

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

December 17, 2024 – 7:00 p.m.

West Reading Borough Council held its regular monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, December 17, 2024 with the following persons present: Council President Ryan Lineaweaver; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Patrick Kaag; Council Members Denise Drobnick, Zachary Shaver, and Bethany Bower; Junior Council Person Brian Pascal; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Solicitor Daniel Becker, Code Department Manager & Fire Chief Chad Moyer; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Public Works Director Kerry Grassley; Chief of Police Richard Tornielli; Engineer Pamela Stevens; Recreation Director Michael Esterly; Borough Manager Randall Miller; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Zanna Leiendecker was unable to attend.

VISITORS:

James Rogers, Resident

Suzanne Thompson, Resident

Jean Witmer, Resident

Michael Fitzgerald, Visitor

Kate Mallow, Resident

Dan Moscaritolo, Reporter (via Zoom)

Tyler Weisman, Resident & New Castle Lawn & Landscape Representative

Charles Aden, Resident & State Representative Constituent Services Advisor

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:** An executive session was held at 6:30 p.m. tonight to discuss personnel in relation to hiring police officers.
3. **AGENDA AMENDMENTS:** Consideration was requested to amend the agenda to include acceptance of the Civil Service Commission's certified eligibility list for the position of Entry Level Police Officer. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**
4. **PRESENTATION:** Mr. Fitzgerald expressed his gratitude to Borough Council and the Recreation Commission to host the Lauren Foundation's 20th anniversary 5K event. He shared that the foundation was created in memory of his daughter who died of brain cancer in 2005. There was a great turnout for the event that generated \$25,000. In gratitude, Mr. Fitzgerald presented a check in the amount of \$1,500 that he requested be allocated towards a children's program either through the Recreation or Police Departments. He shared that proceeds are distributed in various ways such as scholarships and to help families care for children with serious health conditions.

Mr. Fitzgerald departed the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

5. **COMMENDATION:** Mayor Kaag read aloud a commendation to Tyler Weisman, a committed resident who through his leadership role at New Castle Lawn & Landscape planned and executed the Palmer Memorial Garden, creating a serene area for remembrance.

Mr. Weisman and New Castle Lawn & Landscape team members departed the meeting at 7:06 p.m.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ms. Mallow shared her concerns about the proposed Western Berks Water Authority water rate increase based in part on a reduction in consumption. This should not be a burden to residents or customers but should be reviewed internally to reduce salaries, staffing or other expenses. She asked if all required minutes and financial documents have been received and reviewed by Borough Council. If not, she suggested this happens prior to implementing a rate increase. Mr. Lineaweaver reported that

the missing meeting minutes have been received but not fully reviewed at this time. Ms. Mallow asked if the borough has been compensated for expenses associated with the water hammer caused by Western Berks Water Authority last July. Ms. Mallow thanked Borough Council for their time and consideration of her concerns. Mr. Lineaweaver noted that the Western Berks Water Authority holds public meetings and residents are able to attend and speak during public comment periods.

7. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:**

Motion to approve November 19, 2024 meeting minutes. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

8. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**

a. **Ordinance 1187 2025 Water Rate Amendment** – Consideration was requested to adopt an increase to water rates for 2025. Mr. Wert noted that Western Berks Water Authority has already adopted their 2025 budget and will be passing on a 19% rate increase to the borough next year. Should the borough choose not to pass the rate increase onto residents the borough would be hindered in maintaining the water infrastructure. He is disappointed with the two appointed borough authority members in that they are not in attendance at this meeting to answer questions or to provide insight. Mr. Grassley noted a request for authority member attendance at council meetings, they offered to attend Traffic and Infrastructure Committee meetings instead. He assured residents and council that he will continue to meet with and communicate with the water authority to keep the lines of communication open to influence budgetary savings. Mr. Lineaweaver noted posts on Facebook about the increase and did not receive feedback, nor are any new residents in attendance at this meeting in person or virtually. He urged residents to attend water authority meetings to voice their opinions.

