

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

April 21, 2020 – 7:00 p.m.

West Reading Borough Council held its regular monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, April 21, 2020 with the following persons present: Council President Jack Gombach; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Patrick Kaag, Jennifer Bressler, and Samantha Kaag; Mayor Andrew Kearney; Solicitor Daniel Becker; Police Chief Stephen Powell; Borough Manager Nicholas Imbesi; Public Works Director Dean Murray; Fire Chief Chad Moyer; Recreation Director Helen Moyer; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Code Department Manager Cathy Hoffman; Main Street Manager Mark Ratcliffe; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Council Member Nicholas Gardecki was unable to attend.

VISITORS: (In attendance via Zoom Meeting)

Karen Livingood	Resident
James Rogers	Resident
Suzanne Thompson	Resident
Mary Ellen Moreland	Non-Resident

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Jack Gombach called the meeting via Zoom to order at 7:01 p.m., which was followed by Roll Call. Mr. Gombach requested a moment of silence to honor those lost to the COVID-19 within the County and across the Country.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** Mary Ellen Moreland expressed an interest to reintroduce Victory Gardens in an effort to maintain self-sufficiency due to the recent food supply anxieties brought on by the COVID-19. A Victory Garden movement began during World War I and was reintroduced during World War II where it was estimated that home, school and community gardeners produced approximately 40% of the country's fresh vegetables. Mayor Kearney mentioned the Borough's Community Garden and was unsure if non-residents would be allowed to register for a plot of land. Mrs. Bressler indicated that the Library recently purchased e-books on this subject and a City Council Member is currently pursuing this avenue and recommended contacting their office to add Ms. Moreland's enthusiasm.

James Rogers inquired as to plans to close the pool and playground programs this summer. Mr. Gombach assured Mr. Rogers that this topic would be discussed later in the meeting. Mr. Rogers then inquired as to the status of uncollected rental funds for the Lofts at Narrow property. Mr. Imbesi stated that the funds have not yet been collected and could not comment any further on the subject due to legal proceedings. Mr. Rogers also inquired as to the status of the fire inspection of the Lofts at Narrow garage. Mr. Imbesi reported that the violations have been corrected and the garage has been issued a certificate of occupancy.
3. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:** Motion to approve the March 24, 2020 Council meeting minutes. **Moved** by Mrs. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 6-0.**
4. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**
 - a. **Resolution 2020-6 Extension of Emergency Proclamation** – This Resolution would extend the original Proclamation of Local Disaster Emergency signed by Mayor Kearney on March 17, 2020, which was extended to this meeting. Mr. Becker stated that since we are still under the Governor's Stay at Home Order, it is advisable to extend this emergency proclamation until the next Council meeting. If at some point Council would want to remove the emergency proclamation this could be accomplished via a special meeting of the Board.

Motion to approve Resolution 2020-6 Extension of Local Disaster Emergency Proclamation through May 19, 2020. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- b. **Resolution 2020-7 Extension of Business Privilege Tax Filing** – Mr. Imbesi noted that Wilson and Wyomissing Area School Districts, and the Borough of Wyomissing have extended their filing deadline to July 15, 2020 and Berks EIT's request to follow suit. Similarly, the Wyomissing Area School District and Berks EIT have requested to reduce the estimated 2020 tax payment from 100% to 50% due to the length of time businesses have been ordered to shut down. Mr. Becker stated that a Resolution could be created and signed from actions taken tonight.

Motion to approve Resolution 2020-7 Extension of Business Privilege Tax Filing through July 15, 2020 and Resolution 2020-8 Reduction of the 2020 Estimated Business Privilege Tax Amount from 100 percent to fifty percent. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 6-0.**

5. **CONSULTANT'S REPORT:**

- a. **Solicitor's Report** – Mr. Becker stated that he had nothing to report other than items that are currently on the agenda.
- b. **Engineer's Report** – Mr. Imbesi stated that Mr. Unger was unable to attend tonight's meeting and had nothing new to add to his report.

Motion to accept the Engineer's report. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

6. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Mr. Gombach noted an executive session that was held prior to tonight's meeting to discuss union negotiations and personnel matters.

7. **COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S REPORT:** Mr. Gombach took a moment to thank Borough staff, first responders and leadership individuals at the table that stepped up to the plate when COVID-19 issues needed to be addressed. Mr. Imbesi quickly responded in February when the CDC announced a warning of major life disruptions by assembling a team consisting of the Council President, Mayor, Solicitor, Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Public Works Director to implement an effective plan. Mr. Gombach stated that he is very proud and honored to be a part of this team.

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

- a. **Addendum to Police Contract** – This item was discussed during executive session. Mr. Imbesi requested authorization to sign the one-year contract extension addendum to the collective bargaining agreement.

Motion to approve the Addendum to the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Borough of West Reading and the Police Officers of the Borough of West Reading, extending the contract one-year. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- b. **Street Curbing** – Mr. Imbesi requested Council's feedback on revising the decision to require homeowners to repair their curbing in areas of planned paving projects during this challenging time. A number of residents have stated that they either cannot find a contractor during this shutdown period or are currently laid off from their employment.

Mr. Lincoln agreed that now is not the time to be asking residents to fund these improvements. However, it was recommended to delay the Pine Street and Sycamore Road paving projects until next year to allow more time for the Borough and residents to recover financially and make

these repairs. Also, UGI should be required to maintain their trenches on these roadways with a permanent patch until such time as the paving projects are practicable.

Mr. Wert recalled resident comments that were shared requesting alternative methods to fund these types of repairs. A project delay would afford an occasion to research these options.

Council agreed to notify the affected residents of the delay to these projects and review alternative funding methods.

- c. **Financial Strategic Plan** – The Center for Excellence in Local Government (CELG) has provided a Consulting Contract Agreement to review the Borough's finances in order to recommend operations that would maximize financial performance. The County of Berks has created a program that would fund 75% of the cost to perform these services; the CELG has agreed to waive the remaining 25% of this contract fee. Mr. Gombach assured Council that this would be a collaborative effort that could be adjusted as needed. Mr. Becker stated that the findings would be recommendations for Borough Council to refer to in the coming years.

Motion to enter into a Consulting Contract Agreement with CELG to perform a comprehensive review of the Borough's finances. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- d. **COVID-19 Pandemic Update/Policies** – Mr. Imbesi requested permission to insert three temporary policies into the employee handbook. ADP and the Emergency Family Medical Leave Expansion Act, as passed by Congress, have provided guidance on these policies.

Motion to approve the addition of three policies: COVID-19 Infectious Disease Control Policy; Public Health Emergency Leave Policy; and Emergency Paid Sick Leave for COVID-19 into the Employee Handbook. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- e. **Summer Events** – Mr. Imbesi requested Council Members to contemplate guidance for upcoming events planned by the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation and private businesses.
- f. **Possible Budget Savings** – A list of 2020 budgeted projects was provided to Council to consider postponement should a financial hardship be suffered as a result of the pandemic. Further budget information will be available next month after collection of real estate taxes during the discounted time period. Mr. Imbesi attended a meeting today via Zoom and it was recommended to review tax revenues that were collected during the recent 2008-2009-recession period. The Treasurer and Mr. Imbesi plan to gather this information.

Mr. Lincoln requested the Department Heads feedback for their respective items on the list. It was recommended to pursue the sewer main upgrade on Linden Lane should grant funding become available. Mr. Murray agreed that the bucket truck, pool fence and repointing of the Pavilion could be delayed. Mr. Kaag inquired about the pedestrian bridge, Mr. Imbesi stated that further communication has not been received from UGI or the engineer.

Mrs. Moyer noted discussions through the Recreation Commission and the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society to review how other park systems are handling this shutdown. Most municipalities are reviewing their options on a month-to-month basis. Mrs. Moyer indicated that June 15th would be an ideal deadline to open the pool should conditions allow. A decision to open the pool during the May meeting would allow sufficient time to prepare the pool for

opening to the public on June 15th. The Playground Program may not be a suitable program to host this year due to the number of children that register for this program.

Mr. Gombach was not comfortable making a decision to open the pool as early as June 15th due to the added burden that could potentially detract from essential services. CDC guidance for public pools should be reviewed to allow Council to derive an educated decision. Mr. Kaag anticipates a slight increase in COVID-19 cases once people are allowed to return to work and noted the recent opening of the Community Garden with strict guidelines in place. Mrs. Kaag recommended erring on the side of caution and to discuss this further next month.

- g. **Wireless Lease Negotiations** – Mr. Imbesi reported that Verizon intends to install 5G cell towers throughout the Borough and with that a Master License Agreement would be needed. The Cohen Law Group specializes in these types of agreements and has recently been approved by Council to negotiate the cable franchise contract. The cost for wireless lease negotiations has been quoted at \$2,400. Mr. Becker stated that the Cohen Law Group is a good resource for these types of services. The cost for services is divided between multiple municipalities and is more than likely less expensive than preparing a contract in-house.

Mr. Lincoln expressed concern regarding a joint venture on a local level where our conditions may differ from the other municipalities. Mr. Becker indicated that we would have an opportunity for involvement in the contract details specific to West Reading.

Motion to authorize the Borough Manager to sign the letter of engagement with Cohen Law Group to negotiate a wireless lease. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- h. **Street Cleaning** – Postponement of parking enforcement for street cleaning through the month of April was discussed now that the stay at home order has been extended through May 8th. Mr. Murray indicated that cleaning is performed as needed with the limited crew hours. Council agreed to extend the postponement through May 8th with an option to revisit this extension as needed.

Mr. Wert shared Mr. Imbesi's accomplishment in achieving his Master's Degree in Public Administration through Villanova University. Congratulations Mr. Imbesi!

- 9. **MAYOR'S REPORT:** Mayor Kearney thanked Chief Powell, Mr. Imbesi and Mr. Becker for taking care of the Police contract negotiations by extending the contract one-year in light of the COVID-19 issue. Also, Mayor Kearney thanked Chief Powell and Mr. Imbesi for their exemplary service in taking care of the 4,200 citizens of West Reading during this pandemic.

Motion to accept the Mayor's report. **Moved** by Mrs. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

10. DEPARTMENT REPORTS:

- a. **Police Department** - Chief Powell referred to his written report and offered to answer any questions. There were no comments.

Motion to accept the Police Department report. **Moved** by Mrs. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- b. **Public Works Department** - Mr. Murray noted the recent tree damage caused by a windstorm in the traffic circle and Linden Lane. The majority of the Oak tree in the circle has been removed and

he is in the process of obtaining quotes to remove the remaining trunk of the tree. Mr. Wert recommended reaching out to DCNR for contacts if needed or alternatively processing the trunk into wood chips to be used around the Borough. Mr. Lincoln inquired as to any damage to the home on Linden Lane where a large branch fell. Mr. Murray indicated that there was minor awning damage to the front porch roof and that crewmembers quickly removed the debris. Mayor Kearney stated that he knows the gentleman who owns the affected home on Linden Lane and that the resident was ecstatic by the service of the Borough.

Motion to accept the Public Works Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- c. **Fire Department** - Chief Moyer reported that the entry fob system for the Fire Department has been in need of an upgrade for quite some time, and recently the ability to track key fob use for security purposes has been lost. Western Berks Ambulance has offered to share the \$3,400 cost to replace this system. Chief Moyer indicated to Western Berks Ambulance that this cost had not been factored into the 2020 budget. Western Berks Ambulance has offered to fund the entire balance this year with an agreement from the Borough to remit \$1,700 in the year 2021.

Council agreed that we should take advantage of this opportunity and reimburse Western Berks Ambulance as early as possible.

Motion to accept the Fire Department report. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- d. **Code Department** - Mrs. Hoffman was unable to converse due to technical difficulties. Mr. Wert shared his recent interaction with a Systems Design Engineering staff member who enforces property maintenance within the Borough. A new approach has been implemented to remind residents via a letter placed in their door of basic property maintenance items prior to issuing a notice of violation. Mr. Wert admired this initiative for items that should be easily addressed during the pandemic, to avoid backsliding on property maintenance items.

Motion to accept the Code Department report. **Moved** by Mrs. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- e. **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation** - Mr. Ratcliffe reported that merchants are muddling through this business shutdown time period. Efforts are being made to offer "West Reading Tag Your Take Out" and weekly email blasts are being sent to the general population. With regards to cancellation of large events, the decision will be made during the May meeting for the June 20th Art on the Avenue event.

Motion to accept the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 6-0.**

11. COMMITTEE / COMMISSION REPORTS: All meetings were cancelled during the month of April due to the Stay-at-Home order.

- a. **Recreation Commission** – Mrs. Moyer reported that seasonal staffing background checks are currently on hold due to the expense that is incurred by the Borough. Sponsorship of the Concert in the Park events is needed, and at this time the first event has been cancelled. A decision will be needed to reopen the basketball court and playground areas possibly with the required use of masks. The May Recreation Commission meeting will be held via a Zoom meeting. The Humane

Society has donated two skids of dog and cat food to provide to our residents, and the designated pickup location is at the Bicentennial House.

Motion to accept the Recreation Director's report. **Moved** by Mrs. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 6-0.**

12. TREASURER'S REPORT:

a. Financial Statement – 3 months ending 3/31/2020

- b. Payment Approval Report 3/25/20 to 4/16/20 & 4/17/20 to 4/21/20** - Mrs. Rentschler noted that new COVID-19 GL codes have been added to the second payment approval report to track expenses.

Motion to approve the Payment Approval Report 3/25/20 to 4/16/20 & 4/17/20 to 4/21/20. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- c. 2019 DCED Audit** – One deficiency was found during the audit regarding sewer billing for one of the hospital accounts and the Lofts at Narrow. These two accounts were being billed at a residential rate as opposed to a commercial rate. The billing deficiency was calculated and added to their last statement. Both accounts have been paid in full without question. Mr. Wert asked if revenue projections were revised for this year due to this finding, Mrs. Rentschler indicated that she would make this modification.
- d. 2019 Tax Collector Audit** – There were no findings within this audit.
- e. 2019 Police & Non-Uniform Pension Plans** – The financial statements that were generated in February appeared to be in good order. However, it was suggested to meet following the pandemic to discuss the affects and recommended course of action.

Mayor Kearney requested Jeanette's thoughts on the Borough's financial future. Mrs. Rentschler indicated that it is unclear at this time and that it may take years to feel the full impact on items such as the Minimum Municipal Obligations.

Motion to accept the Treasurer's report. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

13. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Rogers requested the billing discrepancy information to be repeated since it was difficult for him to hear. Also, Mr. Rogers shared his agreement with the Borough Manager's decision regarding street cleaning.

- 14. ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:39 p.m. **Moved** by Mrs. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary