

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

December 19, 2023 – 7:00 p.m.

West Reading Borough Council held its regular monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, December 19, 2023 with the following persons present: Council President Ryan Lineaweaver; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Jennifer Bressler, Patrick Kaag, Zachary Shaver and Denise Drobnick; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Solicitor Daniel Becker; Fire Chief and Code Department Manager Chad Moyer; Chief of Police Richard Tornielli; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler (via Zoom); Assistant Treasurer Helen Moyer; Borough Manager Dean Murray; Public Works Director Kerry Grassley; Engineer Pamela Stevens; Junior Council Person Mark-Handy Phanor; Main Street Manager Mark Ratcliffe and Nick Price; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

VISITORS:

James Rogers, Resident
Tina Shenk, Resident & Business Owner
Ty Gardner, Resident
Suzanne Thompson, Resident
Jacob Kallman, Visitor
Stewart & Tina McDonough, Residents
Jean Witmer, Resident
Blake Tobias, Resident (via Zoom)
Mark Dougherty, WRCRF President
Kim Murray, Visitor
Christian Murray, Visitor
Raegan Murray, Visitor

Karen Livingood, Resident
Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz, State Representative
Clayton Geiger, Resident
Sydney Geiger, Visitor
Elise Geiger, Visitor
Stephen Jones, Resident
Mike Clarke, Resident
Lance Parmer, Fire Police (via Zoom)
Jenn Murray, Visitor
Matthew & Emily Murray, Visitors
Gavin Murray, Visitor

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Ryan Lineaweaver called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.
2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Mr. Lineaweaver noted that an executive session was not held this evening.
3. **AGENDA AMENDMENTS:** There were no amendments to the agenda.
4. **COMMENDATIONS:** Mayor Kaag and Mr. Lineaweaver read aloud a commendation recognizing Fred Geiger's commitment to his community in representing the Borough of West Reading on the Wyomissing Joint Municipal Authority board from July of 2010 through August of 2023. The commendation was presented to Mr. Geiger's family members.

Mayor Kaag and Mr. Lineaweaver read aloud a commendation recognizing Mark Ratcliffe's service to the community as a member of the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation member and Main Street Manager from June of 2017 through December of 2023.

Mayor Kaag and Mr. Lineaweaver read aloud a commendation recognizing Dean Murray's unwavering commitment to West Reading Borough during his three decades of leadership with honesty and integrity.

State Representative Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz presented Mr. Murray with a Citation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania recognizing his dedication and commitment of thirty years serving the Borough of West Reading and to his service to the United States Navy from 1988 to 1992 and a life member of the West Reading Volunteer Fire Department.

Mr. Geiger and Mr. Murray's family members departed the meeting at 7:09 p.m.

5. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Rogers spoke of a noise complaint he filed on Saturday evening regarding the West Reading Motor Club and his request to the Police Department on Monday for a copy of the report to which he was informed that he needed to file a Right-to-Know request for his own complaint. It was noted that this is standard practice when requesting a document.

Mr. Rogers also provided an update on his Business Privilege Tax collection efforts indicating an additional 140 accounts that have been added to the tax roll. He reported that 43% of the tax roll has been assigned to a collection agency.

Mrs. Livingood thanked the team that coordinated the three commendations that were presented this evening that illustrate respect for the individuals that serve the Borough.

Mr. Gardner thanked the individuals that assisted in the cleanup following the busy Santa Crawl event that was held last weekend. Mr. Lineaweaver noted a conversation that was held with event organizers to ensure that cleanup efforts are included in their future events.

Ms. Shenk noted resident complaints that were shared with her regarding several residential streetlights that are out and the length of time it is taking to make these repairs. Ms. Shenk wondered if a municipal request may have more clout. It was noted that streetlight outages can be reported through the Met-Ed website and the importance of providing a pole number. Complaints may also be filed online through the Public Utility Commission.

6. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:**

Motion to approve the November 21, 2023 and November 28, 2023 meeting minutes. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

7. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**

- a. **Ordinance – Accessible Parking Space Designation** – Amendments to this ordinance section were recommended by the Traffic and Infrastructure Committee to relocate a space within the 400 block of Chestnut Street and the addition of a space within the 300 block of Linden Lane.

Motion to authorize the advertisement of an amendment to relocate an accessible parking space within the 400 block of Chestnut Street and add an accessible parking space within the 300 block of Linden Lane. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Ordinance – One-Way Streets & Stop Intersections** – Mr. Lincoln reported that staff coordinated with PennDOT's Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) to perform studies that resulted in a recommendation of one-way flow of traffic on Holland Square and Juniata Street. LTAP recommended notification be provided to residents within these vicinities to

address any concerns that affected residents may have, and to work with Wyomissing Borough to modify the other half of Holland Square for consistency.

Motion to authorize the advertisement of amendments to the one-way streets and stop intersections to include Holland Square and Juniata Street. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Ordinance 1176 Membership of the Planning Commission** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted the decision last month to advertise a proposed decrease in the number of board members from nine to seven while decreasing the number of Council members from three to two.

Motion to adopt an amendment to the membership of the Planning Commission decreasing the membership from nine to seven members. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Ordinance 1177 Tax Rate Amendment** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted a proposed increase to the general-purpose tax by one-mil to 9.25 mils. The fire protection tax rate would remain at 2.85 mils, and the infrastructure tax rate would remain at 1 mil.

Motion to adopt an amendment to the general-purpose tax rate. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **Ordinance 1178 Water Rate Amendment** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted an increase to the Western Berks Water Authority rate that is charged to the Borough and the inability to absorb another rate adjustment.

Motion to adopt an amendment to the Water Rates and Charges. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- f. **Ordinance 1179 Parking Prohibited at All Times** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted the proposed changes would prohibit parking for the entire length of Court Street from Fourth Avenue to Eighth Avenue, and Plane Alley between Linden Lane and Sycamore Road.

Motion to adopt an amendment to prohibit parking on Court Street and Plane Alley. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- g. **Resolution 2023-30 Extension of Local Disaster Emergency** - Mr. Lineaweaver noted that the extensions will continue each month while repairs are being made within the area of Second Avenue.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2023-30 extending the Proclamation of the Local Disaster Emergency until the January 16, 2024 Borough Council meeting. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- h. **Resolution 2023-31 Fee Schedule Amendment** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted a proposed increase to the Business Privilege License fee from \$35 to \$50 annually. Mr. Lincoln noted receipt of renewal paperwork for 2024 that lists a \$35 fee. To avoid confusion, it was decided to table the fee increase at this time.

8. CONSULTANT'S REPORT:

- a. **Solicitor's Report** – Mr. Becker indicated that he had nothing new to report that is not otherwise covered on the agenda.

b. **Engineer's Report** – Ms. Stevens reviewed the following items:

- The 2024 Road Project discussions have begun with plans to request cost estimates for Park Alley early next year.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) year 8 Green Light-Go grant award project is being prepared for design, bidding, and construction administration services.

The year 9 pre-application scoping form has been prepared for the traffic signals located at 7th Avenue and Parkside Drive North, 7th Avenue and Reading Avenue, and 8th Avenue, Hill Avenue and Reading Avenue. The initial cost estimate is in the amount of \$193,521.20 with a Borough match of \$48,380.30.

- The Commonwealth of PA Financing Authority (CFA) grant funded security camera upgrades project is still moving slowly. Ms. Stevens and Mr. Murray are working with the contractor in hopes of finalizing contract documents by the end of the year.
- Contract documents for the Disposal of Solid Waste and Landfill are being assembled and will be delivered to Borough Hall tomorrow.
- The pump station flow monitoring report for the Olive Street Pump Station had an unusual flow fluctuation. Mr. Grassley noted a backup that overheated the pump and a switch that needed to be replaced.
- Ms. Stevens shared news that was received today of grant funding that has been awarded for the 500 block of Spruce Street water line replacement project in the amount of \$269,500. Mr. Murray thanked State Representative Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz and Senator Judy Schwank's office for their support during the application process.

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

Ms. Stevens departed the meeting at 7:37 p.m.

9. **COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S REPORT:**

Mr. Lineaweaver took a moment to thank Mr. Lincoln and Mrs. Bressler during their last Council meeting, noting that the board did not always see eye-to-eye but appreciates their feedback and is proud of this board.

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

- a. **Solicitor Representation** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to ratify the Borough Solicitor's involvement with real estate tax appeals.

Motion to ratify the solicitor's involvement with the real estate tax assessment appeals.

Moved by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Auditor Services** – Mr. Murray noted the permission that was granted last month to solicit auditing service rates and the receipt of only one proposal that was considerably more than the current auditor service rate.

Motion to reappoint Maillie, LLC as the auditor for 2023. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **2024 Meeting Schedule** – Mr. Murray requested authorization to advertise the 2024 meeting schedule. Mr. Lineaweaver noted that the dates will be available on the Borough’s website and the first meeting scheduled will be held on January 2, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. for Reorganization.

Motion to authorize advertisement of the 2024 meeting schedule. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Solicitor / Engineer Services** – Mr. Murray requested authorization to approve the solicitor and engineer involvement in reviewing Chapter 363 Sewers and Sewage Disposal to bring this section of the ordinances to present day standards with regards to tapping fees and EDU schedule.

Motion to authorize the solicitor and engineer to review Chapter 363 Sewers and Sewage Disposal. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **Environmental Advisory Council Resignation** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to accept a letter of resignation from the Environmental Advisory Council. After five years of service Mr. Lineaweaver expressed an interest in focusing his efforts elsewhere in the new year.

Motion to accept the letter of resignation from Ryan Lineaweaver from the Environmental Advisory Council. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- f. **Environmental Advisory Council Appointment** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to appoint an Associate Member of the Environmental Advisory Council to a full voting member. Mr. Lineaweaver shared the board’s recommendation to reappoint Ty Gardner as a full voting member of the Environmental Advisory Council.

Motion to appoint Ty Gardner as a full voting member of the Environmental Advisory Council. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Murray thanked everyone for their support during his thirty years of employment.

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

11. **MAYOR’S REPORT:** Mayor Kaag provided a verbal report noting the following:

- On November 24th she visited the firehouse with Council Members Zachary Shaver and Patrick Kaag and Russel Sloan of the Art Plus Gallery and his grandson who was excited to see the new fire truck.
- On November 29th she was unable to attend the department meeting but understands that Chief Tornielli conducted a productive meeting.
- On November 30th she attended a course called “Beyond the Battlefield” noting a Veteran addiction crisis that intensifies during the holiday season.
- On December 4th she attended the rain delayed tree lighting ceremony.

- On December 14th she met with Mr. Ratcliffe and Mr. Price to review ideas moving forward.
- On December 15th she attended the Borough Christmas party with staff.
- On December 16th she attended the West Reading Fire Department Christmas party where Isaiah Washington-Ganns was named Firefighter of the Year, and Tim Eisenhard was named Fire Police Officer of the Year. She thanked all volunteers for their service to the borough.
- Also, on December 16th she attended a ribbon cutting ceremony for Zerbe Photography noting the history of this family business and the ability to have pictures taken with Santa during this event.
- On December 17th she attended the Santa Crawl that was very well attended. She noted the need to recruit the Public Works Department to empty trash cans and clean the streets and Council Members that joined in the cleanup efforts following this event.

Mayor Kaag congratulated Sergeant Wayne Holben for being awarded the Police Officer of the Year by the Fraternal Order of Police as well as receiving an Award of Honor for his efforts at the R.M. Palmer incident.

Council Members Mr. Lincoln and Mrs. Bressler were appreciated for their efforts in learning and growing together during the Mayor's tenure.

Mr. Murray was congratulated on reaching a milestone of thirty years of service to the borough.

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

12. DEPARTMENT REPORTS:

- a. **Police Department** – Chief Tornielli shared in addition to his report that events went well this past month with the exception of the Santa Crawl that was more heavily attended than anticipated resulting in minor incidents. It was noted that the Santa Crawl was busier than the night before Thanksgiving, which is a good problem to have. Future event plans will include dedicated deployments.

Chief Tornielli requested authorization to approve tuition reimbursement in 2024 per the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Motion to authorize the preapproval of Sergeant Chad Marks to attend classes and receive college tuition reimbursement in 2024. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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. Grassley referred to his report noting a good year with many accomplishments that included a sewer improvement project, renovations to the Bicentennial House, improvements to the baseball field and recent water and sewer line repairs along Penn Avenue. It was noted that the trenches along the 200 through 400 blocks of Penn Avenue will be redone next week with plans to repave curb to curb next spring.

Mr. Grassley requested consideration to advertise a part-time position.

Motion to authorize the advertisement to hire a part-time crew member. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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

- c. **Fire Department** – Chief Moyer referred to his written report and offered to answer any questions. There were no questions or comments.

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

- d. **Code Department** – Mr. Moyer referred to his written report and recommended that the event host for the Santa Crawl obtain a special event permit in the future based on the increased crowd size.

Mr. Wert inquired as to the notice of violation issued to the property owner of 158 Penn Avenue that requests a plan of action to remediate the dangerous structure. Mr. Moyer noted two interactions with the owner and the dismissiveness of these requests. Mr. Wert indicated that a responsible property owner would quickly address the safety issues of this building that is located at the gateway to the borough. It was noted that legal recourses are available and would be determined by Borough Council prior to moving forward.

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

- e. **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation** – Mr. Ratcliffe expressed his gratefulness for the unnecessary commendation, noting his goal when he started the position to improve the main street area and feels that improvements have been made. He is now handing the 'baton' off to Nick Price who was introduced.

State Representative Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz presented Mr. Ratcliffe with a Citation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for his dedication to the Borough of West Reading.

Mr. Price noted the positivity of everyone welcoming him to his new position. Mr. Ratcliffe noted that this Borough Council has been the best to work with.

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

Mr. Ratcliffe, Mr. Price, and Mrs. Cepeda-Freytiz departed the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

13. COMMITTEE / COMMISSION REPORTS:

- a. **Equity Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce** – Mrs. Bressler reported that a meeting was not held this month. She is hopeful that the new Borough Council can provide ideas and enthusiasm to continue this important initiative. Mr. Lineaweaver indicated that the Diversity and Inclusion Resolution will be reread next year.
- b. **Recreation Commission** – In Mr. Esterly's absence Ms. Drobnick referred to his written report and noted that the rain delayed Tree Lighting Ceremony went well. The rain delay provided an insight as to possibly rearranging the schedule to light the tree earlier, and have Santa arrive earlier to accommodate younger children's attention span. It was thought that changing

the event date to Thursday with Friday as a rain date may be better attended than on a Monday evening.

Due to Mr. Esterly feeling under the weather the house decorating contest winners have not yet been announced. The Commission is working on a list of events for next year, and Mr. Esterly and Mr. Lineaweaver are working towards providing the ability to register electronically for pool and playground programs next year including the ability to pay for these programs on a monthly basis. Mr. Lincoln recommended including a pro-rated pool membership rate to accommodate new residents.

Motion to accept the Recreation Commission report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Planning Commission** – Mr. Wert shared an overview of discussions that continued regarding form-based codes with Derck & Edson, LLC via Zoom this month, and continued discussion on mechanical equipment placements in the front yard.

Motion to accept the Planning Commission report. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Economic Development Committee** – Mr. Wert recapped meeting discussions and the flux of businesses on the Avenue. It was noted that the new Noodl restaurant has closed their doors, and the imperfect locations within the borough where businesses seem to thrive.

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

- e. **Environmental Advisory Council** – Mr. Kaag read aloud Mrs. Bressler's memo of 2019 when she interviewed for a seat on Borough Council. He expressed to Mr. Lincoln and Mrs. Bressler that they remained consistent in their service to this community. He appreciated their patience, observations, and strength to disagree on approaches to challenges that were faced by Borough Council and respects their grace and truth, noting the examples they provided of a job well done.

Mr. Kaag recapped meeting discussions with plans to host a post-holiday Free Market event on January 21st at the Bicentennial House from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. On April 21st there will be a combined Earth Day cleanup and Free Market event at the Pavilion from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. A collaborative effort with the Buy Nothing Group has increased the visibility and attendance to these events.

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

- f. **Traffic and Infrastructure Committee** – Mr. Lincoln noted that most items were covered earlier on the agenda tonight. An item of interest is improvements to the Lofts at Narrow driveway onto Elm Street where a stop sign, and speed bump have been installed in the parking lot to reduce the speed of traffic in this vicinity.

It was noted that Mr. Lincoln can remain on this committee as a citizen member in the new year.

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

- g. **Shade Tree Commission** – The December Shade Tree Commission meeting was cancelled.
- h. **Safety Committee** – Mr. Murray noted two days of CPR training that several officials and staff members attended this past month.

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

14. TREASURER'S REPORT:

- a. **Transfer of Funds** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted another request to transfer funds and the historically lean first quarter of the year until tax revenues begin to be received in April.

Motion to approve the transfer of \$300,000 from the PLGIT Prime account to the M&T Bank account. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **2024 Budget Adoption** – Mr. Lineaweaver requested consideration to adopt a 2024 budget.

Motion to adopt the proposed 2024 budget. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Lineaweaver requested approval of the 2024 Municipal Tax Sheet to be submitted to the Berks County Treasurer's Office.

Motion to approve the 2024 Municipal Tax Sheet respective millage rates. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Financial Statement Ending 11/30/2023** – There were no questions or comments.
- d. **Payment Approval Report 11/22/23 to 12/14/23 and 12/15/23 to 12/19/23** – There were no questions or comments.

Motion to approve the financial statement ending 11/30/2023, and Payment Approval Reports of 11/22/23 to 12/14/23 and 12/15/23 to 12/19/23. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

15. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Rogers inquired as to the real estate tax assessment appeal properties in question earlier tonight with regards to solicitor involvement. Mr. Becker indicated this pertains to all hospital properties being subject to property taxes. The borough is working in conjunction with the school district.

Mr. Lincoln took a moment to express his gratitude for the nine years he sat on Council, he enjoyed his time and considered it a privilege to serve the borough. Beyond that he commended the Public Works, Police, and Administration departments as being one of the best staff in the region. Everyone works extremely hard with a high workload and manages to bring it all to the table each month to keep the borough functioning. Finally, to our residents and property owners he shared his appreciation for attending the meetings each month and the face-to-face positive feedback, and criticism, to address important issues within the borough.

Mrs. Bressler echoed Mr. Lincoln noting the privilege and honor to serve the residents and businesses as a Council Member and the amazing staff. She will appreciate future Council Members for their work and dedication to their community.

Mr. Wert shared as a teacher of civics and public service that this is the foundation of the country. The trust that the constitution provides to the states and the states disperse to the counties and municipalities to determine how to run their individual communities must be ever vigilant.

Mayor Kaag requested a group photo to remember the board that served during a difficult time. She appreciates the lessons that were learned and personal growth.

16. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:31 p.m. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary