



Annual Council Activity Report 2012

Council Staff

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Introduction

City Council Staff prepared this report to provide an overview of the activities of both Council Staff and City Council for 2012. This report provides some detail on the number of complaints fielded during 2012 with the resolution rate, along with highlights of the legislation adopted, and updates on the issues addressed by City Council, Council Staff and the Boards, Authorities and Commissions served by Council Staff.

City Council Accomplishments

City Council, as set forth in the City of Reading Home Rule Charter, serves as the Governing Body of the City of Reading. As such, all powers of the City not otherwise provided for by the Home Rule Charter are exercised in a manner determined by City Council.

In 2012, City Council addressed a wide range of issues that directly affected the lives of citizens. **Key accomplishments** include:

City Council adopted resolutions to **reappoint and appoint 38 Board, Authority and Commission members, along with a new Fire Chief, Administrative Services Director, Community Development Director, and Managing Director.** Council **removed two BAC members** for non-attendance at meetings during 2012.

City Council assisted the Administration by **adjusting program fees** to enable the City to cover its costs to provide various programs, such as Building and Trades Fees, Fire Prevention Fees, Vacant Property Fees, and Coin Operated Laundry Fees. Council also enacted legislation to reduce the Rental Housing Fees after it was determined that the inspection fees were detrimental to the housing process. The inspection fees are now separated from the annual \$100 per rental property permit fee. In addition, Council re-

organized the health permit fees to eliminate the requirement for businesses to pay multiple health permit fees depending on the business type.

Council enacted two ordinances which enabled the Administration to run **amnesty collection programs** for delinquent Business Privilege Tax and housing related fees.

City Council also supported the Administration's desire to expand the **Quality of Life Ticketing program**. Prior to the Quality of Life Ticketing program Property Maintenance Inspectors (PMI) were required to post notices for complaints like high grass and weeds, animal excrement, snow removal, etc. The PMIs were then required to go back to the property five (5) days later to check for compliance. The majority of time property owners would refuse to comply and the citation process would begin. This process was found to be ineffective and expensive and served as a reminder system for basic quality of life property maintenance. QoL tickets are scaled from \$25 for the first ticket, to \$50 for the second ticket and \$100 for the third ticket. The Property Maintenance Division reported monthly on the Quality of Life Ticketing program used to address individual complaints and sweeps covering the entire City over 2012. At the end of 2012, 18,666 QoL Tickets were issued and \$377,330 was paid. At the end of 2012, 1,327 appeals were heard and 674 were granted. Analysis of this data shows that 53.3% of the tickets were issued to rental properties. An Amnesty program began in December to allow unpaid housing related and QoL fees to be paid before moving into the collection process.

City Council empanelled the **Redistricting Committee** to review the 2010 Census results and to make recommendations for the realignment of the Council District boundaries. The Redistricting Committee received technical assistance from the County Planning Department and administrative support from the Legislative Aide Committee. Through this assistance the Redistricting Committee was able to draft an effective and well prepared recommendation, which was presented to Council at the December 2011 Work Session. A public hearing was held in January 2012. The Redistricting Committee's recommendations were approved by Council on January 23, 2012.

City Council also continues to participate in meetings with the **Albright** Administration, Reading Police Department and District 4 representatives concerning **off-campus student housing problems**. Communication between the parties is coordinated by the Council office, resulting in a significant decrease in complaints from residents in the Albright neighborhood. Council also learned that only one (1) rental property in District 4 had registered their non-conforming pre-existing student housing use. The Zoning Ordinance now prohibits new Student Rental properties in the R1 and

R2 low-density zoning districts. However, approximately 15 new unregistered student rentals were reported to the Council office. The Zoning office is undertaking enforcement.

Council adopted **117 Ordinances** and **133 Resolutions** in 2012. By the end of 2012, four (4) Ordinances were withdrawn; two (2) Ordinances before Council were NOT enacted; one (1) resolution was not adopted. Staff, in cooperation with the Solicitor's Office and other departments, provided research and support for the preparation of this legislation. Every effort was made to ensure the final product was of the highest legal and technical quality. The original copies of legislation are indexed, bound and stored in the vault for research and historical purposes.

In addition to Regular Meetings, Work Sessions and Committee meetings, Council conducted three (3) **Public hearings** – of which two (2) were Charter required budget hearings and one (1) was concerning a liquor license at 1626 Perkiomen Ave, which was denied. Council also held eight (8) **special meetings** to appoint the President and Vice President of Council, fill the District 1 Council seat, reopen the 2012 budget, appoint a Managing Director, appoint an Administrative Services Director, approve the CDBG Action Plan, and two regarding the 2013 budget and employee listing.

In addition, three (3) **Conditional Use hearings** were held concerning the following properties:

- 918 N 4th St – approving the addition of one rental unit to an existing multi-unit property
- 912 Amity St – denying the addition of one rental unit
- 615 Kenhorst Blvd – approving the operation of a group home

Also, one (1) **HARB appeal hearing** was held concerning a window replacement project at 317 N. 5th St. The appeal was denied and remanded to HARB.

Council held fourteen (14) **budget review sessions**. During budget discussions, several topics were discussed which need further follow up including:

- Street Light Assessment
- Addition of an EMS unit
- Pension Reform
- Land Value Tax
- Dedicated Library funding

In addition, during budget review sessions, discussions resulted in the reduction of the

proposed real estate tax increase to 9.45% and the resident and non-resident earned income tax increased by .2%.

City Council intervened in several decisions of the Zoning Hearing Board to the Court of Common Pleas that were appealed by **Orange Stone/Fire Tree**. During 2011, with assistance from the Law Office, Barley Snyder LLC (outside legal counsel for the City), and Hartman/Shurr (legal counsel for the College Heights Community Council) all zoning related cases were merged into a single case. Favorable decisions were obtained from the Berks County Court of Common Pleas and the Commonwealth Court. The Mandamus action, which sought an immediate zoning permit from the Zoning Administrator, filed by Orange Stone/Fire Tree was denied by the Commonwealth Court. This decision provides language that will further assist in this legal battle, as it states that the proposed reuse of the property is not a non-conforming, pre-existing use. The City also received assistance from Masano Bradley LLC and the City Law Office in the tax exemption appeal of Orange Stone/Fire Tree, which was denied by the Berks County Court of Common Pleas. Appeals in these cases continued through 2012.

The Zoning office issued an enforcement notice in 2012 to stop Orange Stone from conducting business in the property without a zoning permit. The enforcement action was made possible due to Orange Stone's testimony at the Tax Exemption hearing where they admitted to operating daily with multiple employees at the former Caum Home property. Orange Stone's appeal was denied by the Zoning Hearing Board and appealed to the Berks County Court of Common Pleas. The appeal of their tax exemption decision was also denied.

Council Staff Key Accomplishments

1. Staff was responsible for providing administrative support to the following City agencies. These organizations play a vital role assisting City Council and the Administration in advancing their respective positions. These organizations promote citizen involvement in government and advance the concept of participatory democracy.

- a) **Blighted Property Review Committee** – The Blighted Property Review Committee (BPRC) Ordinance, enacted in 2007, assigns the City Clerk to the BPRC to ensure that the process is well managed and continues through successive administrations. During 2011, the City Clerk worked with the Law Office and Property Maintenance Manager to shift blighted property support from the CD office to the Property Maintenance Office and create an automated support process using the Hansen program. The hearing process was again

refined to use a consent agenda approval format for properties that do not have representation at the hearings. The City Clerk and Law Office also began meeting with other City offices and the County Treasurer to begin using the Act 90 tools provided by the State Legislation, effective in April 2011. The BPRC process in Reading again gained the attention of the PA Housing Alliance when the City Clerk was invited to a Blight Conference in Pittsburgh for western PA municipalities. The BPRC, with assistance from the City Clerk and Law office also began quarterly meetings with the City's Housing Partners (Reading Berks Association of Realtors, Neighborhood Housing Service, Our City Reading and Habitat for Humanity) to start the eminent domain process, rehab for certified properties and develop a strong housing strategy to address the City's Housing Stock. The City Clerk, Law office, CD Director, Reading Redevelopment Authority (RRA) Director and Solicitor for the Redevelopment Authority now meet as the Acquisition Team on a monthly basis to discuss the disposition of all certified properties, select the best means to gain title to the certified properties, and then move the process forward. To date 148 properties have been certified as blighted. The BPRC certified 44 properties in 2012 and removed 20 properties from the process. When eminent domain action started on five properties in the 300 block of North 3rd Street and one property on Fairview Street, the Acquisition Team learned that eminent domain can be a long and expensive process. The Team regularly reviews the Tax Sale lists and the RRA has purchased five properties located on Penn Street at tax sale. The Team learned that the optimal approach would be to have a pool of non-HUD related funding to use for the acquisition process and are working to identify a funding stream to make that possible. In 2013 the Team will be preparing a handbook on the various acquisition processes available through tax sale, foreclosure, Conservancy, eminent domain, etc. which will help the Team identify the most efficient and cost effective acquisition tool possible.

b) **Board of Health** – The Board of Health met six times in 2012 to focus on the following topics:

- Tattoo Parlor Legislation – The Board discussed the need for this legislation and whether it should require a license or permit for this type of business. Draft legislation was created and is currently being reviewed by the Law Department and discussed with tattoo business owners.
- Bedbug Legislation – The Board discussed the increased occurrence of bedbug infestations in the City and the suggestion by the City Health Officer for clarification of the current ordinance regarding abatement.

The Board continues to discuss the actual need and legalities associated with designating and enforcing responsibility on the landlord and/or tenant.

- Pet Limitation – The Board also discussed the need to enact legislation to limit the number of pets per household which will be continued in 2013.
- Membership – The Board is currently at two members which does not constitute a quorum. The Board needs additional members with a health care background to continue its work. The Board members are actively recruiting potential members.
- Health Officer – The Board discussed its concerns with the lack of a Health Officer after the retirement of Dr. Hassel. The gap is creating a backlog of handicapped parking applications.

The Board will continue to monitor health issues affecting the City and its residents.

- c) **Board of Ethics** – The Board of Ethics met four times during 2012 to continue their work to integrate the City’s Integrity in Government provisions into the Code of Ethics and to process one complaint which did not fall within this Board’s jurisdiction. The Board will pursue lobbying regulations at the conclusion of the Integrity in Government amendment.
- d) **Environmental Advisory Council** – The EAC continues their work on a bi-monthly BCTV program, “Our City Our World,” to educate citizens about the environment. During 2012 topics of the programs included climate change and environmental protection. The EAC monitored progress of the remediation of Bernhart Park.

The EAC participates in the Conservancy EAC Networking programs.

Environmental issues reviewed throughout the year included:

- Recycling by the Reading School District
- Regulations for rain barrels – referred to and approved by Council
- Smart Growth Alliance
- Stormwater Issues
- Steep Slope Ordinance
- Riparian Buffer Ordinance
- Reviewed Floodplain Ordinance – approved by Council

- Alternative Energy Regulations
 - Fluoride in Public Drinking Water
 - PA Act 13 regarding oil and gas operations
- e) **Park and Recreation Advisory Committee** – The PARC was disbanded in 2012 as it was deemed that the Recreation Commission would continue the work of the PARC.
- f) **Reading Local Redevelopment Authority** - In late 2010 the CEO of The Reading Hospital and Medical Center resigned and a new interim CEO was named. TRHMC withdrew their application for use of the Navy Marine parcel. In 2011 Mary’s Shelter amended their original request for the parcel along Pershing Blvd and requested ownership of the main “L” shaped facility along Kenhorst Blvd, which sits on a two acre site. The LRA approved this request as the change will provide Mary’s Shelter with the ability to expand their client care without building or moving into new facilities. In discussions with Mary’s Shelter the LRA explored partnerships with several other organizations such as Alvernia and Berks Catholic; however, the HUD requirements for the complete rehab and reuse of the property within a short period of time became an obstacle that caused both organizations to back away. The LRA then began meeting with the Reading Redevelopment Authority (RRA) to discuss their potential purchase of the residual area for ratable residential use. A survey was completed by the City and the parcel was subdivided in April 2012. The Navy will set the fair market value of the residual and negotiate with the RRA. The Redevelopment Authority is currently exploring residential reuse options with developers. In the first six (6) months of 2012, after Mary’s Shelter received a zoning permit for the reuse of the main facility, City Council and the LRA will need to approve an amendment to the Reuse Plan for submission to the Navy, OEA and HUD. The LRA will also need to approve an amendment to the Legally Binding Agreement with Mary’s Shelter. The documentation was completed and sent to HUD at the beginning of 2013.
- g) **Bernhart’s Park** – In early 2011, the EPA and Exide agreed to remediate Bernhart’s Park and a rehab plan for the Park was negotiated by the City Clerk, Environmental Attorney David Beane from the EAC, Dr. Kimball from the Board of Health who is an expert in health issues caused by lead exposure, and the City’s Utilities Division Manager Deb Hoag. Exide’s work to remediate and rehabilitate the Park to the City’s specifications began in late

spring 2011. By the end of 2011 only a few punch list items remain to be completed. The Park has been fully restored for passive recreational reuse and is already heavily used by the surrounding residential property owners. The plan for an Exide sponsored grand re-opening was scrapped when Exide offered to maintain the park for two additional years, which will provide Public Works time to speak with Muhlenberg Township about some type of quid pro quo relationship that will assist the City with the ongoing maintenance of this park.

2. In early 2011, the **Reading Berks Association of Realtors (R-BAR)** introduced the **CORE (Community Reinvestment)** program to the City. CORE focuses on turning vacant blighted properties into owner occupied properties. The BPRC and City Clerk saw an opportunity to begin the CORE in the outlying low-density residential areas, due to the dramatic increase in foreclosed properties sitting vacant and in disrepair and shepherded this program forward. The CORE ordinance was approved by Council at the October 24, 2011 Regular Meeting and the CORE agreement was drafted by the Managing Director, Legal Specialist Tonya Butler, Esquire and the City Clerk. The CORE Agreement requires all properties to become owner occupied and offers incentives such as a 4% reduction in the City's transfer tax, a reduction in the Trades/Building permits, and ReTAP for property improvements. The BPRC put CORE bound properties into the blighted property process in early 2012. The City Clerk and Legal Specialist continue to participate in R-BAR's CORE meetings with realtors. R-BAR requires realtors to complete a CORE training program. The City's CORE Committee, composed of the City Clerk, Legal Specialist, District 1 City Councilor and Property Maintenance Manager and two representatives from RBAR will select CORE designated realtors to market CORE properties after the Redevelopment Authority takes title. As CDBG HOME funds cannot be used to take title to properties that do not meet HUD's low to moderate income regulations, the Managing Director has allocated \$100K to start this program. The success of the CORE program will provide a funding stream for the Redevelopment Authority to expand its ability to assist in the rehab and demolition of properties on a City-wide basis. The CORE Pilot program began in October 2012 with the acquisition and listing of 737 N. 4th St. The City Clerk and CORE Realtor Mark Mohn were invited to make a presentation to the Schuylkill County Commissioners and Senator Argall as Schuylkill County is interested in starting a CORE program. The Legal Specialist and City Clerk have worked closely with the Redevelopment Authority's Solicitor to develop a strategy to take title to properties slated for CORE.

3. In late 2010 the City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk began to work with Eric Weiss and John Kromer, the City's housing consultants to develop the **Certificate of Transfer** program. This work continued through 2011. The team composed of the City Clerk, Deputy City Clerk, the housing consultants, the Property Maintenance Division Manager, and Legal Specialist Butler worked together with R-BAR, the Recorder of Deeds and other parties to develop a sound Certificate of Transfer program. The Certificate of Transfer program was developed as an improvement to the Act 47 requirement to recreate the Pre-Settlement Inspection of residential properties. In their early meetings this team identified the need to find a mechanism to catch properties that did not comply with the pre-settlement requirement. As all properties that transfer are recorded at the Recorder of Deeds Office, the group created a process that will quickly identify properties that do not comply with the pre-settlement requirements: all deeds going to the Recorder's office must have the City's certificate of transfer attached. Properties that do not have the certificate attached will be flagged and transferred to the Property Maintenance Division, who will contact the new owner and provide follow through. The team decided to expand the pre-settlement process to all properties - residential, mixed use and commercial. Additional Property Maintenance personnel were hired in early 2012 to support this program that began in April 2012. It is now post-settlement inspection. The Recorder of Deeds provides a list of transfers to the Property Maintenance Division who schedules the inspections. Prior to the implementation of the program the Property Maintenance Division Manager and Legal Specialist recommended switching to a post settlement inspection program so the inspection process could be more easily managed. Due to the lagging real estate sales it will be less cumbersome to inspect properties after the title transfers. The Recorder of Deeds sends all addresses that have changed title weekly and Property Maintenance generates letters issuing an inspection date. The seller of a property also has the ability to request an inspection pre-settlement.

4. The City Clerk worked with the in-house team and outside legal counsel to refine the **Housing Permit Ordinance** and develop a plan to address the zoning backlog of approximately 1500 properties with incomplete zoning applications. The new housing permit process will require inspection of rental properties on a 3-5 year schedule. The previous rental ordinance provided annual rental registration and a rental permit only after a property was inspected. The new version eliminates the annual registration and created an annual rental permit which requires the owner to state on the application that his rental property complies with the City's property maintenance requirements. The group discussed creating a process to handle the 1500 rental properties stuck in the zoning backlog. Some of these properties have been in the backlog for almost four (4) years. Under the MPC and zoning regulations an independent hearing officer can be

used to conduct conditional use hearings. Individual City Councilors can also conduct conditional use hearings. Using the information provided by the Business Analyst, the City Clerk recommended the following plan to process these backlog properties:

- Independent Hearing Officer will conduct hearings for all rental properties with 1-3 rental units in high-density residential zones. An RFP for an attorney and transcription services was used to staff this process. The Hearing Officer will, after holding the hearings, prepare a recommendation to approve or deny the applications with findings of fact and conclusions of law, which will be approved or denied by City Council at a regular business meeting.
- Individual Councilors will conduct hearings for rental properties with 4-6 rental units in their Council Districts. Council Staff and the Law Office will provide support and will draft recommendations to approve or deny the applications with findings of fact and conclusions of law which will be approved or denied by City Council at a regular business meeting.
- The body of Council will conduct hearings for rental properties with 7 or more units and all rental properties in R1 and R2 low density zoning districts. Council Staff and the Law Office will provide support and will draft recommendations to approve or deny the applications with findings of fact and conclusions of law which will be approved or denied by City Council at a regular business meeting.

To guard against too many applications coming in at one time, the process will be phased with assistance from the Business Analyst and the Zoning Administrator.

5. During 2011 a strong partnership developed between the Council Office and **R-BAR Director of Governmental Affairs**. Through this partnership the R-BAR Board of Directors and the Governmental Affairs Director worked with the City Clerk to develop positive relationships with various City Departments, become informed and provide input on various City initiated programs like the Quality of Life ticketing program, the Certificate of Transfer program and other housing related ordinances. Through this partnership R-BAR realtors have been able to become educated about various City initiatives and take that information to the clients they work with. The R-BAR office also provides assistance in correcting real estate listings in TREND that improperly advertise single family homes as rental properties. Realtors now obtain information about real estate regarding zoning permits, rental permits, etc, before listing a property for sale.

6. Council Staff participated on the **HPO Continuous Improvement Team** (Health Permit Fees, Fire Escrow and Tax Amnesty Program), Chamber Governmental Affairs

Committee, Municipal Secretaries Forum, Zoning Amendment Committee, Six Sigma Greenbelt Teams, Pandemic (Continuation of Government Operations) Committee and the City's Housing Strategy, Recreation Commission, Bernhart Park Work Group, and Act 47 Implementation meetings.

- a) The **Continuation of Government Operations Committee** defines the City's ability to respond to and be trained for disaster and ensures the functions of government are not halted during times of crisis. All Council Staff members have completed all FEMA and NIMS training courses and passed the related tests.
- b) The City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk updated the **Welcome to Reading Guidebook**. The update was necessary to get important information to residents. The Guidebook contains information about many City services and works to answer questions and provide contact information for additional information when needed. The Administration is now working on advertising in the Guidebook to offset the cost of printing.
- c) Council Staff provided support to the City's **Business Analyst** as he works to audit many of the City's program and operational areas.
- d) Beginning in early 2012 the Deputy City Clerk lead a team concerning the increase in the fees for **grocery inspections and deli inspections** and the necessity of one business paying for multiple health permits. The team discovered that by modifying establishments by size rather than type, many overlapping fees can be eliminated. The team recommended modifying the classifications to simplify the process. Modest increases were made in several categories. However, the permit fees required were reduced overall.
- e) The City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk updated the **Council Policy Handbook**. The Handbook contains policies for Council procedure.
- f) The City Clerk assembled a **Local Ordinance Handbook** for Police. The officers have the Handbook available on their laptops and can refer to it quickly and easily when a situation occurs and they are unfamiliar with City regulations. Using this information a Patrol Officer identified an illegal rental in late 2012. PMD undertook enforcement action.

7. Council Staff identified and corrected disconnects with the receipt and review of

tax assessment, tax assessment appeal and tax exoneration applications and PLCB liquor license applications.

8. Through our continued work to identify illegal rental properties, Council Staff discovered rental properties that were improperly approved for the Homestead property tax rebate program. Council staff, with assistance from State Rep Dante Santoni, worked with the Reading School District Solicitor and the County Assessment Office to correct the improper issuance of Homestead property tax exemptions to rental properties.

Council staff has been provided with access to Hansen. Using Hansen and the Berks County Assessment Office Parcel Search, Parcel Maps, the online Polk Directory and the Department of State website, Council staff has helped the Administration identify a multitude of illegal rentals and boarding houses, along with properties operating without proper business licenses and zoning permits. As of December 31, Council staff has identified approximately 13,075 properties that appear to be illegal rentals (properties lacking a zoning permit, lacking a housing permit, and/or lacking a business license) since February 2008. Property Maintenance uses this information to bring properties into compliance with the City's housing regulations.

Searches are done based on complaints received or by researching all properties on a street. Blocks in which fire or crime incidents occurred or those accused of crimes reside are also researched. The weekly real estate transactions from the Sunday Reading Eagle, weekly codes court cases and tax assessment appeals are also utilized as sources for searches.

9. Council Staff researched and drafted ordinances. The most prominent are:

- Land Banking
- Establishing an Audit Committee
- Establishing procedures for Amnesty programs
- Creating a process for the internal review of the annual Capital Improvement Programs
- Requiring annual authorization for City bank accounts
- Fire Escrow Ordinance Amendment
- Business Privilege Tax Amendment
- Use of Electronic Recording Devices at public meetings

Council Staff also assisted the Administration with researching and amending various additional ordinances.

10. In addition to drafting legislation and organizing a wide variety of meetings, Council Staff composed **57 commendations** and many recognition certificates. Council commendations have been issued to recognize the many achievements and heritage of local individuals, businesses, and organizations. In addition, certificates for athletic and academic accomplishments were issued to those named in the Reading Eagle Berks Best for Reading High School and Berks Catholic High School.

11. Council Staff further refined the process for managing **appointments to City Boards, Authorities and Commissions**. A system of improved background checks was implemented. These checks enable staff to determine if an applicant is in good standing in the community. The background check determines if a candidate has unpaid parking tickets, warrants, delinquent taxes, delinquencies with the Water Authority, Solid Waste Office and Codes Office. **A total of 49 applications were processed resulting in 38 approvals.** Seven applicants were identified to have problems during their background checks. Of those seven, 6 have not rectified the issues. In addition, one candidate withdrew their application and one did not return phone calls.

12. Council Staff participated in the bi-monthly meetings with the City's **Act 47** Coordinators regarding the Recovery Plan initiatives.

13. During 2010 the City installed the **Granicus webcasting system in Council Chambers**. Due to the reduction in BCTV funding, BCTV now tapes and records regular Council sessions and work sessions only. BCTV no longer tapes and broadcasts Planning, HARB and Zoning Hearing Board meetings. The webcasting system changes that and makes the meetings, press conferences, etc. available to all residents in Reading, Berks County and across the nation through the City's website. Currently City Council, the BPRC and the Zoning Hearing Board are the only groups to stream meetings to the City's website. With the Administration's approval, the system will be installed in the Penn Room, which will enable further expansion of the webcasting system and the internal use of the system will increase to provide improved transparency to the public. The meetings and functions streamed are archived on the City's website so people can watch any meeting or event recorded at their convenience. Council Staff has also encouraged the Administration to use the non-public webcasting system for employee orientation and training, as employees will have the ability to review training programs recorded for internal use at their work stations, which makes the training efficient and affordable.

14. Council staff established a **City Council Facebook** page to update citizens about important legislation and upcoming meetings and created a format for a **quarterly newsletter** which will start in 2013.

15. The City Clerk was invited to speak at a PA Senate Public Hearing about the constitutionality of Student Home Regulations.

16. The City Clerk sits on the Acquisition Team that meets regularly to identify properties for the eminent domain, foreclosure, or private sale process.

Administrative Accomplishments

The Council Office is a fully functioning municipal office, which has many responsibilities in addition to providing support to City Council. The head of the office, the City Clerk, is the official keeper of record. As such the City Clerk is responsible for the maintenance of all **municipal records**, their dissemination to relevant and interested parties and attesting to their authenticity. This important responsibility necessitates a large and complex system of document management and storage. Four particular areas were addressed by staff in 2012:

1. Binding of the Journal of Council, Ordinances, and Resolutions;
2. Organizing the vault, which serves as the City's records repository;
3. Utilizing technology acquired in 2007 to scan items of historical and administrative value into an electronic document management retention system;
4. Coordinating the Municipal Records Retention Program with all Administrative Offices.

Journals of Council are prepared by the office annually. The Journal contains the Council minutes, ordinances, resolutions, reports, support documentation and the budgets (CDBG, General Fund and CIP). Copies of the Journal are required to be sent to the Berks County Law Library and the Reading Public Library, as well as being kept on record in the office. In 2012, Journals of Council were prepared for the year 2011. In 2012 Staff will continue to aggressively pursue document management by utilizing the 2010 upgrade to the DocStar software. Having all documents stored electronically will greatly increase our ability to research issues. The Council Office is the only City office currently using this technology consistently.

Vault organization remained a priority in 2012. Lawsuits, minutes for Boards, Authorities and Commissions, Council minutes, Ordinances and Resolutions and ongoing/current issue files were all given a specific section of the vault. While reorganizing, many duplicate and dated documents were disposed of or turned over

to the Berks County Historical Society. This reorganization freed up much needed space and improved the ease of accessing documents in the vault. The digitizing of documents has greatly improved accessibility and the ability to research City documents. Digitization of contract files will be the focus of 2013.

The **Codified Ordinances** are updated annually, but a re-codification of the book has become necessary. Staff worked to procure a firm to re-codify and republish the City's ordinances in 2012 which will include all legislation enacted in 2011 and 2012. During the re-codification process Council Staff and the Law Office will work with a publishing firm to review all enacted ordinances, review the organization of the Codified Ordinance book and make adjustments that will improve the book. Before the 2001 re-codification every City Office was provided with a hard copy of the Codified Ordinance Book which quickly became problematic as offices did not update the book when new materials were provided by the Council Office. The 2001 re-codification reduced the number of hard copy provided to various offices and began to force offices to use the online version of the book. With the 2012 re-codification, all City Offices will be required to use only the online version. In 2012, Council Staff worked with the City's Webmaster to provide live updates to the online Codified Ordinance book as ordinances are enacted by City Council. For the last six (6) years, Council staff has been **posting newly enacted legislation on the City's website** which provides instant access to new legislation for employees and citizens and has reduced the cost of the annual supplement of the Codified Ordinance book.

Constituent Service

Council staff recognizes that we serve as your fulltime support service and are a reflection of Council. As such we make every effort to conduct business in a courteous and professional manner. The opening of the Call Center – and now the Citizens Services Center - has not reduced the number of calls our office receives. Calls are tracked and managed according to category. The largest category, Calls for Service includes: directory assistance, departmental transfers and general questions about City operations.

In 2010, at the request of the Administration, complaints and other service requests were forwarded to the Managing Director's office to be forwarded to the Call Center/Citizens Services Center who forwards the complaint to a City department for resolution; however, Staff monitors issues and works with the Managing Director's office to try to ensure prompt resolution. Complaints received by the Council office fall into two major categories; those who call this office because they

have had a successful experience in the past and those who call this office after calling other City offices and receiving no response.

This process continued in 2012. When complaints are received, they are recorded in a separate database, which staff regularly monitors. The database tracks the complaint by type showing when the complaint was recorded, where the complaint was sent for further action and what action was taken regarding the complaint.

During 2012, the Managing Director allowed Council staff to work directly with the Services Center manager for complaint follow-up. In addition, the Services Center manager has been working with individual offices for more timely and informative updates. These two items combined are showing improvement in complaint resolution.

Council staff generates requests for updates monthly. Forwarding complaints to the Managing Director has not improved follow up or resolution during 2012. It is the goal of the Council office to have 100% complaint resolution. The complaint resolution rate for 2012 is 63%. The resolution rate is **down from the resolution rate of the Call Center in 2008 (70%)** and is still **down from 2006 (94%) when Council staff directly handled all complaints.**

The following tables show a tabulation of the number and type of issues addressed by the Council Office in 2012:

Breakdown of 2012 Calls by Type

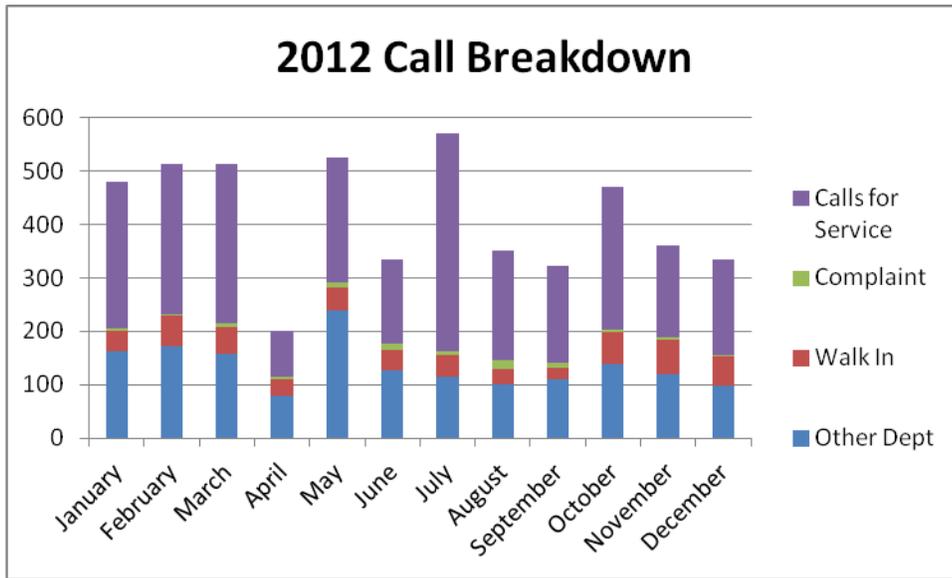
<u>Other Department</u>	<u>Walk-Ins*</u>	<u>Complaints</u>	<u>Calls for Service</u>	<u>Total Calls</u>
1,621	529	85	2,742	4,977

* Walk-Ins are counted as calls as the service provided is the same.

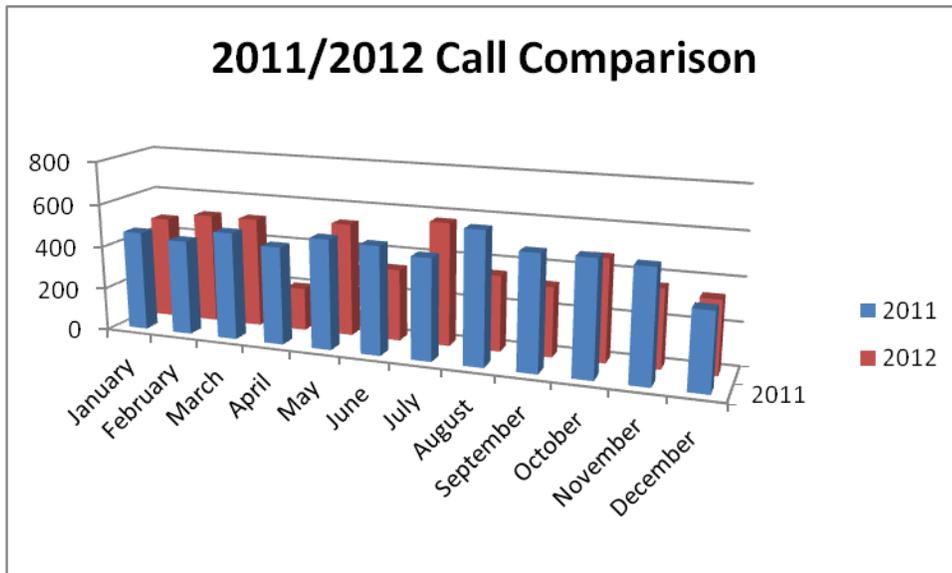
Breakdown of 2011 Calls by Type

<u>Other Department</u>	<u>Walk- Ins*</u>	<u>Complaints</u>	<u>Calls for Service</u>	<u>Total Calls</u>
2,151	714	115	3,368	6,348

*Walk-Ins are counted as calls as the service provided is the same.

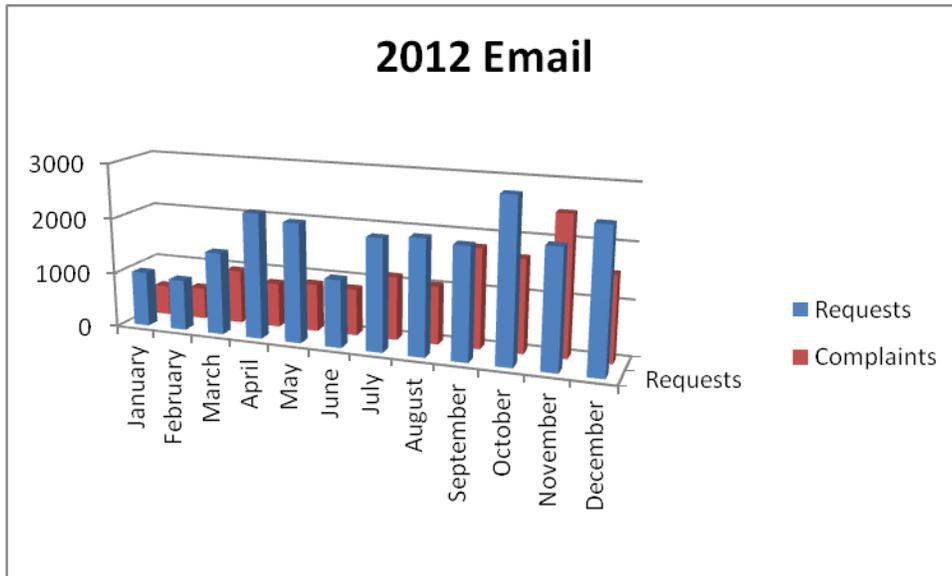


*Data for the month of April is incomplete.

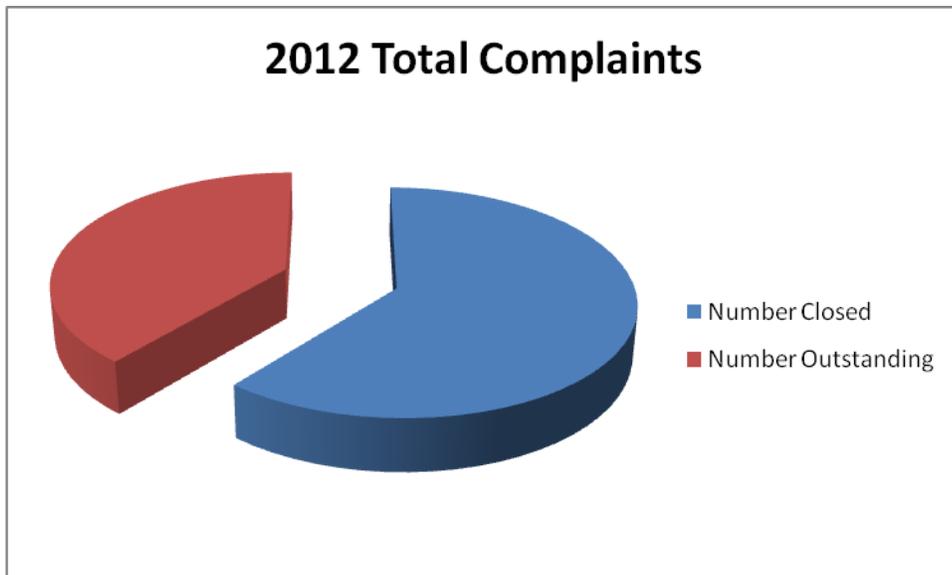


Email Management

With the increased use of email by citizens of the City, the office has begun tracking the number of requests and complaints received by email. The following chart outlines the number of requests and complaints received during 2012.



Complaint Management



Staff acknowledges that the job of supporting Council is never finished. There are always ways of improving existing functions and finding new techniques to carry out existing tasks. As part of setting goals, staff continually evaluates the function and efficiency of the legislative branch of government, determining what should continue, what should be improved and what can be dispensed with. The consistent critical self-evaluation undertaken by staff not only benefits the office organization but Council as well. The quality of support improves as inefficient methods are weeded out. By setting clear goals for the upcoming year, staff will orient tasks to achieve those goals.

Staff Goals for 2013:

1. Organize Town meetings as requested by members of Council;
2. Continue digital imaging and maintenance of ordinances and resolutions, meeting minutes and contracts (with an emphasis on contracts to allow for better search ability and to dispose contracts in accordance with the PA Record Retention Schedule in order to free up much needed space in the vault) and use the new version of DocStar to increase the availability of electronic documents to all City Departments and the public; Work with the Reading Public Library to find off-site storage space for permanent records;
3. Continue to work closely with the Administration and the Business Analyst to improve efficiency of operations to residents;
4. Work with IT to improve updates to the on-line version of the Codified Ordinance Book, updating of the Council web pages and provide space for an "In Your District Update" area;
5. Provide opportunities for staff and City Council to receive training and education by attending conferences, workshops and other training opportunities;
6. Work with Administration on the amendment of the Comprehensive Plan and the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance;
7. Continue to coordinate meetings with the School Board, County Commissioners and Albright Administration;
8. Continue to search for non-owner occupied properties to ensure they obtain all the necessary licenses/permits necessary;

9. Monitor and attend Magisterial District Justice hearings for problem property/property owners;
10. Improve various application forms used in the Council Office;
11. Re-codify the City's Ordinance Books;
12. Quarterly newsletters to the public highlighting and describing legislation recently enacted by City Council and Council district issues;
13. Develop a means to track follow up items requested by Council;
14. Assist with the implementation of the Land Bank.