

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING  
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

**March 28, 2023 – 7:00 p.m.**

West Reading Borough Council held its second monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, March 28, 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, Denise Drobnick, and Zachary Shaver; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Solicitor Daniel Becker; Fire Chief and Code Enforcement Officer Chad Moyer; Police Chief Wayne Holben; Police Officer Nicholas Karetas (via Zoom); Borough Manager Dean Murray; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

**VISITORS:**

Karen Livingood, Resident	James Rogers, Resident
Kacie Rodriguez, Resident	Rafael Torres, Resident
Antonia Lineaweaver, Resident (via Zoom)	Charles Aden, Resident
Douglas Olexy, Resident	Kate Mallow, Resident
Lance Parmer, Fire Police	Ty Gardner, Resident (via Zoom)
Donna Reed, City of Reading Council President	Jason Witman, Assistant Fire Chief (via Zoom)
Tom Evans, Bethany Lutheran Church	Pamela Seaman, County Office of Mental Health
Chera Wertz, Reading Hospital Chaplain	Debbie Gruesel, Crisis Response Canines
Ralph Johnson, County Fire Department Chaplain	Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz, State Representative
Tom Gombar, State Senate District Office Director	
Spencer Thornburg, State Senate Communications Director	

Council President Ryan Lineaweaver thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting noting that brief statements are welcome. He apologized to the press if they were in attendance to discuss the investigation. Tonight's meeting is strictly for the community to provide knowledge of resources that are available including a therapy dog.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Ryan Lineaweaver called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m., which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.
2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:**  
Mr. Lineaweaver noted an executive session that was held today at 6:30 p.m. to discuss personnel matters relating to selection of an alternate candidate for the Police Department Administrative Aide position and strategy related to police emergency management. A moment of silence was requested to honor the lives lost on Friday evening in the explosion at R.M. Palmer Company.
3. **AGENDA AMENDMENTS:**  
There were no amendments to the agenda.
4. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**  
Mr. Lineaweaver noted a handful of representatives in attendance from numerous places to share information on available resources available to the community. Mr. Lineaweaver personally intends to utilize some of these resources and vowed to never complain of being tired again after witnessing the services of our police, fire, EMT's, and public works personnel this

past weekend. There is a sense of pride in the community joining together and an admiration for those that risk their lives during the rescue and recovery process.

Ms. Seaman noted the County's contract with Holcomb Behavioral Associates that offers services at 401 Buttonwood Street, West Reading. Crisis intervention is a service that is funded for the community. She noted that everyone's crisis looks different, and everyone calls for different reasons, there is no bad call. They are available 24/7 by phone, walk-in or mobile response. Currently their Emergency Behavioral Health Response Team is available with clinicians and other community partner volunteers as part of a team that responds to big and small situations, such as large disasters to bank robberies.

Ms. Wertz introduced herself as one of the Chaplains of the Spiritual Care Department for the Reading Hospital that offers bereavement support groups.

Ms. Gruesel introduced herself and Piper, both of which have special training and certifications. Their motto is "Strength through Comfort". They respond to disasters and mass shootings, noting that there is a team currently travelling to Nashville, Tennessee. Dogs are non-judgmental and intuitive and latch onto the person with the most need.

Mr. Johnson introduced himself as a County Fire Department Chaplain and member of the Shillington Fire Department. The County offers Chaplain services to first responders, public officials, and the community.

Mr. Gombar introduced himself and Mr. Thornburg as representatives of Senator Schwank's office and commended local EMS, members of Council and Mayor Kaag for the outstanding job and response to this past weekend's tragedy, and to the community for coming together. Mr. Gombar noted on Monday morning their office followed up with the Governor requesting their assistance to offset the expense to the Borough and EMS responders, they offered to assist in the application process. Secondly, to assist businesses that have been displaced due to extraordinary circumstances a rapid response for unemployment compensation through the Department of Labor and Industry has been made available.

State Representative Cepeda-Freytiz didn't have words to describe her feelings but admires how the community has come together to do what they can to help and assist the community's needs. She assured everyone that we are not alone and offered her support in any way possible, stating we are in this together.

Mr. Lineaweaver expressed his gratefulness to the community from public works to those that answer the phones. An exhaustive list will be created to thank everyone during the regular April meeting at the firehouse. Mr. Lineaweaver provided an update from the Berks County Community Foundation stating that the disaster relief fund has collected in excess of \$330,000.

Mr. Rogers said thank you for what everyone did last weekend. He shared an incident forty-seven years ago within the 400 block of Franklin Street where a house fire began at 413 Franklin Street and spread to 419 Franklin Street, he lived at 425 Franklin Street at the time. He personally saw what the fire department and community were able to do then, and he saw it again. That's why he wanted to say, thank you.

Bethany Lutheran Church shared their plans to open the church before and after the memorial on Friday. Food or snack donations may be delivered to the church at 5:00 p.m. with the doors

opening at 6:00 p.m. Requests can be made for healing or memorial services and the food pantry can be made available to anyone who has been displaced.

Ms. Mallow hopes to coordinate a metropolitan response similar to the September 11<sup>th</sup> incident when she lived in Hoboken, New Jersey. There's a healing arc that differs for everyone. It is important to be open to offering services for an extended period of time. The plans that have been put into place are solid and she thanked everyone for their thoughtfulness and compassionate responses.

Mr. Olexy of Reading Avenue inquired as to UGI no parking signs along Reading and Third Avenues prior to the incident, and wondered if there are issues with the gas infrastructure. Mr. Murray noted that UGI was planning to restore paving prior to the explosion, this activity has been placed on hold while they focus their efforts on the R.M. Palmer incident.

Ms. Reed indicated that she is present on behalf of the nearly 100,000 residents of the City of Reading to offer their condolences and support in any way they can. It was heartbreaking to know what was happening. The way everyone stepped up to the plate makes her proud to be a public servant. The Borough of West Reading has been exemplary to your constituents and to the outside world, your transparency, your compassion, your thoughtfulness, your calm in the face of this kind of devastation is a lesson to all of us who are public servants. She'd tip her hat to the Mayor and Council President if she wore one and shared her profound admiration. Ms. Reed noted that the first responders have been working closely as neighbors, and on Friday evening she plans to join the peaceful memorial being planned near the firehouse.

Mayor Kaag noted the candlelight vigil being planned on Friday evening is for the affected parties. She thanked Bethany Lutheran Church for their offerings and noted that PennDOT would not allow the closure of the Penn Street bridge. Therefore, an alternate location has been chosen near the West Reading Fire Company at the footbridge adjacent to the field. It will be a peaceful gathering where a memorial could be established in the future. The firehouse will be open to people that would like to donate food for the event. This will be a celebration of life, bring pictures, bring stories, and come together as a community to heal together. Additional details will be released via social media. The West Reading Community was encouraged to walk together to the venue to allow parking for visitors.

5. **ORDINANCE / RESOLUTION:**

- a. **Resolution 2023-4 Extension of Local Disaster Emergency** – Mr. Lineaweaver reported that on March 25, 2023 Mayor Kaag signed a Proclamation of Local Disaster Emergency to be eligible for any and all federal, state, and county disaster emergency funds that may become available for emergency services. The proclamation is valid for seven days. Adoption of this resolution would extend the local disaster emergency until the April 18<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, at which time an additional extension could be adopted if necessary.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2023-4 Extension of Local Disaster Emergency through April 18, 2023. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 7-0.**

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

- a. **Road Closure** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to authorize the closure of South Second Avenue from Franklin Street to Penn Avenue and the 100 block of Cherry Street until

such time as state and local officials deem it safe to reopen. Mr. Lineaweaver reported that the area is currently under investigation and until it is released back to the Borough, South Second Avenue will remain closed. Mr. Wert recommended adding federal officials to the motion.

Motion to authorize the closure of South Second Avenue from Franklin Street to Penn Avenue and the 100 block of Cherry Street until such time as federal, state, and local officials deem it safe to reopen. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

7. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Ms. Rodriguez noted that she lives on Linden Lane and commended the West Reading first responders for being onsite within minutes of the explosion. She offered her condolences to everyone that lost someone in the R.M. Palmer disaster. This tragedy has been difficult for the community. However, seeing elected officials that have jobs and families being present on scene day and night the entire weekend was very touching. It is beautiful and inspiring to see everyone coming together and going above and beyond the call of duty. Ms. Rodriguez thanked everyone and asked them to stay strong.

Mr. Lineaweaver thanked the often-forgotten fire police for their important assistance at the scene.

Mr. Johnson recognized the unsung heroes that are near and dear to his heart, the Public Works Department. They were called to do things beyond their scope of work and stepped up to the plate for hours on end.

Mayor Kaag also recognized the Public Works Department noting that on Friday night she literally witnessed them giving the jackets and sweatshirts off their backs to anyone in need. She could not be prouder of the Public Works Department. We have an amazing fire department, police department, and administrative staff. Everyone is working very hard together. Another unsung hero is Berks Emergency Dispatch Services, those calls are not easy to take. She wants to make sure they also have access to needed services.

8. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:37 p.m. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira  
Borough Secretary