

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING  
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

**February 16, 2021 – 7:00 p.m.**

West Reading Borough Council held its regular monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 with the following persons present: Council President Jack Gombach; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Patrick Kaag, Samantha Kaag, Jennifer Bressler, and Ryan Lineaweaver; Mayor Andrew Kearney; Solicitor Daniel Becker; Police Sergeant Ryan Phillips, Police Officer Nicholas Karetas; Deputy Fire Marshal Mark Burkholder; Borough Manager Nicholas Imbesi; Public Works Director Dean Murray; Code Department Manager Cathy Hoffman; Recreation Director & Assistant Treasurer Helen Moyer; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Engineer Tom Unger; Main Street Manager Mark Ratcliffe; Event Coordinator Emily Branch; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

**VISITORS:** (In attendance via Zoom Meeting)

Karen Livingood, Resident	Stacey Shirk, Resident	Tony Veloz, Resident
Allen Heist, Resident	Christina Shenk, Resident	Xiomara Guerrero, Resident
Brian Adams, Resident	Jenna Hiester, Resident	Heidi Reuter, Resident
James Rogers, Resident	Thomas Federico, Resident	Melinda O'Neill, Business Owner
Gregory Bean, PA Chiefs of Police Association		

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Jack Gombach called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call. A moment of silence was requested to remember those impacted by Covid-19 locally and beyond.
2. **PENNSYLVANIA CHIEFS OF POLICE ASSOCIATION:** Mr. Bean reported that the Chief of Police employment opportunity has been advertised for one week and to date has received ten resumes and cover letters. The advertisement will run for thirty-days through Monday, March 8, 2021. All resumes will be provided to the Borough approximately two days following the deadline to apply. Three experts will review the applicant's training and education experience to recommend six to eight qualified candidates to interview. The interviews will be conducted in accordance with safety guidelines by three assessors that are either current or former Chiefs of Police not from the immediate area for validity purposes. Borough Council or staff members are welcome to attend the full day of interviews, each interviewee will be asked multiple questions during a one-hour interview process. It is requested that if Borough Council or staff members plan to attend the interview process that they are present for all interviews. Following the completion of interviews the candidates will be ranked in order of experience and capabilities of performing the work as well as seven benchmarks qualities such as oral communication, judgement and planning skills. Of these candidates, one to three will be selected for a second interview. Borough Council will be provided with a list of thirty potential second interview questions, which should be based on common issues that are dealt with by the West Reading Police Department. The physical and psychological examination and background investigation would be completed by a different organization. Mr. Bean offered to answer any questions regarding this process.

Mayor Kearney asked if the interview rankings would be shared with Borough Council. Mr. Bean indicated a meeting would be held with Borough Council to discuss the reasons for the

rankings. Sergeant Phillips asked for a general timeline for this process. Mr. Bean indicated an approximate three-to-four-month process.

Mr. Bean departed the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** Mr. Rogers stated that through a recent Right-to-Know request a total of \$13,940 is currently owed to the Borough by the Lofts at Narrow and wishes something could be done to collect these fees. Mr. Gombach indicated that citations have been filed and this is currently going through the legal process. Mr. Becker indicated that the length of the process depends on how they respond, if the citation is opposed it would be a lengthier litigation process. Mr. Rogers also noted that Franklin Manor Apartments owes approximately \$9,000 in inspection fees.

Mrs. Livingood requested the status of updating GPS as to the demolition of the Parkview Road Bridge. Mr. Lincoln noted that updates to personal GPS devices would need to be downloaded, which unfortunately is out of our control. Google Maps does allow individuals to report mapping errors and encouraged multiple reports to illicit a more rapid correction. Mr. Lincoln has filed notices to Google Maps and has not received a response. He will look for other avenues to update this mapping.

4. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:** Motion to approve the January 19, 2021 regular meeting minutes and the February 4, 2021 special meeting minutes. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

5. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**

- a. **Ordinance 1135 – Estimated Water Billing Amendment** – This amendment would add regulations pertaining to calculating an average consumption in the event of meter failure.

Motion to adopt an ordinance amendment to estimate water meter readings in the event of meter failure. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Ordinance – Municipal Lot Parking Fine Amendment** – This amendment would remove the criminal penalty and include a fine of twenty-five dollars for parking violations on the municipal parking lot as recommended by the Traffic and Infrastructure Committee.

