

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING  
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

**December 28, 2021 – 7:00 p.m.**

West Reading Borough Council held its regular monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, December 28, 2021 with the following persons present: Council President Jack Gombach (via Zoom); Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Jennifer Bressler, Patrick Kaag, Samantha Kaag, and Ryan Lineaweaver; Mayor Andrew Kearney (via Zoom); Solicitor Joan London; Officer-in-Charge Ryan Phillips (via Zoom); Recreation Director Christine Boud (via Zoom); Fire Chief Chad Moyer (via Zoom); Borough Manager Dean Murray; Public Works Team Leader Kerry Grassley; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Main Street Manager Mark Ratcliffe (via Zoom); and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

**VISITORS:**

Denise Drobnick, Resident

Zachary Shaver, Resident

James Rogers, Resident

Thomas Kosmoski, Resident

Michael & Helen Witmyer, Residents

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Jack Gombach called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., which was followed by a moment of silence, the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Rogers noted his research through a right-to-know request of a permit to install a propane generator at an apartment complex and found that the \$500 permit fee had not been paid and he doesn't believe that the Code Department performed an inspection of this installation. Mr. Murray reported, in Mrs. Hoffman's absence, that a large portion of the apartment complex's outstanding balances have been paid. A review of remaining outstanding items is being addressed.

Mr. Rogers shared information he received through a right-to-know request that was posted on the Voices of West Reading Facebook page regarding increased expenses that were incurred during the 2019 through 2021 Art on the Avenue and Fall Festival events that included meals that were provided to staff members. Mr. Gombach indicated that there was a considerably higher police presence during the 2021 Fall Festival event, which was based on police leadership at that time. An incident had transpired that ultimately did not disrupt the Fall Festival because of a swift police response. The Police and Public Works Department staff members were employed for a longer period of time during this event and deserve to be fairly compensated. The arrangements and steps that were followed are not uncommon for municipalities hosting events of this size.

Mr. Kosmoski requested guidance to potentially obtain an exception or variance to install a gas line to his home on Wayne Avenue. He understands that there is a moratorium against opening this roadway based on the length of time since repaving. Mr. Gombach asked that he provide the Borough Manager with his contact information to allow Mr. Murray to review and respond to his request.

3. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:**

Motion to approve the November 16, 2021 regular meeting minutes, the November 23, 2021 budget meeting minutes, and the December 9, 2021 special meeting minutes. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

4. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**

- a. **Ordinance – Animal Amendment** – This amendment would prohibit tethering as a means of restraint. Mr. Wert noted that the Planning Commission and Solicitor have been working on this amendment for a few months. This amendment would empower the Police and Code Departments to prevent future dog attack incidents. This ordinance amendment is a good example of the government working for the people.

Motion to authorize the advertisement of an Animal Ordinance amendment to prohibit tethering as a means of restraint for domestic animals. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Ordinance 1144 Tax Rate Amendment** – It was noted that the tax rate for infrastructure purposes is being raised to offset curb replacements during paving projects. The 0.25 mil increase brings the total tax to 1.00 mil.

Motion to adopt Ordinance 1144 Tax Rate Amendment to increase the infrastructure rate to 1.00 mil. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Ordinance 1145 Sewer Disposal Rates** – Mr. Murray indicated that the sewer disposal rates are being increased 10% based on rate increases from the sewer authority and to build sewer related funds for future sewer system improvements.

Motion to adopt Ordinance 1145 Sewer Disposal Rates to increase the residential and commercial sewer disposal fees ten percent effective January 1, 2022. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Ms. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Resolution 2021-22 Refuse and Recycling Collection Services** – Mr. Murray noted increased disposal costs, and Public Works efforts to continue monitoring the amount of trash being collected by the hauler.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2021-22 increasing the refuse and recycling fee to \$100 per unit per quarter. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

5. **CONSULTANT'S REPORT:**

- a. **Solicitor's Report** – Ms. London stated that she had nothing new to report that is not otherwise covered on the agenda.

