros stated that homelessness is an issue in Reading. He stated that Reading is working with Hope Rescue Mission volunteers. He stated that he was shocked to learn that there are homeless college students who live in the student union building. He expressed the belief that America is the richest nation in the world and needs to address this issue. He stated that the homeless deserve respect and that they matter. He stated that many homeless people have mental health issues that also need to be addressed. He stated that public servants help everyone.

Mr. Zabala questioned where Mr. Amoros sees Reading economically in the near future. Mr. Amoros stated that work is proceeding on downtown buildings. He stated that restaurants and condos are planned and that additional developers are approaching Reading. He stated that many are interested in the 5th & Penn properties. The City is working on a five year economic development plan and projects are moving forward at the Madison, Reading Eagle and CollegeTowne properties. He stated that he is excited to see this work and there is much to look forward to. He expressed the belief that Reading is poised to exit Act 47 in July 2022 and had a \$2.7 million operating surplus for 2020. He stated that repairs at Schlegel Pool continue and it is hoped that it will reopen this summer.

Ms. Shapiro noted the lifeguard shortage and questioned if this would be problematic if Schlegel Pool reopens this summer. Mr. Amoros stated that the Rec Commission has identified some interested in lifeguarding this summer. He stated that some pools are increasing lifeguard pay to entice them back.

Mr. Zabala noted the disconnect between government and residents in the past and questioned how synergy can be ensured. Mr. Amoros stated that there are many resources available to residents. He stated that the Mayor is hoping to hold town hall meetings after it is safe to do so. He encouraged members to watch City meetings and other programming on BCTV, read the news and follow Reading on social media. He noted the need for caution in planning the town hall meetings because of COVID-19.

Ms. Ventura left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Hernandez questioned how the City can help cultivate youth involvement. Mr. Amoros suggested volunteering on a local campaign. Ms. Smith stated that Reading also has many non-profit organizations that need volunteers. She agreed that youth should watch meetings and follow the news. She recommended that youth have an understanding of the way government and non-profits work together. She expressed the belief that public service is helping people get assistance whether it is through the City itself or understanding where to refer the resident to get the assistance with another organization.

Mr. Amoros left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Zabala questioned the main thing they were left with this evening. Mr. Hernandez stated that it was refreshing to hear Mr. Amoros's passion for public service.

Mr. Zabala questioned if members were motivated to volunteer. All nodded their heads. Ms. Munoz Arias agreed with Ms. Smith that youth need to connect the dots and understand how everything interacts. She noted the need to look at the big picture.

Mr. Tineo applauded transparency. He stated that there are many that distrust the government. He stated that members have a voice to bring issues forward. He stated that he looks forward to reviewing the use of the American Rescue Plan funds.

Mr. Zabala encouraged members to follow City Council meetings. He stated that Council will review the use of the Rescue Plan funds. He encouraged all to communicate their opinions to their Councilor. He expressed the belief that elected officials want to know what residents think.

NEXT MEETING

Mr. Hernandez suggested starting a group chat so that members continue to communicate. Ms. Smith stated that she must research if this is allowed. She stated that a group chat may be considered a public record and she would need to understand the regulations around it before one is started.

Ms. Munoz Arias suggested meeting at the Pagoda. Ms. Smith explained the construction that is occurring at the Pagoda and recommended that a meeting at this location take place after that is complete.

Ms. Munoz Arias suggested meeting in City Park. The group agreed to meet at the seating area of the Bandshell.

The next regular meeting of the Youth Commission will be held on Wednesday, August 4 at 6 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk