

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING**

January 21, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.

West Reading Borough Council held its regular monthly meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, January 21, 2025 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, Zanna Leiendecker, and Bethany Bower; Junior Council Person Brian Pascal; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Solicitor Daniel Becker, Code Department Manager & Fire Chief Chad Moyer; 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.

VISITORS:

James Rogers, Resident

Jean Witmer, Resident

Tina Shenk, Resident & Business Owner

Suzanne Thompson, Resident

Karen Livingood, Resident (via Zoom)

Jason Witman, West Reading Fire Department

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Ryan Lineaweaver called the meeting to order at 7:03 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 matters and the potential acquisition of real property.
3. **AGENDA AMENDMENTS:** There were no amendments to the agenda.
4. **COMMENDATION:** Mayor Kaag read aloud a Commendation to Jason Witman for his sixteen years of service with the West Reading Fire Company as a Fire Officer. Demonstrating unwavering commitment and bravery to ensure the well-being of both residents and firefighters.

Mr. Witman departed the meeting at 7:08 p.m.

5. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Rogers spoke of the numerous streetlight outages around the borough and specifically noted an outage at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Franklin Street. Mr. Grassley will investigate this to ensure it has been reported to Met-Ed.

6. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:**

Motion to approve December 17, 2024 regular meeting minutes and January 2, 2025 special meeting minutes. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

7. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**

- a. **Ordinance 1190 Vehicles and Traffic Amendments** – Following the advertisement of an amendment consideration was requested to adopt parking amendments.

Motion to adopt an amendment to add and remove accessible parking spaces on South Second Avenue and South Third Avenue respectively, supplement temporary no parking regulations, and amend a prohibited parking location to align with trash and recycling collection timeframes. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Resolution 2025-1 County of Berks Intergovernmental Agreement** – Consideration was requested to continue the annual agreement with the county board of appeals.

Motion to adopt a resolution continuing an intergovernmental agreement with the County of Berks Uniform Construction Code Board of Appeals. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Resolution 2025-2 Berks County Emergency Response Team** – Consideration was requested to appoint Chief Tornielli and his designee to the Board of Chiefs.

Motion to appoint Chief of Police Richard Tornielli and Sergeant Ryan Phillips, his designee, to the Board of Chiefs of the Berks County Emergency Response Team. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Resolution 2025-3 Fee Schedule Amendment** – Consideration was requested to adopt amendments to the fee schedule.

Motion to adopt amendments to the fee schedule to include a first hour residential alteration plan review fee of \$100, clarification on plan reviews for commercial or new structures, a revision to the discount period for pool and playground registrations from May 1st to April 25th, and the addition of the sewer jet service fee. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **Resolution 2025-4 Animal Control Officer Appointment** – Appointment of the Code Department Manager as the Animal Control Officer was recommended to avoid some shortfalls of outsourcing these duties to the Animal Control Service Agreement Company, currently Safety Net Sanctuary. An in-house appointment within the Code Department that is already enabled to enforce ordinance regulations seemed to be a logical solution in conjunction with the Police Department that enforces regulations under state law. Declarations of Code Red or Code Blue could be performed efficiently in-house. Mr. Moyer inquired about the handling of aggressive dogs; it was thought that the Police Department would use their discretion in those types of situations. It was noted that a Humane Officer or Dog Warden has additional certifications or powers of enforcement. Efforts to locate dog owners are usually exhausted in-house thereby limiting the number of instances in need of Safety Net Sanctuary's kennel facilities. Mr. Moyer noted that a number of aspects within the Animal Ordinance are already enforced by the Code Department such as noise, number of animals, sanitation and domestic fowl permits.

Motion to appoint the Code Department Manager as the Animal Control Officer. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

8. **CONSULTANTS' REPORT:**

- a. **Solicitor's Report** – Mr. Becker did not have anything new to report.
- b. **Engineer's Report** – Ms. Stevens did not have any action items this month and reported that the grants are moving along. Weather permitting the tank removal at 433 Penn Avenue should be completed within the week. Soil testing will take a bit longer and backfill will wait for test results.

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

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

Mr. Lineaweaver did not have anything new to report.

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

Mr. Miller reviewed the following items:

- **Use of Sick Days** – A request was made for a member of the Public Works Department to use ten sick days per the Family Medical Leave Act for the birth of his child.

Motion to authorize the use of ten sick days by a Public Works member for the birth of a child.

Moved by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- **Western Berks Ambulance Association** – Mr. Miller requested consideration to designate Western Berks Ambulance Association (WBAA) as the primary emergency medical services and rescue provider. It was noted that WBAA has been the primary agency serving the borough for many years, this formal designation may assist them in obtaining grant funding.

Motion to designate Western Berks Ambulance Association as the Primary Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Provider. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation 2025 Events** – Mr. Miller requested consideration to approve the following event dates and road closures for 2025:
 - **Craft Pretzel and Beer Fest** – Saturday, April 26, 2025 from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with Penn Avenue road closure of the 500 through 700 blocks from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
 - **Art on the Avenue** – Saturday, June 21, 2025 from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with Penn Avenue road closure of the 400 through 700 blocks from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
 - **French Fry Fest** – Saturday, September 20, 2025 from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with Penn Avenue road closure of the 600 and 700 blocks from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
 - **Fall Fest** – Saturday, September 20, 2025 from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with Penn Avenue road closure of the 400 through 700 blocks from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
 - **2nd Fridays** – The 2025 event dates of April 11, May 9, June 13, July 11, August 8, September 12, October 10, November 14, and December 12 with South Sixth Avenue road closures from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Motion to approve the 2025 West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation event dates and road closure requests as presented. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- **Environmental Advisory Council Appointment** – A letter of interest was received from Ms. Witmer to become a member of the Environmental Advisory Council. Ms. Witmer is excited to become a member of the committee.

Motion to appoint Jean Witmer to the Environmental Advisory Council as a voting member with a term to expire on December 31, 2025. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Miller provided additional highlights from his report:

- **PA WalkWorks** – The next step is to seek grant funding for a transportation plan, a resolution will be prepared for next month's meeting.
- **433 Penn Avenue** – Removal of underground storage tanks is progressing.

- **Electric Choice** – A letter of exclusivity was requested by the company that previously assisted in obtaining electric choice options for the borough. It was thought that multiple options were favorable, and a decision was made not to enter into a letter of exclusivity at this time.
- **National Incident Management System (NIMS)** – Mr. Miller recommended staff, and elected officials review their required certifications of training to ensure requirements are met to receive federal preparedness funding assistance.

Motion to accept the Borough Manager's report. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Ms. Stevens departed the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

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

- Met with the event committee to discuss upcoming events.
- Joined the Berks County Community Foundation forum to participate in a discussion on "What's Happening West Reading" that reviewed how borough businesses are rebuilding after the R.M. Palmer disaster. It was noted that the Mayor attended the C&S Companies ribbon cutting ceremony held earlier today.
- Initiatives encompassing the development of a newly relocated community garden are being established between the borough and West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation. It was thought that a paid Community Garden Manager may be necessary, similar to the Goggleworks program. The Mayor's goal is to establish the garden and allow someone with time to manage or oversee the program.
- The Mayor continues to advocate for donations towards the Veteran and Delaney memorial sites. A meeting is planned next week with the school district to plan a fundraiser for the Delaney memorial with permission from the family.
- Strategic planning collaborations with the police department are underway. A five-year strategic plan will focus on enhancing public safety and community relations.

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

12. **DEPARTMENT REPORTS:**

a. **Police Department** – Chief Tornielli referred to his written report and noted the following:

- Larger special event deployments have been reviewed. The first quarter includes the Ice & Spice event this weekend, and the Saint Patrick's Bar Crawl and Chili Festival events in March.
- Five-year strategic plan department personnel survey suggestions were submitted and evaluated. Individual projects are being developed and planned in small working groups. The goal is to have plans in place by the end of March to craft the overall outline of a five-year plan to present to Borough Council in May for comments. The objective is to have a plan in place in July to be able to prioritize funding of focus areas within the 2026 budget.
- The two entry level police officers began training at the Police Academy on January 13th, Chief Tornielli intends to check-in on their progress tomorrow.

- Highlights of the complete 2024 statistics were shared such as 5,801 calls for service, 7,665 officer-initiated activities that includes traffic stops, foot patrols, bicycle patrols, directed patrols, business checks, traffic checks, and security checks. A grand total of 13,466 departmental activities were conducted throughout the year. In addition, officers were deployed to sixteen large events as well as other smaller events throughout the year.

The following action items were considered:

- Approval of an officer to attend classes and receive college tuition reimbursement in 2025 per the current Collective Bargaining Agreement. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**
- Approval of Chief Tornielli to execute the 2025 Police Service Dog and Handler Maintenance Training Agreement. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 7-0.**
- Approval to purchase the budgeted replacement of five portable radios, required hardware and programming through the Capital Fund totaling \$32,744.24. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**
- Approval of entering into a three-year lease agreement for the budgeted purchase of a 2025 Ford Interceptor with accessories totaling \$62,955. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Leiendecker. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Motion to accept the Police Department report. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Ms. Bower. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- b. **Public Works Department** - Mr. Grassley referred to his written report and offered to answer any questions. A thank you was provided to the police department for their assistance in moving parked vehicles on snow emergency routes last weekend.

The annual request to offer yard waste drop off at the borough garage on the morning of the first Saturday of the month was requested. The program seems to be working as intended, approval would grant authorization to incur overtime expenses.

Motion to approve yard waste drop off on the first Saturday of April through November from 9:00 a.m. to noon. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Motion to accept the Public Works Department report. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- c. **Fire Department** – Chief Moyer referred to his written report and stated that end of year statistics would be provided next month. However, he shared the 2024 year-end number of calls for service that totaled 1,034, the highest on record. The previous record high was in 2023 totaling 899 calls for service.

An appointment of the following 2025 Officers was requested:

- Fire Chief – Chad Moyer
- Deputy Fire Chief – Jeffrey Reinert
- Assistant Fire Chief – Andrew Gudinas
- Captain – Jamie Keith
- Lieutenant – Jamauri Key
- Lieutenant Zachary Shaver

- Fire Marshal – Mark Burkholder
- Fire Police Captain – Tim Goodhart
- Fire Police Lieutenant – Lance Parmer

Moved by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Kaag. **The motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 abstention.** Mr. Shaver abstained from this vote due to a conflict of interest.

Mayor Kaag looks forward to statistics pertaining to the number of calls for service that were responded to by Jeffrey Reinert and Zachary Shaver last year and asked everyone to commend them for their remarkable volunteer service.

Motion to accept the Fire Department report. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- d. **Code Department** – Mr. Moyer referred to his written report noting 2024-year end statistics within the report. A breakdown in the number of violations issued by code, number of permits by type, and inspections by type were included. There were no questions or comments.

Motion to accept the Code Department report. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Leiendecker. **Motion carried 7-0.**

- e. **West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation** – Mr. Price provided the following highlights from his report:

- The second annual March Madness Chili Fest is planned for the afternoon of Sunday, March 16th following the Saint Patrick’s Day Bar Crawl on Saturday, March 15th. They are working with the Pennsylvania Americana Region to promote the event as a come here, stay here type of event.
- Preparations are underway for the April Craft Pretzel and Beer event. Stages will be rented from the city for Art on the Avenue and Fall Fest events that will be delivered the day before to the West Reading Motor Club.

Motion to accept the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation report. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Ms. Leiendecker. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Price departed the meeting at 7:51 p.m.

13. **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:

- Appointment of Ryan Oberly as a member of the Recreation Commission with a term that expires on December 31, 2026. **Moved** by Ms. Leiendecker and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**
- Approval of the 2025 Recreation Calendar of Events. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**
- Authorization to advertise for 2025 pool/playground staff. **Moved** by Ms. Bower and seconded by Mr. Shaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Esterly noted plans to provide pool membership cards from Borough Hall prior to opening day at the pool to reduce the length of lines at the beginning of the season. The next Karaoke event is

planned for February 16th at Third & Spruce and followed by a new event, Dungeons and Dragons at the Bicentennial House on February 25th. The winners of the 2024 Home Holiday Decorating Contest were 505 Chestnut Street, 301 S. Third Avenue, and 123 S. Seventh Avenue.

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

- b. **Planning Commission** – Mr. Wert noted the minimal number of comments received from the solicitor’s office regarding draft zoning and sign amendments. The proposed amendments that include solicitor comments will be forwarded to the Berks County Planning Commission to allow comments from an advisory standpoint. Further discussions were held with Mark Evans of Derck & Edson and Nicholas Johnson of Johnson Environmental Engineering, the borough’s MS4 Engineer, which relate to impervious coverage, stormwater management and civic spaces in the downtown area. Amendments may be needed to the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.

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

- c. **Economic Development Committee** – The January Economic Development Committee meeting was cancelled.
- d. **Environmental Advisory Council** – The December Environmental Advisory Council meeting was cancelled.
- e. **Traffic and Infrastructure Committee** – The January Traffic and Infrastructure Committee meeting was cancelled.
- f. **Shade Tree Commission** – The January Shade Tree Commission meeting was cancelled.
- g. **Safety Committee** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted review of a video on winter driving.

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

- h. **Finance Committee** – The January Finance Committee meeting was cancelled.

14. **TREASURER’S REPORT:**

- a. **Financial Statement Ending 12/31/2024** – Mr. Wert referred to the year-end total of 101.3 percent of total fund revenues collected, which close to what had been budgeted. This goes to the acumen of staff as to how close we are to reaching the borough’s financial goals. It was noted that four years ago the projection was that the borough would be insolvent in 2024. Painful adjustments were made to fees and the tax structure to set up West Reading for the future. At the end of March there will inevitably be residents in an uproar about higher water rates. Be prepared to defend the budget where funds are being spent appropriately to improve the community.
- b. **Payment Approval Report 12/18/24 to 1/17/25 and 1/18/25 to 1/21/25** – There were no questions or comments.

Motion to approve the financial statement ending 12/31/2024, and Payment Approval Reports of 12/18/24 through 1/21/25. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Leiendecker. **Motion carried 7-0.**

15. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

There were no public comments.

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16. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:04 p.m. **Moved** by Mr. Shaver and seconded by Ms. Leindecker. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary