



CITY COUNCIL

Work Session

Meeting Report Monday, July 16, 2012

Council Members Attending: F. Acosta, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, R. Corcoran, D. Sterner, J. Waltman

Others Attending: L. Kelleher, C. Snyder, C. Younger, L. Agudo, E. Lloyd

Mr. Acosta called the Work Session to order at approximately 7:12 pm.

Council Report

Ms. Kelleher stated that the monthly Council report is attached to the agenda. She stated that the last draft of the LRA's Legally Binding Agreement with Mary's Shelter was rejected by HUD, who wanted some modification of the language within the agreement. A new agreement was drafted by Mary's Shelter's pro bono legal counsel and is ready for execution.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the Bernhart's Work Group is working on the close out of the rehabilitation project with Exide. She stated that the Berks Arts Council is assisting with the design of the new sign that will be placed in the park.

Mr. Acosta stated that Ms. Kelleher is also taking steps to fill the open position in the Council Office and that Ms. Kelleher is using this opportunity to revamp the composition of the Council Office which will move the office forward. Ms. Kelleher explained that she is modifying the work flow between the three positions and renaming the Administrative Assistant to Legislative Aide, who will be responsible for assisting with the composition of the newsletter, handling the social media networking, along with assisting the Council Committees.

Tax Amnesty

Ms. Kelleher stated that Mr. Kersley provided a written report, which was distributed. She stated that Mr. Kersley reports that \$5,000 in per capita and \$15,000 in Business Privilege was

collected to date.

Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that the Administration should have done more pre-publicity regarding the penalties that would be applied after the amnesty period is over to drive participation.

Quality of Life (QoL) Ticketing Program

Mr. Agudo distributed a memo updating Council on the June 18th recommendations. Council action is needed for the following recommendations to be finalized:

- Approve funding for the bilingual information campaign
- Approve an ordinance authorizing the \$0 warning for 1st time violators
- Approve an ordinance expanding the language for varying fines depending on the severity of the violation (trash can set out vs. high grass/weeds)

Mr. Agudo stated that the following recommendations are in progress:

- Making technical improvements
- Adopting a collections protocol
- Obtaining an independent hearing officer
- Add an additional hearing day & offer instant counter appeals
- Add a 30 day grace period before 2nd ticket for the same offense is issued

Mr. Marmarou inquired about the independent hearing officer. Mr. Agudo stated that the hearing officer will be the CD Manager or other internal managers not associated with the Property Maintenance Office.

Mr. Waltman noted the need to consider the goals of and benchmarks for the QoL program. He agreed with the recalibration and improvement of the program. He suggested applying the program in individual neighborhoods to develop a sound prototype. He also noted his belief that the city-wide application has not decreased the amount of litter in Reading.

Ms. Snyder agreed with the need to expand the program and to provide clarity of the program goals. She expressed the belief that over time, the program will change the behaviors of residents.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the program has been successful in several areas. She provided an example of how the program has started to change behaviors. She agreed with the need for an ongoing educational campaign due to the transiency of Reading's population. She suggested branding the program. She noted that the program has had positive outcomes built on residents' desire to avoid receiving a ticket.

Ms. Reed noted the growing problem of QoL violations at bank owned properties. Ms.

Kelleher agreed, noting the number of bank owned properties is rising.

Mr. Corcoran thanked Mr. Agudo for his work on this issue. He expressed his support for the information campaign. He also suggested expanded training for inspectors working with the QoL program.

Mr. Acosta described a recent issue with trash can set out on Summit Chase Drive. The only homes who have back yard access are the units on the end of the row of homes. He encouraged Mr. Agudo to draft the amendments he would like Council to consider.

Mr. Sterner suggested sending information about the program along with the first ticket to the first time offender.

Mr. Waltman noted the need to provide balance and focus from small areas with small issues to large issues.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that the program has changed behaviors and that the program has worked well in the College Heights area.

Mr. Acosta noted that the QoL program applies to all properties; business and residential.

Mr. Agudo thanked Council for their comments and input. He noted the expected delivery of the Market Value Analysis started by the Reading Redevelopment Authority, which will be a color coded map that will help the City refine their housing strategy and refine the City's scope of services.

Mr. Sterner suggested a stronger anti-litter program.

Mr. Waltman suggested returning to Council neighborhood tours to address neighborhood problems and neighborhood needs.

Mr. Acosta suggested delivering educational materials during the tours.

Mr. Agudo invited Council to join the meeting with HUD on Thursday. He stated that the tour is scheduled for 11 am followed by lunch at 12:30 pm.

Yard Waste Collection

Mr. Lloyd handed out some research he did on yard waste collection and described his continuous study of this issue. He stated that grass clippings and yard waste has been diverted from trash collection since 1981 due to the overcrowded conditions of landfills.

Mr. Lloyd stated that the City has two yard waste collection sites; a site near Egleman's Park and the Wastewater Treatment Plant. He noted the need to modernize the City screening, grinding and composting equipment. He also noted the need to address staffing for this program.

Mr. Corcoran stated that the lack of a good yard waste program has caused residents to improperly dispose of tree trimmings and grass clippings. He stated that residents living in low density residential areas with larger, suburban-like lawns need a program for grass clippings. He stated that mulching only works if a home owner mows their lawn 2-3 times per week and most property owners do not have time to meet that schedule. He stated that left without any recourse, residents stow grass clippings in with yard waste and trash.

Mr. Lloyd stated that the City cannot compost grass due to the chemicals placed on lawns. He encouraged residents to compost at their homes. Ms. Kelleher inquired about Mr. Lloyd's comment on composting as the majority of municipalities who responded to the survey collect grass clippings and compost them. Mr. Corcoran inquired why the City cannot compost grass clippings but the homeowner can.

Mr. Corcoran stressed the need to create a program that accepts grass clippings. He stated that although the City's trash collection does not accept grass clippings, the private haulers do take them.

Mr. Waltman asked the Administration to prepare three recommendations that will address a grass clipping collection program. He noted that the yard waste program is now located in the Recycling Office and he noted that the cost of the recycling program has skyrocketed over the past decade; going from \$25 a year to \$80 per year.

As no other business was brought to the table the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk