

**CITY OF READING, OHIO
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – REGULAR SESSION
SEPTEMBER 01, 2020 - 7:30PM**

CALL TO ORDER

President of Council Cris Nesbitt called the meeting to order at 7:30PM.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Mr. Nesbitt led those in attendance in a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Council Members Present: Mr. Powell, Mr. Gertz, Mr. Lynd, Mr. Albrinck, Mr. Lindeman, Mr. Fischesser & Mrs. Eadicicco.

OTHER CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Auditor Sabrina Smith & Clerk of Council Carla Kacher.

SCHEDULED GUEST SPEAKERS

LINDA FITZGERALD (Economic Development Director) – Linda said she was pleased to give City Council an update on economic development projects. Although there is no doubt COVID-10 has negatively impacted the overall real estate market in Reading and Greater Cincinnati, the economic development team is doing everything in their power to lessen the deleterious impact on the city's revenues. Linda distributed a survey to the top 15 employers asking for information she could share with the tax office regarding their employment and investment decisions, so the city could plan to continue providing services to residents and businesses. With the exception of Standard Textile (which had to permanently lay off 27 employees in their hospitality division), most manufacturers have remained stable or in some cases even growing, e.g., life sciences companies involved in vaccine R&D, PPE and mechanical devices for ventilators.

Linda said she will begin with a discussion of ongoing economic development projects on the south end of the City and will work her way to the north end of the City. She will also respond to questions she received from Councilmembers Powell and Gertz. She answered Mr. Powell's question now, namely should Council adopt the Master Plan Update. She responded this would be a good idea, although it is her understanding that Planning Commission, which has already adopted the Plan Update, is the appropriate authorizing group. Linda said it would be helpful if the Council followed suit and showed support for the plan by formally adopting it. She added that she has already used the Plan recommendations to justify over \$600,000 in grants.

South Reading Road

For several years she has been working on a joint interjurisdictional initiative to revitalize South Reading Road. The communities of Sycamore Township, City of Cincinnati, Amberly Village and Reading are working together on a vision for what has been dubbed the "Central County Commerce Park which includes Reading Rd. from Galbraith Rd. to Summit Ave. Steve Johns from the Hamilton County Planning Department oversees this initiative. The group has developed a plan to transition the area from the retail establishments that worked so well in the 1960s to the light industrial/distribution uses of the age of Amazon. The Port and Hamilton County Development Company are also partners.

The area has seen some new investment (redevelopment of the former Gibson Card site), but the former motel properties in Sycamore Township are deteriorated and underutilized. Reading has some viable businesses and properties along the corridor including the former Methodist book bindery at the southern edge of the City which was purchased and is being renovated by local attorney Joe Levine. Redevelopment of the motel properties is critical to the success of the redevelopment. Currently the township owns two of the properties and Blue Tide owns the remaining two. The latter group wants to use the motels they purchased for veterans' housing which is not allowed under township zoning. All four jurisdictions are proposing zone changes to disallow residential in the area and to allow light industrial with supporting office. Planning Commission has recommended this change as part of their approval of the zoning code update and Council will now consider that Plan.

Linda noted that ODOT has shown a commitment to the corridor by agreeing to design and build a center turn lane for the corridor as well as sidewalks where they are not available. This should occur next year, and the group will then seek funding for upgrades to pavement and streetscape. In the next few months Mr. Johns will schedule a zoom meeting with representatives from the four jurisdictions, followed by presentations at council/board meetings. The group is focusing on code enforcement in their respective jurisdictions. Linda recently surveyed Reading Road with Dan Brooks to identify major violations. She understands

Mr. Brooks have asked for funding for an intern which would be very helpful in code enforcement.

USEPA Projects

The USEPA grant (\$400,000 for environmental studies) will be closed out this year. Recent projects for which Phase I and Phase II studies were done include properties owned by Tammi Burkel at Valley Termite on Reading Rd. and two other Benson St. properties); 311-314 Jefferson Ave. which is being purchased by McCluskey who intends to demolish two eyesore properties for future expansion); and Sentry Doors on Reading Rd. Linda will prepare a summary of expenditures and job/investment creation generated by the grants for USEPA and Council.

Nivison Property

The realtor on the Nivison property recently reported that although the industrial real estate market is beginning to move forward, office is still at a standstill and will likely get worse. They send listings out monthly to brokers and respond to REDI Cincinnati for inquiries that would work on the site. They have presented the site to three users recently and have come to realize that aside from a biotech company locating on site, office use will remain unlikely. The fact that the property is bordered by a railroad track and residential to the east, companies, whether local or national, want to be located among similar uses and have access to upscale nearby amenities. For this reason, the realtor feels the site should be marketed for light industrial. To date, council has decided to be patient and wait and see if Avecia could ultimately expand on the site, (still a possibility in the long term), but they may want to reconsider changing the zoning to light industrial when they consider the zoning code update.

Bridal District & General Retail

Although the Bridal District and restaurants were negatively affected by the economy shut down, the bridal business in particular is doing well again as brides are trying to reschedule their weddings that were put on hold during the shut down. This Saturday there will be a ribbon-cutting for The Cookie Jar, a women's wellness center, opening up in the Bridal District. All are invited. The city developed a "Take Out to Step Up" campaign to encourage residents and businesses to support local restaurants.

Linda is working with the owners of two other underutilized Benson Street properties, (the former SOS building which has been under new ownership for almost a year), and the former Emery Theater at 481 W. Benson St. which is dilapidated and only being used for storage. Linda's opinion is that the owner of SOS is asking too much for the property to be sold or leased. She thanked Mr. Gertz for referring Will Greiner to her – he is considering investing in the theater property to bring it back to its former glory.

General Tool Expansion

Unfortunately General Tool's expansion project has been delayed due to the Navy's temporary hold on the project during COVID-19. Linda is investigating whether the three funding sources will hold the money until the project proceeds or whether she will have to ask to have the funds re-assigned to a different job-generating project.

Redevelopment of Dow

Melissa Johnson from the Port will join Linda at the October 20th council meeting for a project update. Total redevelopment costs for the 25-acre property is almost \$8 million. The Port is the appropriate entity to conduct the redevelopment since the City would not have been able to come up with this much capital and no developer would take on the site without the Port's ability to access investor capital and state grants. Linda is working with the Port to prepare grant applications to USEPA for another \$1.7 million in remediation and to the State of Ohio under their new OCIP program which can be used for site prep and demo related to speculative industrial parks. Although there is not an end user committed, the Port hopes to sign a development agreement very soon with Neyer Properties. The Port, Neyer and City are also in communications with the Reading Schools regarding a possible Tax Increment Financing to help pay for necessary redevelopment costs.

Linda turned to questions submitted by Councilman Gertz who indicated she had answered most of them. The question about the pipeline should be referred to Mr. Ross; Councilman Powell said that Mr. Ross had sent out an update recently. Linda said that the city-owned vacant lot behind Rallyt's Hamburgers has not had much interest other than for outdoor storage. Regarding the Riesenbergs St. improvement project, Linda stated that the Port would not have moved forward with the Dow site, nor would Neyer have agreed to be the preferred developer, without this improvement. Several other options including Cooper Rd. and Cavett Dr. are not viable due to difficult/expensive property acquisition across Browfields and required crossings over the railroad and/or Mill Creek. Linda said that the flood plain question should be referred to Patrick/JMA.

CATE CRUSHAM (Reading Public Library Branch Manager) – I would like to take this time to update the community on

how the library is currently operating and welcome you back into our building if you haven't yet been by to see us since we reopened.

Currently the library is open Monday-Saturday 10:00AM-6:00 PM. Customers are welcome to visit for up to one hour per day to use a computer, use our wi-fi on a personal device, browse for and check out materials, read the newspaper, or have items copied, printed, or faxed. We are operating at a reduced capacity, and allowing 15 visitors in the building at a time.

Because of our reduced capacity and because we recognize many people do not feel comfortable coming inside at this time, we ramped up our offerings at the drive up window. In the past, we've mostly used the drive up window as a place for people to pick up their holds. Now we are helping members of the community by sending faxes through the window, this includes faxing paperwork and documents to Hamilton County Job and Family Services. If a customer is able to email us a document, we can print this for them and they can pick it up at the window. We are happy to make copies through the window as well.

There are also a few timely matters we can help the community with. Customers are always welcome to visit us to register to vote or check the status of their voter registration and determine their polling location. You can also pick up a vote-by-my application at the Reading Branch or any library location.

Time is almost up to complete the Census. If you have not completed this yet, you may visit the library to do so – it only takes 5 minutes once you are logged onto a computer! The deadline is September 30th.

The library staff would like to wish Reading students and teachers a happy and safe return to school. We are monitoring the needs of students as the school year begins and are continuously looking for ways to support students and teachers with virtual learning and any other needs they may have.

If Council or any members of the community have any questions or need assistance with anything, please reach out. You can reach us by email at reading@cincinnati.library.org or by phone at 513-369-4465.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION – None.

COMMUNICATIONS

Note from Donna Wiggins, Reading Farmer's Market:

The Reading Farmers Market wants to make sure all residents are able to enjoy our healthy, fresh produce and other food items. So we now are accepting SNAP/EBT payments. We also have Produce Perks tokens which are a dollar for dollar match of SNAP purchases up to \$25 a day. If you buy \$10 in SNAP tokens, you receive \$10 in Produce Perks. If you buy \$30 in SNAP tokens, you receive the maximum of \$25 in Produce Perks and so on. We also accept the Council on Aging's Senior Farmers Market vouchers. Anyone 60 or over who meets the income guidelines is eligible for \$50 in vouchers for the purchase of produce. More information can be found on our "Reading Farmers Market" FB page or by emailing ReadingFarmersMarket@aol.com or just stop by the welcome booth on Friday. We have also extended to our season to the end of October so come out and see us on Vine St where it intersects with Reading Rd. until Oct. 30th!

Donna Wiggins
Manager, Reading Farmers Market, LLC
513-709-8630

COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORTS

FINANCE: Anthony Gertz

- No Report.

UTILITIES, LANDS & BUILDINGS: Don Lindeman

- Introduced 1 updated video from Emmet Cottler (Project Manager for the Mill Creek Alliance) of the work being completed on the Mill Creek Flood plain Bench Project.

ZONING, PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT: Dave Powell

- The Reading Planning Commission met on August 24, 2020 and approved proposed changes to the zoning code. Once I receive notice of the recommendation of the Planning Commission I will schedule a committee meeting to review the changes before it is brought before Council for a public hearing.

I will be bringing an Ordinance to the floor next meeting to adopt the most recent Master Plan. It is my understanding that it is not required to Council to adopt the Master Plan but I feel it would be an important gesture to show support if that is how this body chooses to vote.

LAWS AND CONTRACTS: Katie Eadicicco

- I have been gathering information from both the city and the school regarding the utility poles and lawsuit. I've also gone through posts on the Community Forum page on Facebook and the comments from each post, as well as letters that have been sent to council. I've reviewed the video from the public portion of the December 26th meeting. And I've been reading through emails, and other documents.

I sent out what I have so far on Sunday to each council member. Included was the petition and signatures from citizens asking that the lawsuit be dropped.

Tom Bemmes sent me this statement, which was included with what I sent to each council member. He said, "Dear Council, there was a question about how the petition was presented and signatures acquired. For clarity: the petition was presented as written. In short, the signers humbly ask council to drop the lawsuit and allow the poles in question to remain. We do not want our money spent to move the poles or pay for lawyers to fight over them. Surprisingly to me, many people were already aware of this issue. Most were actually eager to sign because they agreed it was a great waste of our money. I went door to door on Thurnridge and in Cherryfield. I got over 300 signatures. Knocking on 100's of doors, not 1 person told me that they disagreed with the petition. Two said they simply don't sign petitions. A few others collection an additional 200 signatures. When the governor asked us to be careful due to Covid-19, a decision was made to do what City Council and most others were doing and do our petition remotely. In a few days, we collected over 300 online signatures. If we would have continued to go door to door, I believe we could have easily tripled our number of signatures."

From the school I have received copies of a letter to Dan Brooks from Chuck LaFata requesting clarification to the PDD and asking for the poles to remain in place, an email to Dan Brooks with the estimates to move the poles from Duke, Cincinnati Bell and Spectrum, a letter from Dan Brooks to Chuck LaFata stating that the school board should submit a revised Development Plan through the PDD process, the Ordinance for "PDD#2", and land surveys and the Grant of Easement from the Hamilton County Auditor.

FYI: I have also been told that on Monday, August 24, the Planning Commission voted to change several areas of the zoning code that would strike the requirement for underground wires in PDDs for any future construction. A reminder that on November 11, 2019 the Planning Commission voted 3-2 to allow the poles to remain in the current location. The December 26th vote by council was to accept the recommendation of the Planning Commission. That motion failed by 4-2 with Mr. Powell abstaining from the vote.

I have a statement from Mayor Bemmes that says: "I have let council members and our community know on numerous occasions that I do not approve of a single taxpayer dollar being spent on putting utility lines underground in an area that has numerous telephone poles." He goes on to say "Each Council member knows very well how I feel about this topic. I am on televised Council meetings on numerous occasions letting everyone clearly know that no matter who one feels is right or wrong that it would be an incredible waste of hard-earned taxpayer dollars to put those utilities underground. In my 21 years as an elected official I have said numerous, numerous times that our City and our Schools must work together to assist each other and from my Administrations actions we have proven that we do exactly that every day."

Looking at this information I have received so far, it appears the school was following the proper steps to amend the PDD.

The overwhelming majority of Facebook comments, letters read to council, messages, and speakers at meetings are in favor of leaving the poles where they are, not forcing the school to pay to move them and are against the lawsuit. I have also spoken with business owners in the Bridal District who are not happy about their tax dollars being spent on this lawsuit.

I believe that it's time to put personal feelings aside and look at this issue with fresh eyes and with the knowledge of how the majority of the taxpayers within our city feel.

Tony Gertz remarks:

- (1) Deadly High Voltage Electric Poles – not telephone poles.
- (2) What are we telling our children? We're telling them that if you screw up, just go back and say your sorry. You don't have to abide by your contracts or commitments.

- (3) Thinks the Mayor should have recused himself from the Planning Commission Vote considering his ties personal ties to the schools.
- (4) Said it's frustrating that the school put in \$30,000 - \$40,000 for temporary installation of the poles.
- (5) Is concerned with the precedent we're setting for future City projects.

Tom Lynd – Believes that the better question right now is - How do we move forward?

Mel Gertz – Pointed out that 700-800 people on a petition is not “the majority.” There is over 10,000 people in Reading.

1/3 of the Citizens voted and Mel pointed out there's 826 is not a third

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY: Randy Fischesser

- We will be voting on the Arlington Heights contract to provide fire and EMS services for the next five years. As mentioned before, the only changes from the previous contract are the dates and annual cost which equates to a 10% increase per year increase.

For Police:

For the month of August, they had 1481 calls for service, 23 auto accidents, 254 total charges filed with 171 being original charges. Citation issued: 32 to Arlington Heights, 6 to Hamilton County Court, 3 to Juvenile Court, and 130 to Reading's Mayors Court for a total of 174 citations.

Highlights of their operations include:

- 8-17-20 ongoing investigation of sexual assault .
- 8-18-20 officer observed suspicious vehicle near Dottie Ct. during investigation found 2.5 lbs. of marijuana.
- 8-19-20 Warrants served against suspect for weapons and drugs investigation. Also seized \$3,620.00 during search.
- 8-21-20 Arrest made from an ongoing investigation for breaking and entering.
- 8-27-20 Received 4 CODIS hits on DNA evidence from the shooting at The Lounge. Now looking for 4 suspects.
- Two B&Es being investigated. One on 8-21-20 at Family Dollar and the other on 8-29-20 at 8397 Reading Rd.

For Fire:

For the month of August, they had 185 EMS incidents and 42 Fire incidents for a total of 227 responses.

Career FF/P written test was given August 22nd. Physical Agility testing was August 29th and 30th.

This Sunday starts Fire Prevention Week. Fire Prevention Week is observed each year during the week of October 9th in commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire, which began on October 8, 1871, and caused devastating damage. This horrific conflagration killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures, and burned more than 2,000 acres of land.

The theme for this year is: “Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen.” Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries in the U.S. Everyone is encouraged to be mindful of fire safety in the kitchen including putting a lid on grease fire, never leaving an unattended pot, avoiding wearing loose fitting clothes while cooking, and keeping the young ones out of the kitchen while food is being prepared.

SERVICE: Dennis Albrinck

- Encouraged Council to hire a mechanic for the Service Department.

RECREATION: Tom Lynd

- Another great year at the Reading Pool. The pool officially closed on 8/30 and averaged 80 people a day. I want to thank the staff for a great year and all the residents who cooperated with all the COVID-19 restrictions.

NEW BUSINESS - NONE

REPORTS OF OFFICIALS

MAYOR: Robert "Bo" Bemmes

- No Report (Absent)

SAFETY SERVICE DIRECTOR: Patrick Ross

- No Report (No Report)

LAW DIRECTOR: Dave Stevenson

- Briefs have been filed on the pipeline case with the Supreme Court from the City of Blue Ash, N.O.P.E. and the City of Reading. We awaiting the responses from Duke Energy and Ohio Power Siting Boards.

TREASURER: Mel Gertz

- August Financial Update: We've collected \$5,245,172.00.

AUDITOR: Sabrina Smith

- To Start September we have \$1.5 Million in our general and City Earnings Tax Funds.

READING OF RESOLUTIONS – None.

READING OF ORDINANCES

**(1) AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE SAFETY/SERVICE DIRECTOR TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT
WITH THE VILLAGE OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, OHIO (Third Reading)**

Motion made by Mr. Powell, seconded by Mr. Fischesser to adopt the ordinance. Motion passed by a 7-0 roll call vote.

ORDINANCE ADOPTED

ORDINANCE NO. 2020-35

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Gertz – Suggested Council come back to Council Chambers

Mr. Lindeman – Paperwork in each of the Council member's mailboxes regarding the Ethics Commission

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was declared adjourned at 9:24 pm.

X Carla Kacher
CARLA KACHER
Clerk of Council

X Cris Nesbitt
CRIS NESBITT
President of Council