

Youth Commission
Wednesday, Sept 1, 2021
Zoom Virtual Meeting
6:00 pm

Members Present – G. Munoz Arias, K. Shapiro, B. Hernandez, S. Segura, W. Butler

Others Present – S. Smith, J. Zabala, L. Kelleher

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Zabala called the meeting to order at 6:07 pm.

Ms. Smith stated that a quorum is not present. She stated that the group can hold discussions but no official action can be taken, including the election of officers.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

PRESENTATION BY MANAGING DIRECTOR

Mr. Hernandez stated that this was a great presentation and he felt a deep connection. He expressed the belief that Reading is moving in a positive direction and he has a good feeling about where Reading is heading.

Ms. Arias stated that the Managing Director ties all City services together. She noted the focus on public safety and expressed the belief that Reading would exit Act 47 in 2022.

Ms. Shapiro stated that she now has a better understanding of City services and how the City government directly affects its residents.

Mr. Zabala noted the need for continuous progress. He noted the need for Reading to have a welcoming environment and for residents to have a sense that it is home. He expressed the belief that positive change is continuing. He noted the need for better ways to communicate and work together.

Using the chat feature, Mr. Hernandez stated that his power and internet were unstable due to the remnants of Hurricane Ida.

GROUP CHAT

Ms. Smith explained that a group chat is allowable, with some rules, however. She explained that the messages would be subject to PA Right to Know regulations and that, if requested, the chat would be turned over to the requesting party. She stated that she must be included in all chats so that she can manage the messages and that chatting is fine but that no decisions or discussions leading to a decision can be made outside official meetings.

The members stated that they would like to begin a group chat.

PROJECT PLANNING

Mr. Zabala noted the importance of the voices of young people. He noted the need for all to voice their ideas and ways to collaborate with others.

Ms. Arias stated that she would like to address teen pregnancy. She stated that sex education in the Reading School District is not comprehensive.

Mr. Butler agreed with Ms. Arias. He stated that he would also like to work on a public art project now that Council has enacted the new Public Art Policy. He noted the need for people to be creative.

Ms. Segura agreed with Ms. Arias. She suggested working on comprehensive sex education rather than just teen pregnancy. She noted the need for young people to understand safe sex and STDs.

Ms. Arias agreed with Ms. Segura and noted the need to avoid stigmatizing pregnant teens.

Mr. Hernandez expressed the belief that it is important to get started. He stated that he likes both projects. He noted the need to empower youth. He suggested that the Youth Commission make presentations at Reading schools to show their leadership role.

Ms. Arias questioned if Mr. Hernandez would like to start a mentoring program. Mr. Hernandez was unsure of mentoring but noted the need to be community leaders.

Ms. Shapiro agreed with working on sex education. She stated that sex education is very limited right now and most youth don't understand what they need.

Mr. Zabala questioned if an event could be planned.

Ms. Arias stated that she has been attending meetings with youth from Exeter and Hamburg. She stated that the Reading Health Resource Center (HRC) is now meeting virtually. She suggested collaborating with these groups and suggested collecting period supplies.

Mr. Zabala questioned how to move forward. Ms. Smith stated that she is part of Berks Teens Matter (BTM) and their focus has been on reducing teen pregnancy and they manage the HRC. She suggested inviting them to a meeting to discuss working together. She explained that BTM works on projects with a collective impact.

Mr. Butler questioned how BTM works throughout the County. Ms. Smith stated that they have been working to expand beyond Reading and it appears that youth from Exeter and Hamburg are getting involved.

Mr. Butler expressed the belief that working with BTM would be a great way to expand the Youth Commission's reach.

Ms. Segura suggested focusing in Reading first and expanding later.

Mr. Hernandez agreed and stated that the Youth Commission's main focus should be in Reading. He stated that if the focus expands it should be after programs are established in Reading.

Ms. Arias agreed with Mr. Hernandez. She expressed the belief that members have many Reading connections but need to continue to build their network.

Mr. Zabala questioned when the group would like to begin working on this project.

Ms. Arias questioned if there was funding available for the Youth Commission. Ms. Smith explained that the 2022 draft budget is being compiled at this time. She stated that this is the perfect time for the Commission to request funding for 2022.

Mr. Butler questioned if the project could use BTM funding at this time, as needed. Ms. Smith stated that this would need to be discussed with BTM.

Mr. Zabala questioned BTM's location. Ms. Smith explained that BTM is a program within the Co-County Wellness Center, which is located in the 400 block of Walnut St in Reading.

Mr. Zabala noted his support of this project.

Ms. Arias noted the need for collaboration. Ms. Segura agreed and noted the need to coordinate with BTM.

Mr. Zabala suggested inviting leadership from BTM to the next meeting to continue discussions. He thanked Ms. Arias for bringing the period poverty drive forward as a potential project. He suggested that public art be worked on next. He suggested meeting in this collaborative style until a quorum is present and leadership positions can be elected.

Ms. Arias noted the need for members to consider where the collection will take place and who will receive the items.

Mr. Hernandez agreed that logistics are important for this type of project.

Mr. Butler stated that BTM offices are in center City and suggested that their location be a collection point. He also suggested an event in City Park.

Ms. Arias agreed that multiple locations can be used for collections.

Mr. Butler suggested providing the donated items to the City's middle schools.

Ms. Kelleher suggested, via the chat feature, to utilize the City's libraries as collection locations.

Mr. Hernandez noted his hope that this project can be done in 2021.

Ms. Segura agreed and suggested that the items be provided to those in need before the winter season begins.

Ms. Arias stated that the Women's March is scheduled for January and suggested that the project be completed before that.

Mr. Hernandez suggested that the group consider setting goals.

Mr. Zabala stated that the initial goals were teaching members how City government works and how the Youth Commission can assist the City. He noted the need to keep officials accountable and noted his hope that Youth Commission members become the next City leaders.

Ms. Kelleher left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Smith stated that during initial meetings of the Commission, members noted the areas they wished to focus on. She stated that she compiled that list and it is available for review. She stated that once more members are engaged, several projects can occur simultaneously with multiple committees.

Ms. Arias questioned the current number of members. Ms. Smith stated that several members have moved outside Reading which makes them ineligible to serve. She stated that membership currently stands at ten. She noted the need to re-engage the members who have not been attending meetings and noted her hope that the group chat would improve meeting attendance.

Mr. Zabala expressed the belief that the Commission has done good work. He noted his appreciation of the members who have been attending meetings and moving the Commission forward.

NEXT MEETING

Ms. Smith questioned if she should schedule the meeting with BTM before the next regular meeting. The group agreed.

Ms. Smith was asked to schedule the meeting with BTM on Weds, Sept 15 at 6 pm via Zoom.

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk