



## *City Council District 6 Interviews*

**MINUTES  
August 31, 2015  
Council Chambers  
5:30 P.M.**

### **COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

S. Marmarou, D. Sterner, J. Waltman, D. Reed, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, C. Daubert

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, C. Younger

The interview session was called to order at 5:35 pm by Mr. Waltman. He explained the process that will be used to interview the three (3) applicants for the District 6 seat. He stated that the interviews will be conducted in the order in which the applications were received. He announced the interview schedule. He asked the applicants to consider stepping out of the room while they are waiting for their interview. Mr. Slifko and Mr. Zimmerman voluntarily left the room.

### **I. Melvyn Jacobson**

Mr. Jacobson thanked Council for providing him with this opportunity. He stated that prior to submitting his application he gave careful thought to the responsibility of serving in this capacity. He stated that while it is easy to critique the operation of government and to discuss issues from the sidelines, it is more difficult to step up and apply to fill the position.

Mr. Jacobson stated that he has lived in Reading for the past 35 years and he has worked as a project manager and an architect. He stated that he has served on City boards, authorities and commissions which will help him to contribute to the legislative branch if he is appointed. He noted the need for Council to create solutions to resolve a variety of issues.

Mr. Jacobson noted the need to increase owner occupied homes and instill pride in ownership. He stated that he understands the complexities of District 6 and the need for the City and School District to work cooperatively. He stated that while he is deeply committed to the Reading community, he has no preconceived agenda or ties to any individual or organization.

In response to a question from Mr. Daubert, Mr. Jacobson stated that his leadership style, lead by example, was developed while he was a captain in the military.

In response to question from Mr. Sterner, Mr. Jacobson stated that bringing the middle class back to Reading will be a piece by piece effort. He noted the need to expand the growth of Reading's residential areas. He also expressed his belief in building communities through community groups.

In response to a question from Mr. Marmarou, Mr. Jacobson stated that he understands the differences between the legislative body and the administration and that serving on Council will provide him with a better understanding of District 6 and the entire City.

In response to a question from Mr. Marmarou, Mr. Jacobson expressed his belief in the need to strengthen and improve the Reading School District to inspire the growth of home ownership.

In response to a question from Ms. Reed, Mr. Jacobson expressed the belief that Council should work closely with the administration on economic development issues, as the administration has personnel experienced in that field. He also noted the need for Council to advocate to spur economic development and to work with the administration to create a business friendly environment.

In response to a question from Ms. Reed, Mr. Jacobson stated that he will gain additional insight into issues facing the School District and the City because his wife serves as Vice President of the Reading School Board.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Mr. Jacobson stated that the biggest challenge to filling the District 6 seat will be getting acclimated on all the current issues. He also noted the importance of improving the school system to improve home ownership.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Mr. Jacobson stated that if an ethical issue presents itself, it is important to disclose the issue quickly.

When Mr. Sterner posed questions about the City's biggest successes and failures, Mr. Jacobson stated that the hotel is the City's biggest success, along with the influence DID and the downtown farmer's market has had on the downtown. He also expressed the belief that the School District has turned itself around with a new superintendent and improved Board. He expressed the belief that the biggest failure is the most recent ethical issue. He stated that he welcomes the opportunity to become a part of Council.

Mr. Waltman stated that the majority of Council's work relates to mathematical and legal issues. Mr. Jacobson stated that he has had many experiences with budgets as an architect and as a project manager. He provided some examples of developing and managing budgets.

## **II. John Slifko**

Mr. Slifko stated that he has been a Reading resident since 1983 and that he owns the property he lives in and he also owns a rental property. He stated that he has much experience with both business and City affairs. He stated that he served as the legal advisor to the Government Study Commission in the early 1990s as they developed the City's Home Rule Charter and he also served on the Clean City Initiative in the late 1990s. He stated that he served on the Charter Review Commissions in 2002 and 2013 and that he is currently serving on the Gas Meter citizens group.

Mr. Slifko stated that serving on Council was not part of his original game plan but as he believes Council has the need for someone with legal experience, he decided to apply for the position.

In response to a question from Mr. Daubert, Mr. Slifko stated that participating on Council will give him a broader perspective about the Charter and its requirements. He noted the difference between viewing the Charter academically and working within its confines.

In response to a question from Mr. Daubert about his leadership style, Mr. Slifko stated that he enjoys working collaboratively with people to solve problems. He also expressed the belief in the need to set egos aside to develop solutions. He stated that at times he can be a stickler for detail, which will help inspire quality legislation.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Mr. Slifko stated that ethical issues should be reported to the Board of Ethics or the Charter Board, depending on the nature of the issue. He also stated that it is critical to counsel anyone who may be involved in making questionable decisions.

In response to Mr. Sterner's question, Mr. Slifko stated that Reading's greatest success is that the improvement of the downtown is gaining momentum. He also listed the City's work within the Act 47 Recovery Plan as a success. He expressed the belief that the most notable failure is the recent Ethics and Charter violations and the administration's failure to follow the spirit and intent of the Charter.

Mr. Marmarou asked Mr. Slifko how he would cultivate trust within local government. Mr. Slifko stated that trust begins with handling all issues with transparency and open communications.

In response to a question from Mr. Marmarou, Mr. Slifko stated that there is no silver bullet to assist those living in poverty. However, he noted that building a vibrant City with jobs would help increase the middle class population. He expressed the belief that cities have become a vacuum for the poor.

Ms. Reed questioned Mr. Slifko about the role of Council in economic development and how to encourage other City neighborhoods to become as stable as Centre Park. Mr. Slifko stated that Council needs to be a good ambassador of the City to support the increase of economic development. He stated that Council should support economic development initiatives supported by the administration and draft legislation to assist in projects.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Mr. Slifko stated that the major issue the new Councilor will need to handle is the upcoming budget process. He stated that he would like to serve on the budget committee and become involved in the budget process as his BA is in economics.

Mr. Waltman noted the diversity of District 6. Mr. Slifko stated that he is familiar with the district and that he has worked as a home remodeler in many areas of the City. He also stated that he planted trees with the Shade Tree Commission in a wide variety of City neighborhoods.

Mr. Waltman explained that the majority of issues handled by Council relate to the mathematical and legal areas. Mr. Slifko stated that he passed the Pennsylvania Bar exam and has operated a sole proprietorship that requires knowledge and application of both subjects.

### **III. Wesley Zimmerman**

Mr. Zimmerman stated that he works within the financial and insurance areas at a Maryland firm. He stated that he was attracted to Reading's architecture. He expressed the belief that Council could benefit from his business and financial skills.

In response to a question from Mr. Marmarou, Mr. Zimmerman stated that the largest challenge for the person appointed will be learning the system in a relatively short period of time. He stated that while he has a degree in political science, he has not worked in the field of government.

In response to a question from Mr. Daubert on leadership, Mr. Zimmerman stated that he has a neutral temperament and would bring a strong customer service orientation to the position.

In response to a question from Ms. Reed about economic development and the stabilization of Reading's neighborhoods, Mr. Zimmerman suggested using the Centre Park model in other neighborhoods. He noted the need to build pride within the City and to create a more positive perception about Reading. He stated that he is currently assisting some people in developing new businesses. He expressed that adopting positive energy will increase economic development.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired about how Mr. Zimmerman would handle an ethical dilemma. Mr. Zimmerman stated that if he was unsure if an issue crossed improper lines, he would seek guidance to find a proper solution.

In response to a question from Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Mr. Zimmerman stated that the City needs to attract the middle class by selling both the City and the School District.

Mr. Waltman stated that the majority of the issues handled by Council are either mathematical or legal in nature. Mr. Zimmerman stated that he has a strong financial background and has worked with various boards. He expressed the belief that he will bring objective ability to the position.

#### **IV. Next Steps**

Mr. Waltman explained the process Council will use to evaluate the applicants and the interviews. He stated that Council will make a collective decision. He stated that the appointment will be made at a Special Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, September 8, 2015 at 5:30 pm.

The interview session adjourned.

*Respectfully Submitted by  
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC, City Clerk*