Motion to authorize the advertisement of an amendment to the municipal lot parking enforcement provisions to include a fine of twenty-five dollars. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Ordinance – Parking Prohibited Certain Hours for Street Sweeping** – The Public Works Director requested to add Barnhardt Way, Silk Drive and Penn Avenue to the street sweeping program. The Traffic and Infrastructure Committee has recommended approval of this request with Penn Avenue being scheduled once per month, on the second Monday with an earlier start time of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

Motion to authorize advertisement of an amendment to the prohibited parking hours for street sweeping purposes for Barnhardt Way, Silk Drive and Penn Avenue. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Resolution 2021-2 Extension of Local Disaster Emergency** – This Resolution would extend the declaration expiration date to the March Council meeting, allowing the ability to apply for emergency disaster funding.

Motion to approve Resolution 2021-2 Extension of Local Disaster Emergency through March 16, 2021. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

6. **CONSULTANT'S REPORT:**

- a. **Solicitor's Report** – Mr. Becker stated that he had nothing new to report at this time.
- b. **Engineer's Report** – Mr. Unger commented on the following items:
  - **2021 Road Project** – Mr. Unger requested clarification as to curb repairs being included in the scope of work to pave Pine Street this year. Mr. Lincoln confirmed that this aspect is to be included in the 2021 Road Project.
  - **Parkview Road Pedestrian Bridge** – Mr. Unger reported that the thirty-day window for the Department of Environmental Protection to comment on the joint permit application has lapsed and he anticipates a signed permit to install a pedestrian bridge next week. Mr. Unger requested an updated status of the right-of-way agreement between the Borough and UGI. Mr. Imbesi noted that he has not yet received a response from UGI and will follow up with his contact again. Mr. Lincoln recommended waiting for a signed right-of-way agreement prior to executing the contract with Contech Engineered Solutions to fabricate the pedestrian bridge. Mr. Unger noted a ten-week fabrication period once the contract has been signed.

Motion to accept the Engineer's report. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

7. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Mr. Gombach noted an executive session that was held at 6:00 p.m. this evening to discuss potential litigation.
8. **COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S REPORT:** Mr. Gombach thanked Borough staff members, resident volunteers, Representative Manual Guzman, Representative Mark Rozzi, Senator Judy Schwank, Representative Chrissy Houlahan, and the County Commissioners for their assistance with the Franklin Manor apartment complex condemnation today. Mr. Gombach was pleased to announce that the coordination of efforts with the Berks County Coalition to End Homelessness and the Hispanic Center of Reading. All displaced families and residents of Franklin Manor Apartments have been placed into a hotel room tonight. The Borough will continue to work with these partners to provide additional aide and support during the next few weeks until the County Aide funding is dispersed on March 1, 2021. Mr. Gombach expressed a moral obligation to support these residents during one of the most difficult times of their lives. The Borough will remain committed to the safety and wellbeing of its residents, and will do so with compassion.
9. **BOROUGH MANAGER'S REPORT:**
  - a. **Letter of Interest** – Mr. Imbesi noted receipt of a letter of interest from Melinda O'Neill to become a part of the Economic Development Committee. Mrs. O'Neill reported that she owns Empire Home Center in Leesport and recently opened a home design center on Penn Avenue, which has been going extremely well. It has been a dream to be on the Avenue

because it is the heart of Berks County. Mrs. O'Neill indicated that she has given back to the community in Leesport by sponsoring sport teams and intends to do the same for West Reading, she is willing to volunteer in any manner needed to create positive energy.

Motion to appoint Melinda O'Neill to the Economic Development Committee. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Postage Meter Contract** – STR Business Solutions has offered to buy out the remaining postage meter monthly lease agreement with Great America and to provide a new postage metering system at a reduced monthly cost. Also, the new postage meter would require a less expensive ink cartridge. Mr. Imbesi requested authorization to enter into a new contract.

Motion to authorize the Borough Manager to enter into a new postage meter lease agreement with STR Business Solutions. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Employee Handbook** – Mr. Imbesi requested approval of the updated employee handbook. Mr. Kaag noted discrepancies in the table of contents with regards to page numbering.

Motion to approve the updated Employee Handbook with revisions to the table of contents. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Franklin Manor Condemnation Update** – Mr. Imbesi provided an overview of the events that unfolded today and reinforced that everyone who needed a home today has been placed. Today's condemnation was not about an unpaid water bill, this was about the health and safety of these residents. The main goal of the Borough today was to ensure that the facility was safe and adequate for human occupation. The conditions at Franklin Manor Apartments had not improved with relation to raw sewage remaining in the basement, electrical issues, a sink hole, and a failed carbon monoxide system in the parking garage. Mr. Imbesi was sorry that the tenants had to be displaced and for the actions that needed to take place today. Mr. Becker indicated that the building was in an uninhabitable condition and the Borough had to take these necessary steps for the safety of the residents.

Motion to accept the Borough Manager's report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- 10. **MAYOR'S REPORT:** Mayor Kearney thanked the Borough Manager and Council President for addressing this serious and difficult situation for the safety of the residents and for representing the Borough impeccably.

Mayor Kearney shared his opinion regarding the search for a Chief of Police by requesting that the three eligible West Reading Sergeants be considered for this position.

Motion to accept the Mayor's report. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

11. **DEPARTMENT REPORTS:**

- a. **Police Department** – Officer-in-Charge Ryan Phillips announced that Officer Gil Tinoco has completed his probation period and the department is now operating at full capacity. The new police vehicle is now in service. Sergeant Phillips commended the Public Works Department,

Police Officers, and Parking Enforcement Officers for their efforts during the recent snow emergency and cleanup event. Sergeant Phillips offered to answer any questions regarding the Police report. There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Police Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Public Works Department** - Mr. Murray appreciated Sergeant Phillips comment and indicated that it was a team effort to handle the recent snow emergency, it was chaotic at times, but the storm was addressed faster than any storm in the past. Mr. Murray offered to answer any questions regarding the Public Works report. There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Public Works Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Fire Department** - Chief Moyer was unable to attend the meeting tonight due to the department's assistance to ensure that the Franklin Manor Apartment complex has been vacated prior to padlocking the building. There were no questions or comments regarding this report.

Motion to accept the Fire Department report. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Code Department** – Mrs. Hoffman expressed her appreciation and recognition of the Fire Marshal, Troy Hatt, and Building Inspector, Tyler Berg for their numerous hours and exemplary work in regards to the Franklin Manor Apartment complex. Mrs. Hoffman offered to answer any questions regarding the Code Department report. There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Code Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation** – Mr. Ratcliffe reported that the board has chosen Partners Design to assist in the rebranding efforts. The February 27, 2021 Fashion Show will be primarily virtual with the ability to register to vote. This new and innovative feature may be added to future events. A grant closeout report has been submitted to the County, and the board is currently pursuing a new state COVID-19 grant opportunity. Reauthorization of a five-year Main Street Designation is being pursued primarily to provide additional grant opportunities. A traffic study pertaining to the proposed North Sixth Avenue Pocket Park has been completed and will be shared with the Traffic and Infrastructure Committee prior to bringing to Council next month.

Motion to accept the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation report. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

## 12. COMMITTEE / COMMISSION REPORTS:

- a. **Recreation Commission** – Mrs. Moyer requested Council's direction as to opening the pool this year due to the lengthy process of hiring staff. Mrs. Moyer indicated that CDC guidelines would be followed as presented last spring. It was noted that Wyomissing and Antietam pools are scheduled to open this year. Mrs. Moyer also requested guidance from Council as to

hosting an Easter Egg Hunt on March 27, 2021 with modifications to promote social distancing. A copy of the CDC guidelines will be forwarded to Council for consideration and discussion during next week's Council meeting.

Motion to accept the Recreation Director's report. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Planning Commission** – The February Planning Commission meeting was cancelled.
- c. **Economic Development Committee** – Mr. Wert welcomed Mrs. O'Neill to the Economic Development Committee and noted the continued strong presence within the business district with new businesses continuing to open. The Wyomissing Borough member of the committee shared the Crown Plaza Hotel's endeavor to convert a portion of the hotel into fifty-five and older housing focused towards veterans.

Motion to accept the Economic Development Committee report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Environmental Advisory Council** – Mr. Kaag provided an overview of the topics discussed last month regarding a solar project, appointment of a secretary to take minutes, community garden update and goals such as public/social media outreach, trash/recycling program education, and inventorying green spaces within the Borough.

Mr. Wert noted that Schuylkill River Greenways will be hosting a volunteer day on Saturday, March 27, 2021 to revive a portion of the Thun section on the Schuylkill River Trail. The Reading Gateway Initiative hopes to raise \$70,000 to install trail improvements to this area that passes by the border of West Reading. Volunteers would trim vegetation, collect litter and install new signage. Mr. Wert urged participation in this program and to visit their website to preregister to volunteer or donate. Mr. Imbesi noted that a representative will be attending the March Council meeting to provide an update.

Motion to accept the Environmental Advisory Council report. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **Traffic and Infrastructure Committee** – Mr. Lincoln noted discussions pertaining to an overall study of parking within the Borough and the funds needed to do so. A figure to perform this study will be obtained to determine if funding could be found within the current budget. It's important to move forward and review options to expand programs such as permit parking.

Secondly, a representative from the Borough of Wyomissing joined the meeting to discuss placement of a bike share station along Reading Avenue. Specifications were needed to move forward with selecting a location. As part of the PennDOT grant, funds are available to maintain the station for two years, which is estimated at \$10,000 per year. A portion of these expenses would be reimbursed by the bike rental fees. Similar to Wyomissing Borough we could reach out to business owners to request donations, it is anticipated that this mode of transportation should increase foot traffic to the business district. This is all informational at this point in time, a representative from Movatic plans to attend the March Traffic and Infrastructure Committee meeting to provide additional information and to answer any questions that we may have.

Motion to accept the Traffic and Infrastructure Committee report. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- f. **Shade Tree Commission** – The February Shade Tree Commission meeting was cancelled.
- g. **Safety Committee** – Mr. Murray offered to answer any questions. There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Safety Committee report. **Moved** by Mr. Lineaweaver and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- h. **Finance Committee** – The February Finance Committee meeting was cancelled.

13. **TREASURER'S REPORT:** Mrs. Rentschler thanked Council for appointing Helen Moyer as Assistant Treasurer, she is learning the software and procedures very well. They are currently working on a backlog of items in preparation of the audit, which has been delayed this year.

- a. **Financial Statement Ending 1/31/2021** – There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Financial Statement ending 1/31/2021. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Payment Approval Report 1/20/21 to 2/11/21 & 2/12/21 to 2/16/21** – There were no questions or comments.

Motion to approve the Payment Approval Reports of 1/20/21 to 2/11/21 & 2/12/21 to 2/16/21. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Motion to accept the Treasurer's report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

14. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Rogers inquired as to the addition of street sweeping along Penn Avenue. Mr. Imbesi confirmed that both sides of Penn Avenue are proposed to be cleaned on the second Monday of the month restricting parking between the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Mr. Rogers also inquired as to the Pocket Park idea. Mr. Imbesi noted that the WRCRF has proposed this idea and funded a traffic study to determine feasibility. The results of the traffic study will be discussed during the upcoming Traffic and Infrastructure Committee meeting. The park area is proposed on North Sixth Avenue between Penn Avenue and Court Street. Thirdly, Mr. Rogers noted a comment within the December Council minutes where a notation of 116% of the projected 2020 business privilege tax had been collected and noted an issue with this statement. Due to a change in the method of collecting this tax, double payments were received last year. Mr. Rogers is assuming that the pandemic may impact the estimated 2020 income, which could result in credit balances this year.

Mr. Heist thanked Borough staff for their actions today during a delicate, emotional and sad day at Franklin Manor Apartments. He stated that it's a shame the the owner does not have any respect for the building and indicated that he is looking for another home in West Reading.

Mr. Federico inquired as to roof repairs that were needed in 2018 at Franklin Manor Apartments and why the building was not condemned at that time. Mr. Imbesi noted that roof repairs were completed, however, it was found today that there is a major roof leak that is allowing water to

permeate the building and is in need of additional repairs. The Code Department has been working with the owners in good faith for a number of years to bring the building up to code regulations. The items that were of concern today were the sewage issues in the basement, an exposed sewer pipe allowing gases to permeate into living spaces, moisture damaged electrical panels in the basement from sewage in the basement, and the requirement of an operable CO2 system to expel carbon monoxide from the garage area. Mr. Imbesi indicated that the water bill was the least of the Borough's concern today, although this is a concern due to the fact that West Reading tax payers are currently funding this bill. The Borough's main concern was to ensure that the building was safe for human occupancy. Mr. Federico requested guidance on how to access the building to remove personal belongings. Mr. Imbesi provided the number to Borough Hall for residents to schedule access to the building.

Mr. Heist noted that a resident from unit 208 had not connected with the Berks County Coalition to End Homelessness today and is in need of a place to stay. Mr. Imbesi assured Mr. Heist that someone would reach out to this resident to assist them in finding a place to stay.

Mr. Rogers inquired as to when the building was inspected after the roof repairs were completed in 2018. Mrs. Hoffman indicated that the facility was inspected in 2019 and is on a two-year inspection cycle.

Ms. Shenk asked what the next step is with this building. Mr. Imbesi indicated that an action plan is needed on how they plan to make the repairs with contracts in place to complete these repairs. The building will not reopen until the egregious health and safety violations have been corrected. Ms. Shenk inquired as to interest by the owners to make these repairs. Borough Officials did not comment as to the owner's intentions or the Borough's legal recourse to enforce compliance.

15. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira  
Borough Secretary