CITY COUNCIL

Work Session

Work Session — *Monday, December 21, 2009*
Penn Room — *7:00 P.M.*

I.	**Call To Order**	**7:00 p.m.**
II.	**Managing Director's Report**	**7:05 p.m.**
III.	**Review & Discuss IT Action Plan**	**7:30 p.m.**
IV.	**Review Proposed Amendments to the 2010 Budget & Position Ordinance**	**8:15 p.m.**

City of Reading

City Council

Work Session

Monday, November 16, 2009

Councilors Attending: V. Spencer, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, D. Sterner, J. Waltman

Others Attending: C. Younger, R. Hottenstein, L. Kelleher, L. Murin, F. Denbowski, B. Reinhart, J. Kromer

Vaughn D. Spencer, President of Council, called the work session to order at 7:09p.m.

Joint Recycling with the Reading School District

Mr. Spencer introduced the issue and Mr. Denbowski and Mr. Murin.

Mr. Denbowski noted his attendance at a meeting in October 2008 between City Council and the Reading School Board where the decision was made to develop a joint recycling program. He distributed a point sheet describing the program. He described the split of program components, manpower, and costs. He stated that the Reading School District will contribute approximately $50K per year and the City's allocation of $40K is already covered through the recycling budget. He stated the program will be cost neutral for the City and noted that this service will be provided by City employees rather than an independent contractor.

Mr. Murin described meetings with the school board to create an efficient program that will prevent the layoff of one additional Public Works employee who can also assist with snow removal.

Mr. Denbowski stated that a draft 5 yr inter-municipal agreement will need the approval of both governing bodies. He also noted the need to amend the position ordinance to add one (1) Equipment Operator II.

Mr. Waltman congratulated Mr. Denbowski and Mr. Murin for a job well done.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz commended the group for their effort to develop a joint

recycling program. She noted her surprise when she learned that the Reading School District was not recycling. She expressed the belief that recycling in schools will increase compliance by students, in and out of school. She inquired about the tonnage expected through the School District's recycling program. Mr. Murin estimated that 100 tons of paper will be collected on the School District's side of the program.

Mr. Denbowski noted that an RFP will be issued to find a company to handle the recyclable material collected.

Mr. Marmarou thanked the group for working to save money and an additional Public Works position. He congratulated the group for their successful effort to bring this program to fruition.

Update: Rental Housing and Codes

Mr. Spencer introduced Mr. Kromer from the FELS institute who was assessing the practices of the Codes Division.

Mr. Kromer stated that his work with the FELS Institute to review the practices of the Codes Division and rental property oversight began over one (1) year ago, using the Allentown program as a model. He stated that last year he believed that Reading was ten (10) years behind in properly managing a variety of Codes issues. He stated that he is encouraged with progress made by the Codes division; however he noted the difficulties in changing various processes to develop systematic approaches.

Mr. Kromer stated that one area reviewed was properties that had been placarded for condemnation. He stated that last year seventy-five (75) properties have been tagged as unfit. These properties have now been inspected and either rehabbed or vacated. He also noted the positive change brought about by the Conditional Rental Registration Program. He also described the new inspection cycle to occur every three to five (3-5) years in five (5) Codes areas. He stated that the backlog of rental registration has been handled and invoices have been mailed out for the 2008 and 2009 calendar years. He stated these invoices are due February 2010. He stated that the Codes division plans to bill for 2010 rental registration by mid-year and then move towards annual billing in January of each following calendar year.

Mr. Kromer noted the improved professionalism of the Codes inspectors through training and the use of uniforms. He stated that they are currently working to develop additional programs that will train Codes inspectors about building Code requirements. He expressed the belief that Codes staff has made improvements in becoming more accountable, professional, and responsible. He also expressed belief in the improvements through the

realignment of staff and creating the supervisor positions.

Mr. Kromer distributed a progress report. Mr. Kromer noted the success of the Blighted Property Review Committee in assisting the Codes division in handling blighted properties.

Mr. Sterner asked Mr. Kromer if he has identified any roadblocks, and then inquired about the success of moving Codes into the Police Department. Mr. Kromer stated that many cities in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation link Codes and Fire staff as with many properties with Codes issues become Fire hazards. He expressed the belief that combining Codes staff with the Police Department has improved credibility.

Mr. Sterner inquired if the manpower allocation is sufficient. Mr. Kromer stated that Codes staff is on track. He also noted the need for proper implementation of various ordinances such as the ticketing program and increased fee schedule.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the City's overall lack of Codes enforcement has increased the irresponsibility of landlords. Mr. Kromer noted that the Codes Division has a good enforcement partner through the Blighted Property Review Committee process, as they step up enforcement efforts against the City's worst offenders.

Mr. Waltman thanked Mr. Kromer for his insights. He also noted the need for the Codes Division to improve their community relations approach to provide education on available resources. He expressed the belief that good policy can drive good enforcement. Mr. Kromer noted that the most effective community relations approach is presented by a City team that outreaches into a variety areas. He noted the need to encourage good two-way communication and noted a variety of complaints during with his meetings with City investors.

Mr. Waltman noted the importance of good collaboration between all partners in the housing industry. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the City's collaboration with other social organizations. Mr. Kromer stated that these connections are established were applicable. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the difficulties in maintaining and repairing the City's aging housing stock.

Mr. Reinhart noted Codes work to implement a good ticketing system that will cover the cost of the inspector along with raising awareness and increasing Codes compliance.

Student & Rental Housing

Mr. Waltman inquired if the 500 foot rule applies to student rentals. Ms. Kelleher stated

that this 500 foot applies to student rentals not to all rental properties.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for the City to consider college admission levels and the need for colleges to expand on-campus housing to support increased enrollment.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the reliability of rental property information previously provided and the reliability of college enrollment information provided by Albright College.

Mr. Waltman suggested developing a sign-off sheet that can be used at property settlement meetings to inform the owners of zoning regulations and district regulations, etc.

Mr. Marmarou noted that some realtors do not properly advise people purchasing City properties. He reminded everyone of the Conditional Use Hearing for 1524 Palm Street where the applicant testified under oath that he was not advised about the student rental regulations by his realtor. The property owner also contacted Albright College to inquire about off campus housing regulations and was ill advised when he was told to "go for it."

Mr. Waltman questioned the ability of the owner/realtor to advertise that a property could be converted to a multi-unit rental property without proper zoning. He suggested that we develop an ordinance to make such false advertising illegal.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz recalled that an ordinance was drafted about a year ago and suggested that this issue be revisited. Mr. Reinhart stated that some investors and realtors act responsibility; however some do not. He agreed with the need for improved education of realtors and those purchasing properties.

Mr. Waltman also asked the City to consider obtaining enrollment information before each school year and requiring college housing inspections.

Managing Director's Report

Mr. Hottenstein read the report distributed to Council at the meeting covering the following:

- DCED selection of the Act 47 coordinator
- November 17th Centre Park Neighborhood Meeting
- December 13th Centre Park Christmas House Tour
- Holiday trash/recycling collection schedule

Mr. Marmarou noted that independent trash collectors do not respect the holiday collection

schedule. He stated those using independent haulers are sometimes confused about the schedule change as they put their recycling out one day and their trash out on a different day.

Update: Delinquent Collections

Mr. Hottenstein stated that IT is in the process of sending the interface to Linebarger. He stated that a $185K collection rate has been projected for the 2010 budget. Mr. Waltman noted that this figure differs from that agreed to at the budget meeting on Thursday, November 12th. He stated that Council and the Administration agreed to a $50K projection at this meeting. Mr. Hottenstein stated that this figure was developed after reviewing top delinquencies on the type of tax or fee.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for a balancing act between delinquent and current collections.

Review: Business Privilege Ordinance

Mr. Younger stated that the ordinance will be prepared for introduction at the November 23rd Regular Meeting of Council.

The Work Session adjourned at approximately 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk

FOLLOW-UP ISSUES

- Amendment To Property Maintenance Code – Ticketing System
- Business Privilege Tax Ordinance Adding Revocation
- Copy DEP Report WWTP Inspection
- Zoning and Codes – Housing Update
- Review of ordinance regarding illegal advertisement

Proposed Changes to the Rental Inspections Program by Eric Weiss

Date: February 3, 2009, based on our January 22, 2009 meeting
Presented to City Council February 17, 2009

1. Enter property information into Hanson regarding placarded (tagged unfit) properties during January 2009. This will require follow-up inspections to be carried out over the following month for approximately 75 properties to verify use and occupancy along with enforcement actions as needed. All tagged unfit properties found to be occupied will be prioritized for enforcement until complied or vacated.

2. Create Divisions of responsibilities of staff by program or specialty, similar to divisions among the lines of business of a corporation. This specialization will improve effectiveness while allowing for adjustments to staffing in each division as needed during the year in order to address fluctuations in the workload. By February 1, 2009, deploy inspections staff as follows:
    a. 6 rental health & safety inspectors
    b. 4 complaints inspectors
    c. 2 illegal use inspectors
    d. 2 “floating” inspectors to respond to temporary workload increases
    e. 1 inspector handling health inspections

3. By April 1, 2009, to resolve the Housing Permits backlog problem, issue Housing Permits to approximately 1,500 owners who have applied and have had zoning verified. Defer the requirements for BPL and housing inspections on these properties to resolve the backlog and to clear the path for the commencement of the 5 year systematic inspections cycle. These Permits should indicate the conditions of issuance, that is: must be inspected, must comply with BPL requirements, etc.

4. Begin the 5-year, systematic rental inspections cycle by separating the Magisterial Districts into 5 one-year (2009 through 2013) geographic rental inspections areas. The number of rental dwelling units for inspection should be approximately equated each year and care should be taken not to overload challenging Districts into one year. This establishes goals and timetables with achievement expectations for administration, elected officials, staff, property owners and the general public and will transform the current reactive efforts into a proactive, mission-driven systematic process.

5. By June 30, 2009, to resolve the Rental Unit Invoices backlog, make the necessary ordinance amendments to establish a Registration provision for qualified rental units in chapter 11- Housing Rental. Registered Rental Units will be units documented by the City and based on the owner’s application and payment of a yearly fee. A unit will remain Registered, providing the yearly fee is paid, until a Rental Permit is issued when the unit is brought into compliance with all requirements in Chapter 11 following inspection during the five (5) year inspections cycle. The Registration does not warrant the zoning, safety, condition or habitability of these units. It merely

documents the owner's application for inclusion of the units(s) in Reading's Rental Unit Permitting process.

In resolving the invoice backlog, the 2008 and 2009 Rental Unit Invoices for units that are in compliance should be sent as Rental Permit Fee invoices. Rental units for which compliance is pending or units that have not been brought into compliance with the Rental Housing Ordinance requirements, should have 2008 and 2009 invoices sent as Rental Registration Fee invoices.

2007 Rental Fee Invoices, already in progress, can remain as Rental Permit Fee Invoices.

This will bring the rental billing cycle current without mandating all units be in compliance with all requirements while allowing Registered Units to remain Registered until they are included in the five (5) year inspection s cycle and achieve their Rental Permit.

6. List all permitted rental units on a Master Rental Permit posted in a common area (lobby) of every rental property. The permit will list all legal units identifying them by number or letter or location (example: 2nd floor rear). This will document the permitted allowable rental units in every rental building at an accessible location open to public view.

Additional Programmatic Changes:

1. By April 1, 2009 institute Sweep Ticketing Program. Sweep Ordinance is being revised to include all anticipated violations to be addressed by the ticketing process. The process initially will be by standard ticket book issuance similar to the Allentown Program. Potential benefits to using hand-held computers for ticketing will be looked into. Consortium of Code Officials in Reading, Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton has been formed and will best practice solutions, including the Sweep Ticketing Program, to common code problems among the cities.

2. By January 2009 decide on, measure staff size requirements, purchase and issue uniforms to inspectors. The inspectors "uniforms" will be khaki pants and a button down shirt rather than either a more law enforcement officer or a more maintenance worker style uniform. Projected first day for uniforms to be worn is the middle of February.

3. Zoning files are the City's official record of a property's legal allowable use. Having clear, complete, official municipal records of every property's allowable use is essential to a City's success by several measures. It is recommended that a sufficient number of staff be assigned to investigate and resolve issues of allowable uses for properties in rental inspections yearly geographic workload prior to inspections. Consider fee increases for rental housing permits and/or zoning

applications to cover additional staff to verify allowable use and to gain compliance of zoning violations. Maximus Company is evaluating Reading's fee structure. We can review the Maximus draft when it is ready.

Additional note:

Look into the optimal use of State Act 97 by putting a procedure in place to have fire inspectors gather fire insurance coverage information at every fire response and transfer this information to a program coordinator who will assure that insurance providers adhere to the provisions of Act 97 by escrowing with the City Treasurer the required portion of the insurance proceeds. Compliance signed off by the Building Inspections staff when the CO is issued following building restoration should be required prior to release of these funds to the owner/insured. If the owner/insured balks or fails to restore the building, the City should proceed to use the escrowed funds for the repairs. If no insurance is in place at the time of the fire, public nuisance abatement procedures using public funds should be employed to repair the building damage to at least a condition that will not allow further deterioration nor negatively impact surrounding properties. Code enforcement action, blighted property review procedures or municipal lien execution should follow until the fire damaged building is restored.