

*A MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL PRESIDENT**A New Year, A New Opportunity*

Approximately 12 months ago, once the President of City Council position became available due to the election of our current mayor and the majority of council supported and appointed me as the city's new council president, a new style of leadership and teamwork were established. From the very beginning, our goal has been to make council more receptive to the voice of our citizens and ultimately to work aggressively together in the rebuilding of our city. It is clear that there is still so much that has to be done; however during 2012, as a result of many hours studying, researching and moving new legislation forward, we were able to make significant changes a reality in the areas of housing, city finances, recreation, zoning and codes that will positively affect our community as a whole during 2013. I have no doubt that this collaboration among council and the administration will assist in uplifting our city and making it more attractive so that in years to come, we can truly feel proud of our efforts. With the arrival of a new year and with the satisfaction of having done the best we could with the resources we had, we enter 2013 with a new vision. In that vision, we hope to make our dreams of having a city with the best quality of life possible a reality. I have many areas of concern; however, the most concerning is the area that affects almost all of us in the same way - CRIME.

It is a very unfortunate truth, but crime has touched each of our lives at one point. We have seen it in the form of robberies; drug dealing and drug addiction that are plaguing our youth, and murders that have torn apart many of our city families. This is why we supported and attended a crime summit on January 18. The crime summit was a collaborative effort put together by the County of Berks and the City of Reading and was attended by Gov. Corbett, US Sens. Casey and Toomey, our congressional delegation, state officials, county commissioners, superintendent of schools, community merchants and community leaders. During the crime summit, we were able to fervently express our concerns to the governor and the federal delegation that there is a desperate need to address our crime situation as it continues to escalate despite the best efforts of our police and the resources we currently utilize.

The following are areas that were discussed and that, moving forward, will assist in our fight against crime:

- A working agreement between the County of Berks and the City of Reading so that together we can determine how teamwork and shared efforts in the fight against crime will aid in combating our crime epidemic.
- The prospect of obtaining federal funds through our congressional delegation, funds that will enable us to possibly hire new officers and acquire equipment that will assist our police force in fighting crime.
- An agreement with the State Police which will offer us the opportunity to visit the City of Altoona. There, we will see first-hand how a city with so many crime issues has moved forward and successfully implemented the fight against crime through partnerships between the city and the local business community.
- An agreement for the creation of an Anti-Crime Intelligence Committee which will be formed by local, state and federal officials that will obtain and share important information.

In addition, during the next 30 days, we will be working on a situation report to determine the progress in the process. Crime will not ruin our city as we commit to arduously fight to assure our children, young adults and our seniors that the future of our city will be bright and prosperous. Not only will we be ensuring that agreements are carried out but we will also be organizing round tables and town hall meetings with local businesses and community organizations in general to identify the legislative changes necessary to establish our "Tough Hand Against Crime" initiative.

As I have already stated, this is a new year, and with that, we are given a new opportunity to continue the rebuilding of the city that we all love and call home. As your council president, I assure you that the best is yet to come!

Francis G. Acosta, President of City Council



INSIDE DISTRICT 5



What's so special about District 5? I believe that pretty much everything about it is amazing. Consider this: Our expansive District 5 includes everything from a Fortune 500 company, specialty steel maker Carpenter Technology Corp.; to First Energy Stadium, the nation's consistently ranked No. 1 minor league ball park; to the Henry Janssen Library of the Berks County Historical Society, one of the most important historical and genealogical research libraries in the US. And, consider this, too: Our district includes the historically and botanically exotic Charles Evans Cemetery and the elegant Stirling Hotel and Guest House that sits directly across Centre Avenue from the cemetery's stunning circa-1846 Gothic entrance. To acquaint folks who don't know a lot about District 5, permit me to take you on a quick narrative tour.

Riverdale. This suburban subdivision comprises the far northwest corner of the district. It can be accessed from the Warren Street Bypass River Road exits. The US Coast Guard Auxiliary Station greets drivers coming off the bypass entering the area. Residences in the area date largely from the 1920s with the bulk of development occurring from the 1950s on. It is what is known as an R-1 area and comprised of single-family detached homes. The area is a mix of architecture anchored by a lovely old stone farmhouse on the southern end and newer homes closer to the Muhlenberg Township line along River Road.

Riverside: This lovely little neighborhood was, for years, primarily the home ground of laborers at what started out more than a century ago as Carpenter Steel. It is anchored by First Energy Stadium to the north and the Riverside Elementary School to the south. On the west, it is bordered by Front Street and on the east by Fifth Street. Its architecture is primarily brick- or stone-faced row homes. The neighborhood still remains relatively close-knit. Two venerable establishments, in particular, are the glue that unites Riverside. It's a pretty good bet that, if you are a Riverside resident, when you walk into Mike's Sandwich Shop at Centre Avenue and Bern Street or Mike's Tavern on Exeter Street between Pear and Centre, everyone knows your name.

Berkshire Greens: This leafy suburb, another rare R-1 area of the city, is also comprised primarily of single-family homes. There is a mid-century apartment complex fronting the Berkshire Country Club at the city/Bern Township line. The development, bordered by the Warren Street Bypass, the Bern Township line and Schuylkill Avenue, was home to the late state Sen. Michael A. O'Pake. He was raised the Glenside Homes, located on the southern side of the bypass and operated by the Reading Housing Authority.

Glenside: Just the name sounds pretty, doesn't it? Located to the east of the Tulpehocken Creek, the once-rural area was a nearby respite from hectic city life. Folks would mosey on down to the creek and the confluence (its merger point with the Schuylkill River) for some lazy afternoon fishing or family picnics. The neighborhood, now well developed, only offers hints of its bucolic past. Still Stonecliff Park offers well-maintained trails and a great skateboard park thanks to the County of Berks. Glenside is a classic example of what is considered an R-3 (mixed used) zone. Small to large businesses and retail establishments co-exist with single, semi-detached and row homes. Firms like Akzo Nobel Coatings and the venerable Stoudt's Auto Sales, specialists in classic Corvettes, anchor the area.

The Schuylkill Avenue Bridge: This vital link over its namesake river is expected to be almost totally reconstructed in the next few years. Meanwhile, it carries thousands of vehicles north and south between the city and Bern Township on a daily basis.

Baer Park: Named after the 19th-century Reading Railroad magnate George Baer, this area is a beehive of activity. Part of the 15th Ward, it boasts a wonderful elementary school, Northwest, a namesake park which features the Inner City Boxing Club in the stone field house and a lively Northwest Football Association which fills the park with activity all autumn. Nearby is the Northwest Branch of the Reading Public Library.

The 15th Ward: One of the most densely populated areas of the district, this neighborhood has experienced most directly the challenges of urban life. The city's state and federally funded Weed and Seed program targeted the area and the adjacent Sixth Ward for about a decade starting in 2001. The program did a lot to curb crime and help some small businesses take root. The architecture, still largely intact, varies from small 19th-century row homes to early 20th-century semi-detached homes closer to Baer Park.

The Clinton Street unit of the Olivet Boys and Girls Club provides a great, safe place for neighborhood kids to gather and, in the summer months, the pool just across the street is a popular attraction. The Reading Art Works offers a smaller alternative to the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts as well as a venue for social and corporate gatherings. Throughout the 15th Ward, houses of worship play key roles in the neighborhoods. Conversations continue with leaders at Bethel A.M.E. Church on West Windsor Street to re-invigorate an old play lot on its grounds for community use.

Sixth and Amity: This area, located between Fifth and Sixth streets, is spotlighted by a great playground largely refurbished a few years back. The playground association was invigorated by a coalition of established families in the area as well as new arrivals.

Keffer Park: This area lies to the east of the Centre Avenue and the west of North Fifth Street and is bounded by the southern tip of Charles Evans Cemetery and the site of the former Glidden Paints. It is, to a degree, an area in transition, but the good news is that the actual Keffer Park is undergoing a much-needed facelift. The site of the old Glidden Paints awaits development and is easily accessible by the Route 12 (Warren Street) Bypass.

In future stories, we'll explore specific topics of interest as well as profile the neighborhoods and constituents of District 5.



COUNCIL CORNER

Council Committees

READING CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES FOR 2012-13

Open Government, Rules and Intergovernmental Relations Committee—1st Monday monthly

Covers Permanent Rules of Council, City Charter, Administrative Code, Intergovernmental Relations, Act 47, Accuracy of Government Information and Communications, Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government Services.

Members: Mr. Dennis Sterner (Chair), Mrs. Donna Reed (Vice-Chair) and Mr. Stratton Marmarou

Housing, Economic Development and Strategies Committee—1st Monday monthly

Covers Housing Planning strategies, Building Code/Inspection, Economic Development, Citywide Economic

Development Programs, Small Businesses, Business Improvement Districts and Enterprise Zones.

Members: Mr. Randy Corcoran (Chair), Mrs. Marcia Goodman Hinnershitz (Vice-Chair) and Mr. Jeffrey Waltman

Finance, Audit and Budget Committee—3rd Monday monthly

Covers Annual Budget Review, Capital Improvement Programs, Financial Reports, Taxes (Rates, exonerations and exemption appeals), Fee Assessments, Review of Budget & Financial Reports, oversight of the City's external auditing, internal controls and any other financial or business practices, and reviewing the work of the City Auditor.

Members: Mrs. Donna Reed (Chair), Mr. Randy Corcoran (Vice-Chair) and Mr. Dennis Sterner

Public Safety, Public Works and Neighborhood Services Committee—3rd Monday monthly

Covers Police, Fire, Neighborhood Parks, Neighborhood Revitalization, Community Development, Code Enforcement and Graffiti Abatement efforts, Community Group Organization and Support.

Members: Mrs. Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz (Chair), Mr. Jeffrey Waltman (Vice-Chair) and Stratton Marmarou

Nominations and Appointments Committee

Meets as needed re nominations and appointments to our boards and authorities.

Members: Mr. Stratton Marmarou (Chair), Mrs. Donna Reed (Vice-Chair) and Mr. Randy Corcoran

Did You Know... We Reduced the Rental Inspection Fees



Before the end of the year City Council reduced the rental inspection fees significantly.

In 2010, some landlords asked the city to bill for rental inspections, performed every 3-5 years, separately rather than include the charge in with the annual rental permit fees.

The city retained the services of Maximus to analyze the cost of the rental inspection program.

Maximus found that the average rental property required the original inspection plus at least two follow up inspections before a property became compliant with the city's property maintenance regulation. The proposed fee schedule set the inspection charge at \$505 for one, and two-unit dwellings and the fees were scaled up for properties with additional units.

Many landlords objected loudly that good landlords were now subsidizing the non-compliant landlords. Council and the managing director asked administrative staff to re-evaluate

the rental inspection fees.

After a new analysis, the managing director decided to recommend a dramatically reduces inspection fee that charges per inspection so landlords who are complaint will pay only \$145 for the inspection of a one or two unit dwelling (scaled up for additional of units) and landlords who require more than 2 re-checks will be charged for the follow up inspection.

For more information please call the Customer Service Center at 1-877-PAREADING (1-877-727-3234)



**AVOID
DELINQUENT
FEES AND
PENALTIES**

**AVOID THE
COLLECTION
PROCESS**

**PARTICIPATE IN
THE AMNESTY
PROGRAM**

HOUSING FEE AMNESTY PROGRAM HELPING CITIZENS IN TOUGH TIMES

In November 2012, City Council authorized the administration to implement a housing fee amnesty program that would allow property owners with an array of delinquent fees the opportunity to settle their bills and avoid penalties and the extra expense resulting from being referred to an outside collection agency. The program is scheduled to run from Dec. 17, 2012 through Feb. 15, 2013, and offers payment plans to resolve unpaid Quality of Life fines and rental property registration and inspection fees. Those with past-due fees and fines were mailed notices in December, and can enroll in the program by calling the Citizens Service Center at 1-888-PA-READING (1-888-727-3464).

WHAT'S INSIDE...THE CITY'S COAT OF ARMS

We've all seen it displayed prominently in the stained glass in Council Chambers on City letterhead, envelopes, flyers, advertisements, etc. Believe it or not that city symbol defines Reading's history.

The located in the middle is divided into three parts; the central portion being a gold band bearing the arms of the Penn Family, the founders of the city. The upper portion of the shield on a black background indicates the city as a busy manufacturing center, utilizing the imagery of a bee-hive. The lower portion of the shield, also shown on a black background, is a salamander in

the midst of a flame. This represents the prosperity of the city as dependent upon the finances and fires in which the metals are worked. The mural crown located above the shield signifies Reading as a city, along with the staff of Mercury, representing constant activity. Flanking the shield on both sides are Thor and Vulcan, emblematic of labor.

The banner under the feet of Thor and Vulcan read the motto of Reading, "Deo Adjuvante Labor Proficet," which in Greek means, "God help those that work together to progress."



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- The regular meetings of City Council are filmed and can be viewed LIVE while the meeting is taking place or at your convenience at any time after the meeting on the city's website at www.ReadingPa.gov, under the Council section of the website
- Council adopted an ordinance that requires the public to register to speak at a Council meeting before 5 pm on the day of the meeting. You can register to speak by completing the form on the city's website, by emailing the Council Office at council@readingpa.org or calling 610- 655-6204.
- For assistance with any City issue or service call the Citizens Service Center between 8 am and 4 pm Mon-Fri at 1-877-727-3234.
- Did you know that marriage licenses are issued by the Berks County Register of Wills? The office is located in the County Services Center.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES...

GET INVOLVED IN READING GOVERNMENT

The City of Reading has many opportunities for residents to be involved in decisions made by their local government. At this time, the city needs residents to serve on several Boards, Authorities and Commissions (BAC). Four BACs are highlighted below along with a comprehensive list of all openings on city BACs.

The **Board of Health** looks at issues which are health related in the city. Past topics included the remediation of lead in Bernhart Park, education of residents about West Nile Virus and the flu, and the bedbug outbreak. Applicants for the Board of Health should have a health-related background.

The Reading **Human Relations Commission** is the local agency charged with investigating discrimination claims and with landlord/tenant disputes. The Human Relations Commission looks at discrimination dealing with employment, housing and public accommodations.

The **Environmental Advisory Council (EAC)** focuses on environmental issues in the city. Currently the EAC is working on updates to City regulations regarding issues such as steep slopes, riparian buffers, and alternative energy sources. The EAC also reviews projects which may have an environmental impact. Applicants for the EAC should have a background in environmental sciences.

The members of the **Diversity Board** serve in an advisory capacity to the mayor and city council by providing input on policy and processes that promote and facilitate active involvement and participation by diverse cultures such as of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, familial status, and handicap within the Reading community.

HVAC Board	3 openings
Police Civil Service Board	1 opening
Public Library Board	1 opening
Board of Health	3 openings + 2 alternate openings
Board of Ethics	1 opening
Building/Fire Code Board Of Appeals	1 opening + 1 alternate opening
Animal Control Board	3 openings
Charter Board	1 opening
Main Street Board	5 openings
Shade Tree Commission	2 openings
Human Relations Commission	3 openings
Environmental Advisory Council	3 openings

All interested citizens should complete the BAC application form found on the city's website – www.readingpa.gov – and return to the City Clerk's office, 815 Washington St., Reading, PA 19601

For additional information, please call the City Clerk's office at 610-655-6204 or email at council@readingpa.org.

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION



In November 1994, the Reading electorate approved a referendum question that changed Reading's form of government from Commission to Home Rule, under a State Home Rule Law enacted in 1972. "Home Rule" means shifting the responsibility for local governance from the State Legislature to the local community. A community choosing Home Rule can tailor its government organization and powers to suit its special needs. A Home Rule Charter is a local constitution for the municipality; a framework within which the local governing body can adopt, adapt and administer legislation and regulations for the conduct of business, expansion of citizen participation in decision-making and creation of sustainable communities. However, the State Act requires the Home Rule Community to adhere to State laws such as Act 511, the Municipalities Planning Code, etc.,.

Reading's Home Rule Charter requires a Charter Review at least every 10 years. The last review occurred in 2002 and resulted in the creation of the City's Charter Board, approved by the electorate in the November 2002 General Election. City Council must now empanel a new Charter Review Commission, composed of 11 members who must be city residents and registered to vote: seven members will be appointed by City Council and four members will be appointed by the Mayor, with Council approval. The majority of those appointed cannot be employees or city officials.

The Charter Review Commission must make Charter amendment recommendations to City Council within six months of its formation. The recommendations could be clarifications to the various sections or as dramatic as recommending a change in the form of government such as returning to the Commission form or moving to a Council/Manager form of government. Council must then either approve or reject the recommendations. If the proposed amendments are approved, a ballot referendum will appear on an upcoming election ballot. If Council rejects the proposed amendments, the Commission can undertake the Charter's Initiative process to move the amendments forward to referendum.

If you are interested in applying to be a part of this review process, please fill out the Boards, Authorities and Commissions application located in the City Council area of the website at www.ReadingPa.gov and mail it to the Council Office. Council staff can then process your application.

CORE AND HOME OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Do you live in a neighborhood where property values have come down due to a vacant, blighted property? Good news! There is a new initiative the City is using to help address this issue. The City of Reading, the Reading Redevelopment Authority and the Reading-Berks Association of Realtors have entered into a public-private partnership to help address the City of Reading's housing issues. The program is called CORE, for **C**OMMUNITY **RE**investment, and was created through the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors. CORE is designed to help provide workforce housing in municipalities by utilizing private funding through mortgage lenders. Some of the ideals of CORE are to strengthen neighborhoods, eliminate blight and restore pride of ownership. Interested buyers must be able to qualify for a mortgage based on their income, credit and debt ratios.

CORE is not a government funded project. Currently, the CORE program has an active listing for sale in the Center Park Historic District, 737 N. Fourth St; directly across from the park. This home is a very large end unit with lots of charm and character. Hardwood floors, large spacious rooms and a great deal of potential. There are 6 private bedrooms and 3 full bathrooms. The home does need a considerable amount of rehabilitation, but would be a wonderful property for an owner occupant with great vision. Questions regarding the specific property, or CORE in general, can be directed to Mark Mohn, Realtor, RE/MAX of Reading at Mark@MarkMohn.com or by calling in to RE/MAX of Reading at (610) 670-2770. Additional properties will be listed through CORE in the near future.



"THERE CAN BE NO HAPPINESS IF THE THINGS WE BELIEVE IN ARE DIFFERENT THAN THE THINGS WE DO." - ALBERT CAMUS