Motion to adopt an increase to water rates for 2025. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

b. **Ordinance 1188 2025 Tax Rate Amendment** – A 0.5 mill tax increase was proposed that would increase the General-Purpose tax to 9.75 mills to ensure that we continue to climb out of the structural deficit.

Motion to adopt an increase to the General-Purpose Tax rate to 9.75 mills. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

c. **Ordinance 1189 Environmental Advisory Council Composition** – Consideration was requested to adopt an amendment that would remove the Borough Manager as a member of this committee while increasing the number of residents from six to seven members.

Motion to adopt an amendment to remove the Borough Manager while increasing the number of residents on the Environmental Advisory Council. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

d. **Ordinance – Vehicles and Traffic** – Consideration was requested to advertise amendments to the accessible parking space designations, include short-term no parking events, and prohibit parking to align with trash and recycling collection timeframes.

Motion to authorize the advertisement to add and remove accessible parking spaces on South Second Avenue and South Third Avenue respectively, include short-term no parking events within temporary and emergency regulations, and amend prohibited parking for certain hours on Dusk

Alley to align trash and recycling timeframes. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- e. **Resolution 2024-33 2025 Salaries and Wages** – Consideration was requested to establish the salaries and wages of borough employees for 2025.

Motion to adopt a resolution establishing the 2025 salaries and wages of borough employees. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- f. **Resolution 2024-34 Reaffirm Zoning Hearing Board Appointments** – Consideration was requested to reaffirm the 2025 Zoning Hearing Board appointments.

Motion to reaffirm the 2025 Zoning Hearing Board appointments of Rodney Baer, Joseph Brennan and Stacey Shirk, and alternate members Karen Livingood and Rae Wheelan. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- g. **Resolution 2024-35 Fee Schedule Amendment** – Consideration of adopting an abandoned vehicle storage permit annual fee, increasing pool, playground and rental program fees, and establishing a Code Enforcement Officer service fee per hour.

Motion to adopt amendments to the fee schedule to include an abandoned vehicle storage permit annual fee, increase to pool, playground and rental fees, and establish an hourly service fee for a Code Enforcement Officer. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- h. **Resolution 2024-36 Accessible Parking Space Policy** – An amendment to the policy that would increase the percentage of allowed accessible spaces from 10% to 30% in areas that are primarily used for hospital or medical services.

Motion to adopt an amendment to the Accessible Parking Space Policy to increase the maximum number of people with disabilities parking spaces to 30% of available parking spaces within the 200 Block of South Sixth Avenue and 300 Block of South Seventh Avenue, which are located within hospital or medical locations. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- i. **Resolution 2024-37 Experimental Parking Regulations** – The addition of a 20-minute parking space within the 700 Block of Penn Avenue, revisions to parking spaces within the North Fifth Avenue block, and additional parking spaces on the 500 Block of Chestnut Street were proposed.

Motion to adopt experimental parking regulations to include a 20-minute parking space within the south side of the 700 Block of Penn Avenue, first space west of Eighth Avenue, the addition of parking spaces within the 500 Block of Chestnut Street and North Fifth Avenue block. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

9. **CONSULTANTS' REPORT:**

- a. **Solicitor's Report** – Mr. Becker did not have anything new to report.

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

- **Green Light-Go Year 9 and 10 Traffic Signal Upgrades** – The consultant has begun designing year nine. Ms. Stevens is awaiting comments on year ten pre-scoping to apply for a grant by February 28, 2025.

- **Ann Street Multi-Model Grant** – The contractor has submitted Payment Application No. 2 in the amount of \$76,656.66. Next month the closeout and final payment for retainage in the amount of \$20,902.02 is expected.

Motion to approve Payment Application No. 2 to Forino in the amount of \$76,656.66 for the Ann Street Multi-Modal curbing, sidewalk, and ADA improvements project. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- **MORE Grant** – The packet of information was recently received with plans to move forward in 2025 to perform an energy audit.
- **500 Block of Spruce Street Water Line Replacement** – The project has been completed under bid due to the method of installation and elimination of two service connections. A deduction Change Order No. 1 has been received in the amount of (\$36,783.30).

Motion to approve Change Order No. 1 to Barrasso Excavation, Inc. in the amount of (\$36,783.30) for the 500 Block Spruce Street Water Line Replacement project. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

A final Payment Application No. 2 has been received in the amount of \$1,821.72 representing close out and release of retainage.

Motion to approve Payment Application No. 2 to Barrasso Excavation, Inc. in the amount of \$1,821.72 for the 500 Block Spruce Street Water Line Replacement project. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Ms. Stevens recommended creating an invoice for time and materials associated with Public Works involvement in this project as legitimate expenses to be reimbursed through grant funding.

- **Olive Street and Sixth Avenue Water Line Replacement Projects** – Ms. Stevens encouraged Mr. Aden to assist the borough in seeking Statewide Local Share Account (LSA) grant approvals for these projects.

Motion to accept the Engineer's report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

10. COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

Mr. Lineaweaver introduced Brian Pascal as the new Junior Council Person. Mr. Pascal noted that he is studying two majors, one in Political Science and Philosophy and the other in Computer Science.

Motion to appoint Brian Pascal as a Junior Council Person. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Mr. Lineaweaver thanked all of Borough Council for their diligent work throughout the year.

Motion to accept the Council President's report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

11. BOROUGH MANAGER'S REPORT:

Mr. Miller reviewed the following items:

- **2025 Meeting Schedule** – A request was made for authorization to advertise next year's meeting schedule.

Motion to authorize the advertisement of the 2025 meeting schedule as presented. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- **Committee Appointments** – Mr. Miller requested consideration to appoint or reappoint members to various boards. Mr. Lineaweaver shared the following:
 - **Planning Commission** – Reappointment of Jennifer Bressler and Zanna Leiendecker through December of 2028.
 - **Recreation Commission** – Reappointment of Bethany Bower, Jennifer Sabol, Taryn Duncan, and John Harvey through December of 2026. There is a vacancy on this commission.
 - **Finance Committee** – Reappointment of John Harvey and Robert Lockyer through December of 2025. There are two vacancies on this committee.
 - **Environmental Advisory Council** – Reappointment of Samantha Kaag through December of 2027.
 - **Board of Appeals** – Reappointment of Andrew Moletress through December of 2027.
 - **Housing Review Board** – Reappointment of Mark Burkholder through December of 2027.

Motion to reappoint board members as presented. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- **Phase II Environmental Site Assessment** – Mr. Miller requested consideration to appoint Systems Design Engineering, including their subcontractor Earth Engineering to perform the soil sampling analysis of 433 Penn Avenue at a cost estimate of \$11,425. Tank removal and site closure assistance would be handled by Systems Design Engineering at a cost estimate of \$1,500. These services would run in conjunction with Hafer Equipment's underground storage tank and fuel pump removals.

Motion to appoint Systems Design Engineering, Inc. to perform a Phase II Environmental Assessment Tank Removal and Site Closure services for 433 Penn Avenue in an amount not to exceed \$1,500. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Motion to appoint Earth Engineering, Inc. to perform soil sampling and analysis at 433 Penn Avenue in an amount not to exceed \$11,425. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- **Cherry Street Reopening** – Mr. Miller reported that the 100 block of Cherry Street has been released by all agencies involved in the investigation and demolition of R.M. Palmer buildings. Ratification of the reopening of this street was requested.

Motion to ratify the reopening of the 100 block of Cherry Street. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Motion to accept the Borough Manager's report. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Ms. Stevens departed the meeting at 7:48 p.m.

12. **MAYOR'S REPORT:** Mayor Kaag reviewed her report noting the following:

- A police department meeting was held on December 2nd to discuss multiple items such as a five-year strategic plan.
- Volunteered at the Small Business Saturday event that included ribbon cutting for Mix and Make Up.
- Attended the tree lighting ceremony that was well organized by the Recreation Commission.
- Shared insights from the R.M. Palmer incident at the Pipeline Safety Trust conference.
- Gas emergency training for the fire department is being coordinated through a grant-funded initiative partnered with the Chief of Rockland County Hazmat Team.
- Natural gas alarms donated by DeNova Detect were distributed to residents more than a year ago. It was recommended to purchase a natural gas alarm for your home and Mayor Kaag reviewed the list of gas emergency steps such as avoiding sparks, evacuation, and calling for help.
- A list of ongoing priorities was noted such as WalkWorks initiatives, memorial relocation and maintenance, and community outreach and engagement.

Motion to accept the Mayor's report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Mr. Shaver thanked Mayor Kaag for her in person attendance at the NTSB hearing in Washington, D.C. earlier this month.

13. DEPARTMENT REPORTS:

- a. **Police Department** – Chief Tornielli referred to his written report and noted that calls for service are remaining consistent and reported that officer-initiated activity remains high. A recap of events noted that Thanksgiving Eve and Small Business Saturday events were incident free. From a traffic perspective the tree lighting event ran smoothly. The large Santa Bar Crawl event resulted in two arrests. Additional officers remained on-duty that night due to the large crowd to deter additional incidents. Performance Toyota provided funding of "Go-Bags" for all personnel that can be utilized during critical incidents. The areas of focus on the five-year strategic plan are policy reviews and updates, equipment and facilities training, personnel and responsibilities, and community engagement. Input is being solicited by members of the police department; a draft should be brought to council in roughly five months.

Mayor Kaag reviewed the following action items:

- Acceptance of the Civil Service Commission Certified Eligibility List for the Position of Entry Level Police Officer was moved by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 6-0.**
- Conditional offers of employment for two entry level police officers with a date of hire of January 12, 2025 for Gabriel Kolasa and January 13, 2025 for Emily Zaharia was moved by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**
- Enrollment of two entry level police officers in the Reading Police Academy, Class 2025-1 for MPOETC Act 120 certification training was moved by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Motion to accept the Police Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- b. **Public Works Department** - Mr. Grassley referred to his written report and offered to answer any questions. Two updates were provided, he met with representatives of UGI Utilities, Inc. and their contractor regarding a punch list of items to be addressed along Penn Avenue. Also, a letter of appreciation was received from a resident thanking us for our ability to televise sewer lines to determine the need for repairs.

Motion to accept the Public Works Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- c. **Fire Department** – Chief Moyer referred to his written report and noted the annual Kiddie Christmas party that was held last Saturday, where approximately 60 children visited the firehouse and received a gift. A thank you was shared with Mr. Rogers for his donation towards these gifts. Chief Moyer reported that Jason Witman will be stepping down as the Assistant Chief in 2025 due to personal reasons, he will however continue to be a member and staffer. A thank you was expressed to Mr. Witman for his years of service.

Motion to accept the Fire Department report. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- d. **Code Department** – Mr. Moyer referred to his written report and noted that the Brycer compliance engine alerted the department of two establishments whose alarm systems were not being monitored by an alarm company, causing a lack of notification to the Fire Department if an alarm activation occurred. Notices were sent and service has either been restored or is in the process of being restored.

Motion to accept the Code Department report. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- e. **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation** – Mr. Lineaweaver provided the following highlights:

- The Small Business Saturday event was successful despite the cold, all fifty gift bags were handed out within an hour.
- Work continued with the Business Promotions Committee relating to the Salvation Army. More than 20 businesses are participating as drop off locations for canned goods and toys. It was noted that shops are planning to stay open as late as 10:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 19th.
- A ribbon cutting ceremony was attended at Mix and Makeup and Mr. Price met with the management team for the Reading Motor Club.
- The 2025 event dates have been approved by the event committee. They have begun working with local colleges for a College Night in the spring.
- The installation of grant funded streetlight upgrades is being planned for the near future.

Motion to accept the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation report. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

14. COMMITTEE / COMMISSION REPORTS:

- a. **Recreation Commission** – Mr. Esterly referred to his written report and offered to answer any questions. He reviewed the following action items:

- Consideration was requested to list for sale used swim team equipment such as ten starting platforms and two diving boards.

Motion to list for sale used swim team equipment on Municibid. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- Consideration was requested to waive fees for Berks Humane's Pay-What-You-Can vaccination clinics at the pavilion.

Motion to waive pavilion rental fees for Berks Humane's Pay-What-You-Can vaccination clinics on Wednesdays from 2:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on August 20, 2025, September 10, 2025, and October 1, 2025. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Mr. Esterly reported that the tree lighting event went well, and the holiday home decorating contest takes place this weekend. The 2025 event dates should be finalized next month.

Motion to accept the Recreation Commission report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- b. **Planning Commission** – The December Planning Commission meeting was cancelled.
- c. **Economic Development Committee** – Mr. Wert noted that Taiki Ramen is relocating to Penn Avenue from North Sixth Avenue. A kitchen will be installed to the previous brewing facility with the retention of certain specialty brewing recipes. The West Reading Motor Club is reoccupied and reopened, and the Say Cheese building is being repurposed. The vacancy rate remains low in our thriving main street.

Mr. Wert shared a discussion surrounding this committee that is not enabled via an ordinance and is unsure of the current productivity. Therefore, it was thought that the committee could be placed into a dormancy that would meet on an as-needed basis. The 2025 meeting dates will be advertised and used as needed moving forward.

Motion to accept the Economic Development Committee report. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- d. **Environmental Advisory Council** – The November Environmental Advisory Council meeting was cancelled.
- e. **Traffic and Infrastructure Committee** – Mr. Kaag shared highlights of discussions on intersection safety and accessible parking space designations. The borough is being reviewed borough-wide for the creation of additional parking spaces.

Motion to accept the Traffic and Infrastructure Committee report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- f. **Shade Tree Commission** – Mr. Kaag noted the usual discussions surrounding tree planting, trimming, removal, and watchlist trees. He welcomed Jean Witmer to her first meeting as a member of the commission.

Motion to accept the Shade Tree Commission report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

- g. **Safety Committee** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted review of a video on Ergonomics.

Motion to accept the Safety Committee report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

h. **Finance Committee** – The December Finance Committee meeting was cancelled.

15. **TREASURER'S REPORT:**

a. **2025 Budget Adoption** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted that the 2025 budget has a surplus of \$253,598. Generally, through diligence the past five budget years that were budgeted with a deficit have resulted in year-end surpluses.

Motion to adopt the 2025 budget as presented. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Municipal Tax Sheet– The respective millage rates to be forwarded to the Berks County Treasurer's Office were reviewed.

Motion to approve the 2025 Municipal Tax Sheet respective millage rates. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 6-0.**

b. **Financial Statement Ending 11/30/2024** – There were no questions or comments.

c. **Payment Approval Report 11/20/24 to 12/12/24 and 12/13/24 to 12/17/24** – There were no questions or comments.

Motion to approve the financial statement ending 11/30/2024, and Payment Approval Reports of 11/20/24 through 12/17/24. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 6-0.**

16. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Ms. Mallow inquired as to when the two appointed Western Berks Water Authority West Reading Members' terms are set to expire as well as the ability to rescind these appointments. It was thought that the terms would expire in two to three years and the only mechanism for rescinding appointments would be malfeasance. She inquired about written guidelines to fulfill their role, including communication with Borough Council and attendance of borough meetings. Mr. Becker indicated that guidelines would be within the authority's by-laws as to qualifications that would be very general in nature. Ms. Mallow was more interested in their relationship with Borough Council. Mr. Becker indicated that Borough Council could require that they attend these meetings. Ms. Mallow was disheartened by the lack of appointed member attendance at this meeting to provide insight into the 19% increase in water rates.

Mr. Rogers inquired as to the achievement of a surplus budgeted for 2025 created in part to the increased Business Privilege Tax delinquent collections in 2024. Mr. Lineaweaver indicated that it did not hurt the budget and noted the potential loss of tax revenue for a handful of properties pursuing tax abatement. He also noted a list of streetlight outages that he provided to the front desk and indicated that there are five streetlights out in the gateway to the borough. Mr. Grassley reported an electrical issue in the area.

17. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 6-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary