



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
June 25, 2012
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Sterner, D. Reed, R. Corcoran, S. Marmarou, F. Acosta

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, D. Cituk, C. Younger, R. Johnson, M. Vind, D. Rauch

Council President Acosta called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:08 p.m.

I. Refinancing Reading Phillies Loan

Mr. Vind stated that this action would extend the lease agreement to 2027 and the loan payments to 2037. He stated that PFM supports the loan extension.

Mr. Acosta questioned PFM's full stance on this issue. Mr. Vind stated that they support the refinancing but have concerns about the lease agreement. Ms. Kelleher asked Council to consider that in most locations stadiums are owned by the municipality and maintained and improved by the municipality. She stated that in Reading's case, the City owns the stadium but that it is maintained and improved by the Reading Phillies.

Mr. Spencer arrived at this time.

Mr. Marmarou stated that Reading has the finest stadium in the league. He also noted their work with Baseballtown Charities.

Mr. Cituk questioned if the terms of the extended lease would be available for review. Mr. Acosta stated that these are public documents and should be available for review.

Mr. Cituk reminded Council to be cognizant of taxpayers as they are reviewing the revised lease agreement. He noted the need to consider rent payments.

Mr. Acosta stated that there was good discussion on this topic at the June Work Session. He noted that the owner of the Reading Phillies was receptive to Council's concerns.

II. Refunding of the 2008 Series E Bonds

Mr. Vind stated that PFM also approves this transaction. He stated that this ordinance will be introduced this evening.

Mr. Corcoran questioned the savings to the City through this transaction. Mr. Vind stated that the City will save \$1 million in 2012.

Mr. Cituk stated that the City will be electing to take the savings upfront rather than spread it out over the term of the bond. Mr. Vind stated that this is open for discussion if necessary.

Mr. Cituk agreed with the City electing to take the savings upfront.

Mr. Agudo arrived at this time.

Mr. Vind and Mr. Rauch left the meeting at this time.

III. Review Quality of Life Recommendations

Mr. Acosta commended Mr. Agudo for his presentation at the June Work Session.

Mr. Marmarou stated that the "Welcome to Reading" guide has not been updated for several years. He suggested that this should be updated and distributed to new residents. He stated that he introduces himself to new residents in his neighborhood and gives them a copy of the guide. He suggested that the guide also be translated into Spanish.

Mr. Acosta noted the need for the City to enforce regulations and educate residents.

Mr. Spencer stated that Quality of Life violations will continue to be enforced. He stated that six violations make up 97% of tickets issued. He stated that the program has surpassed the budgeted revenue and that there is a perception by residents that the only reason the City is pursuing the program is to increase revenue. He stated that to date in 2012, \$600,000 has been collected and another \$600,000 has not been uncollected. He noted that further education may dispel this myth. He stated that the program is needed to change resident behaviors and to clean the City.

Mr. Spencer also noted the need to correct the appeal process. He suggested that a third party be used to review appeals. He also stated that the wait time for an appeal should be shorter. He noted his hope that the number of tickets will decrease as behaviors change. He noted the need to better define some of the violations.

Mr. Marmarou noted that Reading modeled their violations based on those used by other cities. He noted that the appeal cannot be returned to the MDJ as many violations are not enforced, especially during election years. Mr. Spencer stated that appeals will not return to the MDJs.

Mr. Marmarou stated that a small number of people who receive tickets appear before Council. He stated that he visited the property of one such person whose garden does not fit into this neighborhood. He noted the need for this garden to be addressed.

Mr. Spencer stated that there is a cost involved in addressing the program. He stated that the excess revenue from the program will be used to assist with education. He stated that the Mayor's office also receives many complaints about the program and that many times people want to view the photographs of their property. He stated that this issue is also being addressed with IT and may assist with decreasing appeals. Currently residents cannot view the photo until the date of their appeal.

Mr. Spencer stated that investors have legitimate concerns as it seems that they are targeted.

Mr. Acosta agreed with Mr. Spencer regarding investors. He noted that one investor showed him 20+ tickets. Mr. Agudo stated that he has proposed setting eight as the maximum number of tickets issued to a property on the same issue.

Ms. Reed noted the need for investors to have better tenants.

Mr. Corcoran stated that some tenants have mastered the art of deception during interviews.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that investors add a clause to their lease that eviction will occur if tickets are received.

Mr. Acosta questioned if the legislation needed to be amended to issue tickets to tenants. He noted the transient nature of Reading residents. Ms. Kelleher stated that this would mean that investors would need to inform Codes each time a tenant moved out and another moved in. She stated that this could become a paperwork nightmare.

Mr. Corcoran noted his support of a third party hearing appeals. He also noted his support of bilingual education. He suggested that this excess revenue be used to maintain City properties and to mow grass in City parks. He noted the need for the City to lead by example.

Mr. Spencer suggested that the excess revenue also be used toward neighborhood cleanups.

Mr. Agudo noted the need to address blight. He suggested that the excess revenue also be used to supplement the Blighted Property Review Committee. He stated that he plans to educate residents and work to assist residents. He noted the need to clarify the items which may be ticketed and to use photos to illustrate what is acceptable and what is not.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that very few Latinos can read Spanish. Ms. Reed and Mr. Acosta stated that they do not believe this to be true. Mr. Acosta added that many Latinos come from countries with low educational levels but that this is not the majority.

Mr. Sterner noted his support of correcting the appeal process. He noted that only 3 – 4% of tickets are appealed and noted that he didn't understand why the appeal is scheduled so far in the future. Mr. Acosta stated that Mr. Agudo is now double scheduling appeals as many don't appear for their appeal. He also noted that the number of appeals may drop after residents can view the photo of their property showing the violation.

Mr. Sterner stated that he does not support issuing the first ticket with no fee. He stated that this was already done at the start of the program. Mr. Acosta and Ms. Reed agreed.

Mr. Waltman arrived at this time.

Mr. Spencer stated that many times those who come to the office to complain do not appeal the ticket after they are shown the photos. He noted that this procedure may be used at the Codes counter to decrease appeals and that the Administration is also looking at other ways to expedite the process. He stated that IT is currently working on a way to link the photo to the ticket to allow residents to view their ticket and photos online. He reminded all that residents are entitled to appeal.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that each Councilor hear appeals for their district. Ms. Reed stated that this process will be used for zoning appeals only to clear the backlog.

Ms. Reed noted the need for all to use common sense in relation to the tickets. She suggested that Codes be judicious in how tickets are issued. She expressed the belief that not all issues addressed by the tickets are priorities City-wide. She noted the need to address blight.

Mr. Corcoran suggested including a photo with the mailed ticket. Mr. Agudo stated that the quality of the photo will be poor and may not assist the resident.

Mr. Sterner questioned the percentage of residents who are issued multiple tickets for the same issues. Mr. Agudo stated that this information was included in his presentation at the June Work Session but that he did not have it with it. Ms. Reed recollected that it was a large percentage.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for delineation of the City's goals. He stated that litter on sidewalks must be addressed. He suggested using one small area of the City to test and perfect any recommendations. He stated that some areas of the City also need more enforcement than others. He stated that density creates problems and that the program should be focused on these areas. He noted that he supports the recommendations made.

Mr. Spencer stated that residents need to learn that gutters are not trash cans and the street sweeper program is not in place to remove household waste.

Mr. Waltman agreed and stated that the sweeper program has caused more people to believe that they may throw their waste into the gutters.

Ms. Reed noted that homeownership versus rental also impacts these items.

Mr. Agudo thanked Council for their feedback. He stated that he hopes that the changes to the program are successful and decrease the need for tickets.

Mr. Acosta noted the need for the program to be tailored to each neighborhood.

Mr. Sterner questioned next steps. Mr. Spencer stated that the education will begin and that any amendments needed to the legislation will be brought to Council.

IV. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Ordinance amending Housing by expanding the definition of a Vacant Property

Mr. Corcoran voiced his concern that if a property is for sale or under renovation the owner should not be further burdened by needing to comply with this ordinance.

Ms. Reed stated that properties can be for sale or under renovation for extended time periods.

Mr. Corcoran stated that he will not be supporting this ordinance.

Mr. Lloyd arrived at this time.

- Ordinance amending the Position Ordinance in the Codes Office

Mr. Spencer stated that the Administration is requesting that this ordinance be tabled. He noted the need for further discussion with HR.

- Ordinance amending Chapter 13 regarding a Billing Agent for False Burglar Alarms

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that this will allow false burglar alarms to be billed to property owners for the Police Department.

Mr. Acosta requested that the Fire Marshall be present at a future meeting to discuss false fire alarms.

- Ordinance entering an Agreement for the Wyomissing Creek Watershed

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that this ordinance may not need to be codified and that she will be working with Mr. Younger to finalize the format before the ordinance is eligible for final passage.

V. Utility Work

Mr. Waltman noted his hope that the City would work with UGI on the gas meter issue. He stated that this is especially inappropriate in the City's historic districts. He stated that UGI is working with other municipalities in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Spencer stated that these meters are unsightly.

Mr. Acosta questioned if there was any follow up on this issue. Ms. Kelleher stated that she has contacted UGI. Mr. Spencer stated that he is willing to discuss this issue with them.

Mr. Waltman stated that a State law is allowing this work to be done.

VI. Sewer Fund

Mr. Waltman noted the need for Council to understand the amount of funds which can be used from the Sewer Fund and the items the funds can be used for. He stated that he has requested this information in the past. Ms. Kelleher stated that Mr. Miravich supplied this information.

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC, City Clerk