- b. **Engineer's Report** – In Mr. Unger's absence Mr. Murray requested permission to award a storm sewer cleaning, televising and inspection contract to Utility Services Group, Inc. The project would commence after the new year.

Motion to award a contract to Utility Services Group, Inc. in the amount of \$20,992.90 to perform a storm sewer inspection project. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Murray requested permission to approve Payment Application No. 1 to H&K Group, Inc. for the Pine Street and Fifth Avenue paving project.

Motion to approve Final Application for Payment No. 1 in the amount of \$163,020.44 to H&K Group Inc. for the 2021 paving project. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Grassley provided an update to the Linden Lane sewer project indicating that the sewer has been tied to the main and manholes. They will begin tying in the lines across the street beginning next week.

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

6. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Mr. Gombach noted an executive session that was held on Friday, December 3, 2021 to discuss personnel and at 6:30 p.m. this evening to discuss personnel and contract matters. There were no action items at this time.
7. **COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S REPORT:** Mr. Gombach shared closing comments as Council President thanking residents for placing their faith in him to serve the Borough and he hopes that he lived up to expectations. He thanked the Mayor and Council Members for empowering him to lead the board through difficult times and for being there during the good times accomplishing many goals during the course of two-years. As Council President Mr. Gombach sought out to do three things:
  - Protect the taxpayers
  - Preserve essential services
  - Promote our small businesses

Realizing that these goals will never be fully completed Mr. Gombach noted that there were great strides made. A review of finances led to five-year budget projections to provide a better understanding of the impact that Council's decisions will have. Debt was refinanced earning the highest bond rating noting the steps that were taken during COVID to strengthen our financial position. Mr. Gombach was proud to announce that we are planning to pass a budget later this evening with a small surplus, noting that there had been a significant \$300,000 budgeted deficit.

The importance in continuing to provide Fire, Police and Public Works essential services were a priority as we navigated through COVID. Members of our community helped raise roughly \$30,000 for body cameras for our Police Department and \$30,000 for a resident façade improvement program that will launch in the Spring of 2022 with the help of Berks Alliance and the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation (WRCRF).

Mr. Gombach thanked Borough staff, police officers, Sergeant Phillips for stepping up once again to lead the Police Department during a transition period, and Chad Moyer for leading the Fire Department and all the volunteers that protect the Borough by responding to every emergency. Throughout the pandemic the Borough remained committed to small businesses with the help of the WRCRF and Customers Bank to provide a streamlined Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) to quickly deliver loans to struggling businesses.

In closing Mr. Gombach stated that staying committed to a community can make positive impacts. He encouraged everyone to remain relentless in the optimism that small government can have in so many lives during trying times.

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

8. **BOROUGH MANAGER'S REPORT:**

- a. **Teamsters Collective Bargaining Agreement Addendum** – Mr. Murray requested approval of an amendment to allow a senior Public Works Crew Member to assume responsibility in the absence of the Director and Team Leader.

Motion to approve an addendum to the Teamsters Collective Bargaining Agreement to include an Acting Crew Leader rate increase for a senior crew member in the absence of the Director and Crew Leader. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Ms. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Landfill Agreement** – Mr. Murray requested permission to reject the three landfill proposals to pursue more favorable terms in a one-year contract to coordinate terms with the trash and recycling hauler contract that ends December 31, 2022.

Motion to reject the landfill proposals for service to request new proposals. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Sale of Fire Apparatus** – Mr. Murray requested permission to list two vehicles for sale with the assistance of Brindlee Fire Apparatus. Mr. Lincoln asked if the rescue truck could be used in a different capacity. Mr. Murray indicated that if a certain dollar amount is not achieved through the bidding process that this vehicle may be retained by the Public Works Department for use as a water and sewer truck.

Motion to approve listing fire apparatus for sale with the assistance of Brindlee Fire Apparatus. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Animal Rescue League** – Mr. Murray requested a direction as to the \$1 per capita versus \$2 per capita agreement for animal control services for the year 2022.

Motion to approve the \$1 per capita animal control services agreement with the Animal Rescue League for the year 2022 and authorize the Borough Manager to execute the contract. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **Employee Handbook Amendment** – Mr. Murray requested approval of the new description of the full-time seasonal position.

Motion to approve the employee handbook amendment to include a job description for the full-time seasonal position. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- f. **2022 Meeting Dates** – Mr. Murray requested approval of the 2022 meeting dates for advertisement.

Motion to authorize advertisement of the 2022 meeting dates and times. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- g. **Chief of Police Letter of Resignation** – Mr. Murray indicated that following a review of the minutes a request to accept Glenn Granitz's letter of resignation had not been voted upon.

Motion to accept Glenn Granitz, Chief of Police letter of resignation. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- h. **Civil Service Commission Reappointment** - Ronald Bechtel has requested to be reappointed to this Commission for another six-year term.

Motion to reappoint Ronald Bechtel to the Civil Service Commission for a six-year term ending December 31, 2027. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- i. **Road Closure** – Mr. Murray requested permission to close South Sixth Avenue from Penn Avenue to Cherry Street on Friday, January 28, 2022 between the hours of 5:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. for West Reading Tavern's Fire and Ice event entertainment. The special event application is currently under review by all departments.

Motion to approve the closure of South Sixth Avenue from Penn Avenue to Cherry Street on Friday, January 28, 2022 between the hours of 5:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. pending departmental approval of the event. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- j. **2022 Municipal Tax Sheet** – Mr. Murray requested approval of the list of tax millages to submit to the County.

Motion to approve the 2022 Municipal Tax Sheet tax millages. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Murray recognized Mr. Gombach and Mr. Kearney for their years of service to the Borough by presenting a letter of commendation and a gift certificate to a local business.

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

9. **MAYOR'S REPORT:** Mayor Kearney spoke of the following items within his written report:

- **Council President** – Mayor Kearney expressed that Mr. Gombach did a great job as Council President noting his pursuit of a donation to fund body cameras for the Police Department. After learning of Mr. Gombach's interest to serve on the WRCRF board he indicated that there were few better candidates.
- **COVID** – The pandemic is at its worst and the Mayor encouraged everyone to continue to protect themselves and others against the variant strains.
- **Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony** – Mayor Kearney thanked the Recreation Commission for a job well done at the 93<sup>rd</sup> annual tree lighting ceremony.
- **Staff, Residents and Businesses** – Mayor Kearney thanked all departments, residents and business owners for the honor to serve as Mayor during the last four years.

- **Council and New Mayor** – Mayor Kearney wished the new Mayor and Borough Council Members, as well as returning Council Members all the best and thanked them for their service to the community.
- **Police Department** – Mayor Kearney expressed his honor in being associated with the men and women of the West Reading Police Department.

Mr. Gombach thanked Mayor Kearney for his years of service, noting that he is one of the fraternal orders of elected officials to serve during a pandemic.

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

10. **DEPARTMENT REPORTS:**

- a. **Police Department** – Officer-in-Charge Ryan Phillips requested Council's approval of an officer's request to be reimbursed for a college course. The official request was attached to the report.

Motion to approve an officer's request for reimbursement of college courses in 2022. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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

- b. **Public Works Department** - Mr. Grassley offered to answer questions regarding his report and requested Council to approve the listing of police vehicle 38-3 for sale on Public Surplus.

Mr. Kaag noted the projected annual savings of roughly \$60,000 for repairs completed by the in-house mechanic.

Motion to approve the listing of police vehicle 38-3 on Public Surplus. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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

- c. **Fire Department** – Chief Moyer thanked Mr. Gombach and Mayor Kearney for their support of the fire department and residents of the Borough, and wished them the best in the future endeavors.

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

- d. **Code Department** – Mr. Murray offered to answer questions in the absence of Mrs. Hoffman. There were no questions or comments.

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

- e. **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation** – Mr. Ratcliffe thanked Mr. Gombach and Mayor Kearney for their support during the last two very trying years.

Mr. Ratcliffe offered to answer questions regarding his report. There were no questions or comments.

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

#### 11. COMMITTEE / COMMISSION REPORTS:

- a. **Recreation Commission** – Ms. Boud thanked Mr. Gombach and Mayor Kearney for their support in her new year as Recreation Director.

Ms. Boud requested approval of the 2022 list of Recreation events.

Motion to approve the list of 2022 Recreation events. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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

- b. **Planning Commission** – Mr. Wert noted continued review of amendments to the zoning ordinance.

Motion to accept the Planning Commission report. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Economic Development Committee** – Mr. Wert noted the rapid paced first floor construction of the proposed Noodl restaurant within the 400 block of Penn Avenue, and the new homes along the 200 block of Tulpehocken Avenue that are nearing completion. The increased pressure on the rental market continues and is foreseen to last three to five years with the influx of medical school students and faculty. It was noted that grant funding may not be available for design standard zoning amendments and a Borough-wide parking study due to state legislative redistricting, and that new Council Members will need to decide how to fund these projects.

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

- d. **Environmental Advisory Council** – the November Environmental Advisory Council meeting was cancelled.

- e. **Traffic and Infrastructure Committee** – Mr. Lincoln noted the continued review of various parking ordinance sections to determine that what is in the ordinance lines up with what is on the street. Draft revisions will be coming to Council for approval at some point in the future. Stop intersections will be reviewed next month to incorporate the three intersection studies that were performed with the assistance of a PennDOT representative along Walnut Street at the intersections of Tulpehocken Avenue, Cashmere Way and Chiffon Way. Alteration of intersection controls may be recommended based on these findings.

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

- f. **Shade Tree Commission** – Mr. Kaag referred to the meeting minutes that noted discussions on the trimming schedule and tree removals. The solicitor has been requested to join the next

meeting to discuss liability issues surrounding sidewalk damage caused by tree roots. It was also noted that a Facebook page may be created to allow better public interaction and comment on the health of Borough trees.

Motion to accept the Shade Tree Commission report. **Moved** Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- g. **Safety Committee** – Mr. Murray referred to the minutes and offered to answer any questions. There were no questions or comments.

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

**12. TREASURER'S REPORT:**

- a. **Teamsters Collective Bargaining Agreement Health Insurance** – Mrs. Rentschler indicated that this agreement would be for the Teamsters portion of health insurance, which is separate from the Administration plan.

Motion to approve an agreement between the Borough and Teamsters Local Union No. 429 for health insurance in the current Collective Bargaining Agreement. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **2022 Budget** – Mr. Murray requested an amendment to the agenda to include the 2022 budget.

Motion to amend the agenda to include the 2022 budget. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Murray requested consideration to adopt the 2022 budget. Mr. Wert noted that Borough Council has accomplished their goal to serve the residents without a reduction in service with a minimal increase in fees.

Motion to adopt the 2022 budget. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Financial Statement Ending 11/30/2021** – There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Financial Statement ending 11/30/2021. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Payment Approval Report 11/17/21 to 12/16/21 & 12/17/21 to 12/27/21 & 12/28/2021** – Mrs. Rentschler noted the 12/28/2021 report is for an upgrade to the firewall.

Motion to approve the Payment Approval Reports of 11/17/21 to 12/16/21 & 12/17/21 to 12/27/21 & 12/28/2021. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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

It was noted that the Vice President would sign documents this evening while the President is in isolation.



13. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Rogers noted his review of a WRCRF financial report from August through a right-to-know request that indicated a balance of over \$300,000. He stated that the Borough provided \$63,000 for in-kind services this year and recommended that the WRCRF fund more of these services to lessen the burden on taxpayers.

14. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 p.m. **Moved** by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira  
Borough Secretary