

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

November 2, 2024 – 9:00 a.m.

West Reading Borough Council held a Budget Workshop and Council Meeting at Borough Hall on Saturday, November 2, 2024 with the following persons present: Council President Ryan Lineaweaver; Council Pro-Tem Patrick Kaag; Council Members Denise Drobnick, Zachary Shaver, Zanna Leiendecker, and Bethany Bower; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Chief of Police Richard Tornielli; Public Works Director Kerry Grassley; Recreation Director Michael Esterly; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Assistant Treasurer Helen Moyer; Borough Manager Randall Miller; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Council Vice President Philip Wert was unable to attend.

VISITORS: None

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Ryan Lineaweaver called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m., which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.
2. **AGENDA AMENDMENTS:** There were no amendments to the agenda.
3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**
There were no public comments.
4. **BOROUGH MANAGER'S REPORT:**
Mr. Miller reviewed the following items:
 - a. **Removal of Underground Storage Tanks** – Mr. Miller noted continued efforts to revise the scope of work to obtain three quotes that fall below the bidding threshold to remove underground storage tanks and pumps at 433 Penn Avenue. One quote has been received to date from Hafer Equipment totaling \$19,400 that falls below the bidding threshold of \$23,200. Mr. Miller recommended awarding a contract to remove the tanks at the same time as requesting Systems Design Engineering to perform a Phase II Environmental Assessment to coordinate soil sampling efforts. It was decided to table action at this time until additional quotes are received.
 - b. **Free Market and Community Cleanup Events** – Mr. Miller requested consideration to approve a Free Market event today and Community Cleanup event tomorrow.

Motion to approve a Free Market event on Saturday, November 2, 2024 and a Community Cleanup event on Sunday, November 3, 2024. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Ms. Leiendecker. **Motion carried 6-0.**
 - c. **Information Technology Contract** – Mr. Miller requested consideration of extending the contract with Solve IT Solutions for three years. A review of services provided to the Borough took place roughly a week ago that listed a number of computer stations in need of upgrades to Windows 11 and a number of computer stations that are at the end of life. As a cost saving measure it was decided to convert users with both a laptop and desktop to a laptop with docking station that can seamlessly be used on and off site while repurposing desktops to stations that are at the end of life. This process will eliminate ten computers with annual cost savings of roughly \$2,400. It was not recommended to lower the proposed budget for 2025. Mayor Kaag inquired as to the consideration of requesting quotes from

other vendors. Mr. Miller stated that Solve IT Solutions is familiar with the system and thought at the time of server upgrades would be a time to consider alternate quotes.

Motion to approve extending the contract with Solve IT Solutions for three years to November 30, 2027 not to exceed \$4,500 per month. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- d. **Phase I Environmental Site Assessment** – An executive summary of the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment of 433 Penn Avenue was provided to Borough Council with a full report available for review in Mr. Miller’s office. The findings of minor contamination such as hydraulic and heating fluids revealed a fairly clean assessment.

Motion to accept the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment of 433 Penn Avenue. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- e. **Animal Control Services Contract** – There were no recommendations of an alternate service provider at this time. Moving forward there are plans to communicate and coordinate a multi-municipal program to solve this ongoing issue. Safety Net Sanctuary is increasing their fee to \$1.50 per capita, causing an increased expense to the borough of \$1,500, the Animal Rescue League is assessing a fee of \$7 per capita. Mr. Grassley noted his thoughts on becoming certified as an Animal Control Officer to be able to perform these services in-house. Chief Tornielli reported that there is a limited number of times his department has needed to utilize Safety Net Sanctuary’s services since they do not handle stray cats and are unavailable to transport dogs to their Fleetwood location. Generally, the police department is able to reunite animals with their owners. Mr. Lineaweaver noted that an Animal Control Officer is required to declare Code Red or Code Blue instances. Mayor Kaag spoke of a resident group that is trapping and neutering stray cats at their own expense. It was decided to allocate \$1,000 within the 2025 budget for No-Nonsense Neutering Vouchers as a trial program. Ms. Bower recommended reviewing the current regulations to allow the release of neutered cats. Mayor Kaag would like the Environmental Advisory Council to review possible initiatives to address stray cat issues.

Motion to enter into an Animal Services Agreement in 2025 with Safety Net Sanctuary. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Motion to accept the Borough Manager’s report. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

5. **BUDGET DISCUSSIONS:**

Sewer Fund – Mr. Miller reported that a rate increase is not needed to balance the sewer fund that is projected to end the year with a \$31,613 surplus.

Sanitation Fund – Likewise, a rate increase is not needed to balance the sanitation fund that is projected to end the year with a \$71,164 surplus.

Recreation Fund – A transfer of \$125,534 from the General Fund is needed to balance the budgeted expenses totaling \$352,655. The biggest loss of revenue within the program is the Concession Stand. Notable remedies were a reduction in the number of hours the stand is open, reducing the number of staff, or outsourcing the responsibility at no cost to the borough. An example of outsourcing was provided that is practiced by the Antietam Pool. Mr. Esterly indicated

that staple menu items would remain with the addition of other food or drink items. Mr. Lineaweaver recommended that local food establishments be contacted for their potential interest prior to seeking an outside vendor. Mr. Miller did not recommend a change to the proposed budget.

Water Fund – A letter was received from Western Berks Water Authority (WBWA) to explain their 19% rate increase. A 4% increase was allocated for operations and a 15% increase for capital improvements and capital reserves. Frustration from residents was shared on the numerous recent water main breaks. Mr. Miller spoke of his efforts to communicate with WBWA and a request for future notification of planned modifications to the system. It was noted that WBWA pointed blame for the most recent main breaks to hydrant flushing activity. This activity took place thirty-hours before the water main breaks and has been practiced twice a year for a number of years without incident. Spikes in water pressure are now being monitored and recorded. Mr. Grassley shared a recommendation he received to replace a twenty-to-thirty-foot length of pipe during water main breaks to alleviate the stress caused to shorter sections. Mayor Kaag requested to be included in communications with WBWA. It was noted that WBWA's public meeting is scheduled for November 11th. Plans to attend the meeting should be shared with the two borough appointed members. Mr. Lineaweaver recommended giving WBWA next week to communicate and if no efforts are made, residents and officials should plan to attend their public meeting on the 11th. Ms. Leiendecker recommended that a water engineer or expert take part in conversations between the borough and WBWA. Mr. Miller reported that the borough engineer is writing an emergency LSA Grant Application to replace the water main along Olive Street. Various methods to fund this repair were discussed such as unused bond funds for 433 Penn Avenue, and the estimated year end water fund balance. Mr. Miller shared the proposed water rate increases of 15% for residential uses and 20% for commercial/industrial uses. These types of increases will create a conservation component by consumers that will affect revenues for both the borough and WBWA.

General Fund – A deficit of \$653,568 was finessed through reallocation of actual grant fund expenditures next year bringing the deficit to \$153,568. A large expenditure from the General Fund are transfers to the Capital Fund. Review of the allocation of \$560,000 for 433 Penn Avenue construction plans for next year was discussed. A Phase II Environmental Site Assessment, tank removal, and site plans were definitive expenses for next year totaling roughly \$85,000. The remaining \$475,000 could be moved to the 2026 budget.

30-430-000 Highways Capital Expense – Changes to planned 2025 projects were discussed. The Spruce Street and Ann Street paving projects would be covered entirely through grant funding, the 500 block of Spruce Street from savings associated with a change in the scope of work and line painting performed in-house. Seventh Avenue was recommended to be placed on hold due to the recent multiple water main breaks. Alley paving projects on the 600 block of Court Street and 700 block of Cherry Street would be funded through the Sanitation Fund. Reading Avenue from Seventh Avenue to and including the traffic circle are planned as well as the 400 block Chestnut Street. These changes would provide savings of \$185,000. A reduction of \$31,000 for line painting performed in-house brought the proposed 2025 budget down to \$479,000.

The two noted changes reduced the 2025 Capital Fund expenditures \$506,000, proposing a total expenditure of \$1,739,230.

Mr. Miller shared a caveat to the existing tax structure based on information received from the solicitor's office where Scottish Rite Cathedral may become tax exempt due to a legislative change that adds a classification to tax exempt categories that is in direct correlation to the use of this property. This would reduce tax revenues by roughly \$36,000.

All the noted changes and a proposed 0.50 mil tax increase brought the 2025 General Fund surplus to \$253,598.

Mr. Miller requested consideration to authorize the advertisement for a proposed 2025 budget.

Moved by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Mr. Lineaweaver requested consideration to authorize the advertisement for an amendment to the General-Purpose tax rate by increasing 0.50 mills. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms.

Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Mr. Lineaweaver requested consideration to authorize the advertisement for an amendment to the 2025 water rates increasing residential uses 15% and commercial/industrial uses 20%. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

7. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

There were no public comments.

8. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:01 a.m. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Leiendecker. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary