



# CITY COUNCIL

## Strategic Planning Committee

**Monday, August 1, 2016**  
**Meeting Report**

**Attending:** J. Waltman, B. Twyman, C. Daubert, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz

**Others Attending:** G. Steckman, W. Scott, P. Vasquez, L. Kelleher, C. Younger, R. Johnson

The meeting was called to order at approximately 5:20 pm by Mr. Daubert.

### **I. Youth Commission**

Mr. Zabala distributed copies of the Philadelphia materials on the Youth Commission, which began under former Mayor Nutter. He explained that the goal of the commission is to introduce youth between 12 and 23 years of age to local government and the legislative process. The youth appointed are expected to attend meetings, provide input and to share information about government with their peers. He stated that appointments are made by the Mayor and City Council members.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz described her positive experience working with this Youth Commission in the past.

Mr. Zabala explained that the Philadelphia model uses an Executive Director to run the program and he is exploring implementation alternatives for Reading. He suggested that Council consider appointing nine (9) – two (2) representing the Mayor and seven (7) representing each member of Council. He explained that the Commission in Philadelphia establishes subcommittees that those appointed must volunteer to participate in. Those who participate are asked to encourage their peers to become involved in the activities of the subcommittee.

When asked about including college students, Mr. Zabala suggested appointing only youth who are local. He noted that the Philadelphia model was created through the referendum process. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that in Reading Council could simply create the commission via ordinance.

Mr. Waltman suggested that Mr. Zabala speak with the Administration about their willingness to create a Youth Commission, then Council could consider crafting the legislation.

## **II. 3<sup>rd</sup> and Elm Property re Habitat for Humanity**

Mr. Steckman stated that the original concept using the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Elm property is not moving forward. However, Wells Fargo is donating a property in the 600 block of Tulpehocken Street. He stated that there are also a few other properties in this direct area that are on the Repository List (tax sale) and Habitat is now interested in moving the project forward at this new location.

## **III. Penn Square Properties**

Mr. Scott and Mr. Steckman explained that they have met with Our City Reading (OCR) - Mr. Boscov and his legal counsel - last week about ending the management agreement. Mr. Steckman stated that Mr. Boscov indicated that the federal funding associated with this project is transferrable and that they are checking on the ability of the State funding to be transferred. OCR is seeking reimbursement for some of their expenses associated with the acquisition and title transfer.

Mr. Scott noted that there is evidence prior to the 2015 General Election that OCR no longer wished to be involved in this project. He explained that there are parties interested in both owning and leasing space at these properties, as the current trend shows retailers leaving malls for downtown locations. He questioned OCR's slow approach to getting retail into the 2<sup>nd</sup> and Washington Garage, the Trexler Mansion (Elk's building), and at 5<sup>th</sup> and Penn. He stated that each time OCR is asked about this issue they make the same report about interest in the locations; however, nothing ever happens.

Mr. Scott expressed the belief that doing nothing is not a viable solution. He stated that it is now time to do what is right for the City. He stated that he does not fault Council, but the prior administration, for the various flaws in the contract with OCR that leaves the City responsible for too many of the operational expenses associated with the Penn Square properties. He also noted the ongoing problem with some organizations having contracts for free parking at the City garages. He expressed the belief that all should be paying the going rate to park. He stated that he is working to correct both issues.

Mr. Scott stated that the U.S. Postal Service has contacted the City about the post office building located at 5<sup>th</sup> and Washington Streets. He stated that he believes the City will be offered the building for between \$1 and \$250K. He stated that he wants to install a police precinct at the building and retain some abbreviated postal services along with retail.

Ms. Reed questioned taking title to this building as the City already has difficulties managing and improving what it currently owns. She noted that the building is not in good condition and requires a great deal of work. She questioned adding to the City's maintenance and capital woes.

Mr. Steckman stated that the site could be managed successfully if the City identifies three (3) retail tenants for the building. He noted his background in leasing similar facilities in Easton. He expressed the belief that this post office and its architecture is an integral part of the North 5<sup>th</sup> Street corridor. He agreed that some postal services should remain available at this building.

Mr. Marmarou noted that this building does not have adequate parking facilities. Mr. Steckman stated that parking is under consideration.

All agreed with the need to restore the downtown by improving the types of businesses.

Mr. Scott expressed the importance of bringing new retail to the downtown to increase the City's revenue flow to aid the City's post Act 47 success.

There was discussion about the pros and cons about the "nostalgic" approach to recreating the downtown and the various transformations the downtown has had since the City was created.

Mr. Steckman stated that the current trend is shows that retail is leaving the malls and relocating to downtowns.

#### **IV. Administration's Topics**

- 2016 Winter Holidays

Mr. Scott stated that he met with DID about the upcoming winter Holidays. He stated that DID has raised \$15K to date through the Berks County Community Foundation. He stated that DID wants to purchase an artificial tree and improve the parade, by having the parade move over the Penn Street Bridge into West Reading. He noted the importance of the Penn Street Posse and their involvement in last year's Holiday planning. He invited the committee to get involved again this year.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and Ms. Reed stated that they will schedule a meeting to discuss this topic further with Mr. Scott.

#### **V. Berks LST, BPT and Per Capita Collection**

Mr. Steckman stated that an RFP for the collection of BPT, LST and Per Capita tax was issued last Friday. He stated that he is aware of four (4) companies who currently provide these services – Berks EIT, Keystone, Berkheimer and Capital. He stated that as Berks EIT terminated their contract for the collection of these taxes, he does not expect that they will respond.

Mr. Steckman stated that the City is also considering doing an RFP for auditing BPT returns to discover the businesses that are currently not filing returns. Eventually the firm will do audits of the returns filed. He noted that the City does not have the capacity to perform these services. He

stated that the financial constraints under Act 47 have left the City with bare-bones operations in many critical areas. He stated that although the City has made requests for additional employees Mr. Mann has held a tight line.

Mr. Marmarou again noted the need for those residing in the high-rise apartments to pay Per Capita. He expressed the belief that the people residing in these buildings are instructed not to pay the tax.

## **VI. Housing and Codes Policy**

Mr. Steckman stated that he is evaluating the current codes strategy and the management of blighted properties. He expressed the belief that changes are needed. He stated that he is considering a reconfiguration of the staffing in Property Maintenance to shift employees in a way that will create accountability. He noted that this reconfiguration may require changes in the classification of some positions. He stated that they are interviewing the final two (2) candidates for the Property Manager position.

Mr. Steckman stated that he is considering a program that will provide a funding platform for the rehabilitation of blighted properties.

Mr. Twyman noted that the Blighted Property Review Committee discussed this topic at their June non-hearing meeting. Mr. Steckman agreed to meet with Mr. Twyman and Ms. Kelleher about this topic in the middle of August.

## **VII. Other**

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the importance of the City's relationship with the NAACP and suggested that the Administration reach out to the organization.

Mr. Daubert and Mr. Twyman stated that they are meeting with representatives from the School District tomorrow afternoon. They asked Council to provide areas of interest for discussion/consideration.

The Strategic Planning Committee meeting concluded at approximately 6:49 pm.

*Respectfully submitted*  
*Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*

## **Follow-up Items**

September Strategic Planning

- Housing and Codes Strategy
- BPT, LST and Per Capita Collection
- Penn Square Properties