

Meeting Summary
Crime Summit
Council Chambers
Monday, March 11, 2013
1 p.m.

Attending: DA John Adams and staff, Commissioners Leinbach, Scott and Barnhardt and staff, Council President Acosta, Councilors Reed and Goodman-Hinnershitz and staff, County Chief Operating Officer and staff, City Managing Director, Sheriff Eric Weaknecht and staff, Mayor

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, facilitator, called the meeting to order. All attending pledged to the flag.

The group agreed to focus on the issues under discussion and prioritize the discussion.

Current City-County Cooperation

Mr. Adams stated that cooperation in law enforcement occurs regularly. He noted the success of the warrant service provided by the Sheriff, Operation Night Light, Pharmaceutical Drop Box, etc. He explained that Operation Night Light currently pairs police patrol with probation and parole officers and the sheriff. He stated that LCE and PA probation and parole will also be added to the entourage for visits to local bars. He stated that this program is funded through drug forfeiture money by the County in Reading and other municipalities. He noted that the DA's office has the ability to close down nuisance bars and noted the three nuisance bars shut down over recent years.

Mr. Leinbach and Mr. Scott noted that the County has recently started to handle the investigation of juvenile issues for the City and surrounding municipalities. They stated that the County has also provided assistance through the ADD, community re-entry program and the County contributes to the Reading Public Library system.

Mr. Barnhardt stated that he was pleased to see that the Police Chief agrees with the need for regionalized policing in Berks County. He stated that 70% of the County budget is focused on crime and related issues.

Ms. Snyder stated that the County also assists the City and surrounding municipalities by providing coverage for fraud and identity theft, and evidence training.

Additional Initiatives

Ms. Johnson suggested stronger enforcement of the City's housing code and the need to reduce vacant housing. She also suggested teaming Codes enforcement officials with the

Operation Night Out, when residential properties are visited.

Mr. Spencer noted the need to reduce the number of half-way houses in Reading. He stated that it seems that the centralization of these homes in Reading is a contributing factor to the crime problems.

Mr. Adams agreed with the need to control and reduce the number of half-way houses in Reading. He stated that the residents of these homes are not local and questioned if the residents return to their home municipality or state when they are released from the program.

Mr. Acosta stated that City Council has taken a strong position against increasing the number of group homes and half-way houses in Reading.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Council has also taken a hard stance on increasing the number of bars and liquor licenses in Reading. She stressed the need for improved communication between City and County officials and for the need to develop an action plan that can be measured. She noted the need to develop a joint strategy built on cooperation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz gave examples of how the City has increased their enforcement of housing codes and regulations in Reading along with zoning regulations.

Mr. Barnhardt stated that a few years ago a successful truancy detention center was operated within Olivet. He suggested exploring the costs, legal requirements and benefits of re-establishing this program. Mr. Acosta suggested discussing this issue with the Executive Director of the Rec Commission. Mr. Barnhardt suggested also discussing this issue with the Reading Public Library.

Mr. Leinbach noted that prescription drug abuse remains a key issue, as that is a precursor to the use of heroin. He also described the new program focusing on drug pushers coordinated by the DA's Office.

Mr. Leinbach suggested that the City begin using the County SWAT Team.

Mr. Scott noted the need to track crime to learn if it is imported or committed by locals.

Improved Cooperation

Ms. Reed suggested that all communication should be funneled through the County Chief Operating Official and the City's Managing Director. Mr. Acosta noted the need to copy City Council and the Commissioners and their staff.

All agreed with the need to establish an email communication group.

The need to involve the business community, community groups and churches was discussed. Mr. Spencer noted his roundtable meetings with City businesses and Mr. Acosta described the City Council's success in building a solid relationship with the Reading Berks Association of Realtors.

Ms. Johnson stated that various County officials encounter substandard living conditions when they need to go to residential properties within Reading. The need to convey this information to the City was discussed. Also discussed was the need to involve the DA's Office in the enforcement of housing code violations.

Mr. Barnhardt stated that a Criminal Justice Advisory Board meets every other month and the Steering Committee meets every month. He stated that the Mayor and a Police representative are on this panel but they do not attend. Mr. Spencer stated that he was unaware of these meetings.

Mr. Barnhardt stated that the Advisory Board bylaws can be amended to add participation by members of City Council.

Ms. Snyder suggested cross communication between Department heads for the City and County.

The need for improved economic development in the City, with an initial focus on Penn Street was discussed.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk