



CITY COUNCIL

Standards of Living Committee

Monday, May 19, 2014
Meeting Report

Committee Members Attending: D. Sterner (Co-Chair), C. Daubert (Co-Chair), S. Marmarou

Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, T. Coleman, A. Rudy, W. Heim, B. Maddox, B. Nicarry, T. Waldman, J. Montgomery

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm by Mr. Sterner.

I. Review Administrative Reports

The quarterly Citizen Service Center report was reviewed. There were no questions.

II. Copper Piping Requirement in City Properties

Chief Heim introduced Officer Maddox. Mr. Montgomery distributed the Procedure to Install PEX or CPVC Piping in the City of Reading.

Mr. Sterner stated that Council has been hearing complaints about the requirement to continue using copper piping due to the cost and the repeated thefts. Mr. Montgomery stated that it is a serious safety concern. Mr. Nicarry explained that it is an electrical grounding issue. He stated that if the electric service is replaced and grounded in a way other than through the copper piping, then PEX or CPVC is okay to install.

Mr. Waldman distributed a photo of an example. He explained that in the past it was acceptable to ground wiring to copper piping nearest the electrical installation. He stated that this allows there to be several installations with grounding to copper piping in multiple locations throughout a property. He stated that interrupting the copper

peping with PEX or CPVC interrupts the entire grounding system and an electrocution hazard exists. He stated that most of the complaints that the inspectors hear are from property owners who have not followed the proper procedure. He stated that all Our City Reading properties have PEX plumbing systems since they also have new electrical systems.

Mr. Sterner stated that this requirement is not necessarily business friendly. He noted the problem with theft. Mr. Montgomery stated that safety must always be considered first. Mr. Nicarry stated that this is really an all or nothing type of installation to be done properly.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if local scrap dealers cooperate and inform police if there is someone who is repeatedly bringing copper pipe. Chief Heim stated that City dealers cooperate but if the copper is taken to a dealer outside Reading, there is no enforcement. He stated that several offenders have been caught and jailed. He stated that it is hard to prove that the piping is stolen.

Mr. Waldman stated that there are several property managers in Reading who paint their copper piping a certain color to ensure that if it is recycled, the dealer knows it was stolen and from whom.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he supports the need for copper piping as it is a safety issue. He questioned if people are disconnecting the external gas meters for recycling.

Mr. Sterner noted the need to amend the trade codes to include this new procedure. Mr. Montgomery stated that all the codes need to be updated. He explained that this was a project being completed by Ms. Mayfield when she left City employ and has not yet been completed. Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that the last update was in 2006.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this procedure was drafted by the trades professionals. Mr. Waldman stated that it was a cooperative effort between the electrical and plumbing inspectors and the Electrical and Plumbing Boards. He stated that PMI has also been trained to look for this issue during housing inspections and to notify trades when a problem has been discovered.

Mr. Sterner noted the need for the Law office to complete the work to update these codes.

Chief Heim suggested adding this new procedure to the Codified Ordinances as an update until the full code revisions are complete. He stated that Officer Maddox has a background in construction and has made recommendations regarding this issue.

Officer Maddox stated that he was an electrician. He stated that he was trying to reduce copper theft and suggested that PEX be installed in the basement with a clamp at the subfloor level to ground the rest of the property. He stated that he has attended copper theft prevention training in Philadelphia. He stated that regulations must keep up with technology changes.

Mr. Montgomery stated that galvanized pipe is also an option to decrease the theft of copper pipe.

Mr. Acosta joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Montgomery suggested that Trades prepare a pamphlet for Police to give to property owners when they report copper theft.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that this be added to the City's Guidebook.

Chief Heim stated that the pamphlet will help educate Police during their responses.

Mr. Daubert suggested the procedure be publicized in the newspaper.

Mr. Sterner suggested that the procedure be added to the Codified Ordinances as an addendum to the trade codes until the full codes are updated.

Chief Heim stated that there have been 40 cases of copper theft reported so far in 2014. He stated that this is a reduction from this time last year. He stated that the theft occurs most often in vacant properties.

Officer Maddox stated that several offenders have been arrested. He stated that for those who steal copper on a daily basis, it can bring in more than \$100 per basement.

Mr. Sterner expressed this thanks to all for their work on this issue.

Police and Trades left the meeting at this time.

III. Animal Amendment

Mr. Marmarou questioned if there was a problem when college students moved home. Ms. Rudy stated that it is very infrequent.

Mr. Coleman reviewed the changes to the regulations. He stated that a definition of harboring was added. He stated that the six dogs and/or cats is not a hard limit. He stated that if a person owns six or more dogs and/or cats, they must complete a registration form and return it to Property Maintenance. He stated that there is no fee for the registration.

Mr. Marmarou questioned what happens if an owner has six or more dogs and/or cats and does not register them. Mr. Coleman explained that the City will not be looking for properties where there are six or more dogs and/or cats. He stated that if the City receives another complaint about the property and it is discovered that the animals are not registered there is an additional fine.

Mr. Daubert questioned if the number was a State rule. Mr. Rudy stated that the only number given by the State is more than 25 animals within a one year period. She stated that this number categorizes the operation as a kennel. *(Note: all other municipalities who limit the number of pets use the number six.)*

Mr. Coleman stated that the limit was challenged in the past as being unconstitutional. He stated that there is no taking in this language and that appeals are allowed.

Mr. Acosta left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if those found with an excessive amount of animals have mental or emotional issues. Ms. Rudy stated that this is sometimes the case.

Mr. Coleman stated that there is no fee to register the animals. He explained that the Animal Rescue League is working to have a pantry for those with animals who need assistance with food, veterinary care, etc. He stated that this will be a way to educate residents about the need to register their animals. Ms. Rudy stated that the program will begin in June.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the Board of Health, Animal Rescue League and Law reviewed the regulations. Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that they were all very involved in

the writing and review of the regulations. Ms. Rudy stated that she loves the registration.

Mr. Sterner stated that the amendment should be introduced at the May 27 Council meeting and should be a discussion topic on the May 27 Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Lloyd arrived at this time.

IV. UGI Meters

Mr. Coleman explained that he and Ms. Kelleher met with PUC legal staff. He stated that UGI was instructed to contact the City. He stated that there is latitude to regulate the meter placement.

Mr. Coleman explained that in historic districts the meter can be kept inside when practical and must be masked if it is external. He stated that in non-historic areas the regulations can be based on setbacks, right of ways, etc. He used wheelchair access and the size of the sidewalk as an example.

Mr. Coleman noted the need for the City to have better internal processes to monitor the installation and placement. He stated that the trades professionals must be involved in the process. He stated that internal meetings are being organized and then a follow up meeting with the PUC and UGI will be held.

Mr. Coleman stated that the meter relocation to the outside increases the liability and costs to the property owners. He stated that the new regulations are to reduce leaks and the number of explosions.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that most of the explosions occur when there is construction occurring nearby.

Mr. Coleman stated that there is also increased risk of autos damaging the meters when they are external and are not set back properly. He noted the need for UGI and their subcontractors to install the meters to the manufacturer and utility guidelines and the construction codes. He noted the need to use those guidelines and codes to determine the City's regulations.

Mr. Sterner questioned the meters that have already been moved that are in violation. Mr. Coleman stated that this will be addressed at the internal meetings. He stated that it is his hope that inspections will begin.

Mr. Marmarou noted the need for UGI to clean the area better when work is complete. He stated that many of the street patches are sinking. Mr. Coleman expressed the belief that the new street cut regulations will address this issue.

V. Wyomissing Park Street Lighting

Mr. Daubert stated that the project is still on schedule. He stated that work should begin in August or September.

VI. Pagoda MOU

Mr. Lloyd stated that Ms. Snyder is waiting to hear back from the Foundation Board.

VII. Berks Area Mountain Biking Association

Mr. Marmarou stated that they hosted an excellent event.

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that the MOU has been signed.

VIII. Snow Emergency Plan and Snow Removal

Mr. Lloyd stated that Mr. Johnson is working on the plan but is not yet ready to make a presentation. He stated that there are logistics regarding curb to curb removal. He noted the need for better coordination and communication with the public.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if there were agreements with contractors, the Reading School District, DID, etc. Mr. Lloyd stated that there are but they are informal. He stated that there are no agreements with outside contractors. He stated that resources must be budgeted. He suggested that part time employees be hired on an as needed basis.

IX. Deputy CD Director

Mr. Sterner requested meeting the new Deputy CD Director at an upcoming Committee of the Whole meeting. Mr. Lloyd stated that he will schedule Mr. Varghese.

X. Guidebook

Mr. Sterner stated that he spoke with Ms. Snyder about this issue before the meeting began. She stated that fewer ads were received than anticipated so the number of books printed will be reduced. She noted the need to get an update from Ms. Loaiza.

Mr. Sterner questioned if there was a record of ads and what happened to the payment. He stated that this project has been in progress for at least two years. He stated that this is bad public relations with those who do want to advertise. Mr. Lloyd agreed and stated that the information in the Guidebook may be outdated again.

Mr. Sterner noted the need to contact the donors with an update. Mr. Lloyd agreed.

Mr. Marmarou questioned who was approached and how they were approached. Ms. Katzenmoyer noted her understanding that Ms. Snyder chose who to approach and that they received letters.

Mr. Marmarou suggested using a professional to solicit ads and to print the books.

XI. Meatless Monday Resolution

Mr. Daubert questioned if the Committee would support placing a resolution on a future agenda encouraging residents to go meatless every Monday. He noted the public health and environmental benefits of going meatless.

The Committee agreed to place this resolution on a future agenda.

XII. Truck Parking

Mr. Sterner questioned if there was follow up on this issue. Mr. Daubert stated that it is problematic on Pershing Bl. Mr. Marmarou stated that it is problematic in the 1200 block of Richmond St.

Mr. Sterner requested this issue be added to the Update section of the agenda.

XIII. Pharmacy

Mr. Daubert stated that a property on Hancock Blvd was on the most recent Zoning Hearing Board agenda to open a pharmacy. He stated that he is opposed to this use as the rest of the area is residential.

No further issues were discussed and the meeting adjourned at approximately 6:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Katzenmoyer
Deputy City Clerk