



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
March 7, 2011
4:30 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

V. Spencer, S. Marmarou, D. Sterner

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, F. Denbowski, C. Geffken, C. Younger

Mr. Spencer called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 4:40 p.m.

I. Greater Reading Film Commission

Santo Marabello and Crystal Seitz made a presentation to Council. Several other Film Commission members were present. They noted their thanks to Council for allowing them to update them on the work of the Film Commission.

Ms. Reed and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz arrived at this time.

Mr. Sterner questioned how the Film Commission reaches out to potential filmmakers. Dr. Marabello stated that the Film Commission has been networking the production "Location! Location!"

Mr. Acosta arrived at this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that film opportunities have arisen in Reading which did not receive assistance from the Film Commission, instead City representatives assisted. She noted that the City is financially distressed and cannot fund the Film Commission at this time. She noted that the City has performed work for projects which should be considered as in-kind

services. Ms. Seitz stated that the Film Commission needs assistance as she is now performing these duties beyond her regular work duties.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that private donations be sought for funding. Dr. Marabello noted his understanding of the City's financial situation but noted the need for Council to view this funding as an investment in economic development.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that it will not resonate well with residents to learn that the City can no longer afford its core services but that it can fund the Film Commission. Dr. Marabello noted the need for Council to look at the bigger picture. Ms. Seitz noted the importance of tourism to the area and the increased income generated by filmmakers.

Mr. Spencer requested a copy of the power point slides.

Mr. Geffken explained the City's current financial status.

Mr. Spencer noted Council's willingness to look at other ways to partner with the Film Commission.

Mr. Waltman arrived at this time.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the Film Commission researched and applied for grant funding. Dr. Marabello stated that the Film Commission would only qualify for grant funding for educational purposes.

Dr. Marabello stated that the Film Commission is requesting \$15,000 per year for part time staff.

Ms. Kelleher questioned if Berks Economic Partners or Greater Berks had been solicited for funding. Dr. Marabello stated that they both have representatives on the Film Commission and donate in-kind services.

Ms. Reed questioned if the Film Commission followed up with filmmakers about their experience after the project was complete. She suggested recruiting a retired journalist. Dr. Marabello stated that Film Commission members do not have time to follow up. He stated that the part time hire would provide follow up.

Ms. Reed stated that all organizations are being asked to do more with less. Ms. Seitz noted that she has only a staff of three and will not be able to keep up with all the requests.

Mr. Tangredi and Mr. Kersley arrived at this time.

II. Rebuilding Reading Poverty Commission

Mr. Glassman and Ms. Palmer gave Council an overview of the final report. Mr. Glassman stated that Council will receive the report via email. He stated that Ms. Palmer was the primary author and researcher. He noted the diverse input and participation by many Reading residents.

Mr. Glassman explained that the Commission began its work in September 2009 after learning of Reading's high poverty rate. He noted that he met with the Mayor who agreed to begin a task force.

Mr. Glassman noted his willingness to include anyone with an interest in reducing the City's poverty rate. He noted that the report includes recommendations in four areas – policy, housing, economic development and education. He noted that the recommendations are action oriented and contain flexibility to change as the City changes.

Mr. Robinson arrived at this time.

Mr. Glassman stated that many action items also include suggestions of organizations which can assist with the implementation. He noted that there are short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals and that some short-term goals are already being addressed and that the recommendations coordinate with the Recovery Plan. He noted that an additional goal of the report is for greater communication and collaboration between the branches of government and external organizations. He noted that the governmental process should be open and public.

Mr. Glassman explained that he recently met with the Mayor and his senior staff to review the draft report and make specific edits. He stated that he was grateful that the Mayor and staff read the report closely enough to make those productive suggestions. He noted that he is very proud of the results of the study and is hopeful for the future of Reading.

Mr. Spencer clarified that he attended the meeting with Mr. Glassman but made no suggestions. He stated that Council will receive a copy of the report.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if all parts of the City are covered in the report. Mr. Glassman stated that the entire City is important but that some neighborhoods need special attention. Ms. Palmer added that all sectors of the City were addressed including the Reading School District and non-profit organizations. She noted the need for the entire community to be involved in the process.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the initiatives must be sustainable and monitored for progress. She questioned who would be overseeing this process. Mr. Glassman stated that the committee was comprised of volunteers who are willing to continue to monitor progress. Ms.

Palmer clarified that the commission was comprised of volunteers and the only expense has been the printing costs which have been paid through the Mayor's office budget.

Mr. Glassman stated that many people outside the Reading area are interested in Reading's situation and see the City as a potential leader in revitalization.

Mr. Waltman clarified that Reading hasn't failed. He noted that the City has been very resilient even after poverty landed here. He noted his belief that poor does not mean dirty and noted the need for people to have basic goals. He stated that if these goals are met everyone will benefit and that people's lives must change as a result. Mr. Glassman concurred and stated that some of the initiatives in the plan may need up to 10 years before results are seen. He noted that the City's current challenges can become its strengths. He noted that the Hispanic culture needs to be better marketed to attract tourists and businesses.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the City had a strategic plan and where this report would fit into the strategic plan. Mr. Geffken noted his hope that the City would begin the strategic planning process by compiling information in previous reports. Mr. Glassman stated that this report stresses poverty but that the entire City will benefit from the initiatives. He stated that the report was developed in a strategic manner and that this report can serve as the root for the strategic plan. He requested that Council adopt a resolution formally accepting the report.

Mr. Acosta expressed his belief that the commission should remain active through the implementation process. He stated that much hard work has gone into the report. Mr. Glassman noted that he would be happy to continue.

Mr. Spencer clarified that the Administration and Council often collaborate but sometimes don't agree on issues.

The meeting adjourned at 5:53 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC
City Clerk