

**CITY OF READING, OHIO
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – REGULAR SESSION
MARCH 15, 2022 – 7:30 PM**

CALL TO ORDER

President Mr. Daum called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Mr. Daum led those in attendance in a prayer and then the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Council Members Present: Mr. Powell, Mr. Bronner, Mr. Bishop, Mr. Boehner, Mr. Thamann, Mrs. Kroeger & Mrs. Eadicicco.

OTHER CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Mayor Bo Bemmes, Law Director Dave Stevenson, Treasurer Brenda Owens & Clerk of Council Carla Kacher.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Motion to approve March 1 (Regular) Council Minutes made by Mr. Thamann, seconded by Mr. Powell. Motion carried by a voice vote.

AUDIENCE ASKING PARTICIPATION:

Rhonda Kirby (E Columbia) – Is concerned about the speeding by parents, construction vehicles & busses on Columbia during school hours. She believes that the signs posted on Columbia are not big enough and the sidewalk is not big enough for more than one person at a time. She's disappointed that she has not seen any Reading Police Officers during this time and is very concerned that someone is going to be injured or worse.

Kenneth McKenzie (404 Flora) – Ever since MND built the Rental Property, his property gets a lot of water runoff. His driveway is gravel and with all the runoff he has to replace the gravel often at great expense. He understands that he owns half of the gravel road and the City owns the other half, but since the road is not a dedicated street, the City is not responsible for maintaining it. He wanted to blacktop it but was told he couldn't. He would like something in writing that tells/shows him exactly where his property ends and the City's portion begins so that he can determine exactly what he can do in order to maintain his portion. He'd also like the City to look into maintaining their portion of the road.

Scott Bothe (757 E Benson) – Posed a question to the School Board: Would like to know where he can go to investigate how the tax payer's money is spent. He would like to see what vendors the school uses and how much money is spent on everything (example: how much a year is spent on paint, how much is spent on floor wax, ect.). He was provided a link that was helpful and was also directed to visit OhioCheckBook.com in which he did not find helpful at all – he couldn't find any information on Reading Schools.

PREPARED STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL, MR. DWIGHT DAUM:

“Mayor Bemmes has asked that Reading School Superintendent, Mr. Enix, have an opportunity to address council. It should be noted that Mr. Enix was afforded such an opportunity in January and made a lengthy presentation regarding the District's financial situation and a property tax levy that is on this May's primary election ballot.

As previously stated in this Council, Ohio law makes clear that municipal corporations and school districts are separate political subdivisions, each having its own governing body, taxing authority, budgets, geographical boundaries and constituencies. I'm told that various social media posts circulating over the last several years indicate a loss of this distinction in the minds of some people within our community. This may be exacerbated by certain people referring to various establishments within Reading that the City does not own as “our” this or “our” that. We need to be accurate in the

use of language in order to avoid this confusion.

I've been given recent postings from the Reading Community Forum Facebook page that suggest that tonight's meeting is an opportunity to address bullying in the Reading Community School District. This issue is appropriately addressed at a school board meeting. The next one will be tomorrow night in the school media center @5:30. School issues should be brought to the school board. City council, has no jurisdiction on those matters. Even if bullying rises to the level of an arrest, the onus to act would be on the police department, not City Council.

Out of respect for and in recognition of the autonomy of the City and the School District, we must proceed very carefully to ensure that School Board business does not become inappropriately entangled in City business. In the prior council, one council member properly recused himself from matters involving the District because of an ongoing business relationship with the District. Just a few weeks ago, another council member properly recused himself from matters involving the City due to an ongoing business relationship with the City, and this is the standard we must follow. In order to ensure that this council operates under the highest ethical standards, it is important to note that certain council members need to recuse themselves from issues involving the City and the School District.

Mayor Bo Bemmes' wife is school counselor Terri Bemmes, and his nephew, Brian Bemmes, is a teacher employed by the school district. Brian is also first cousin to councilmember Shelly Kroeger, who is Bo's niece. The Mayor's niece-in law, Alicia Walker Bemmes, is a School Board member, and is teacher Brian Bemmes' wife. Additionally, Mayor Bemmes is related to councilmembers Andy Bronner and Andy's sister and Katie Eadicicco.

Separately, Councilmember Scott Thamann is a teacher employed by the school district and is also brother-in-law to school board member Amy Thamann, and even Law Director Dave Stevensen, by Ohio law, is employed by both the City and the School District.

Therefore, it is easy to be concerned about the multiple appearances of impropriety and the potential for conflicts of interest, and advocating the School District's levy at a City Council meeting is inherently problematic.

In fact, the audience provided to Mr. Enix via his January appearance can generate legitimate demands for equal time from groups or individuals holding an opposing view, and the slightest sense of fairness would require us to honor such a demand. We cannot compound this situation by entertaining further discussion of School-Board-specific business, for example, the levy or bullying, here tonight. Therefore, the tax levy presentation emailed to me last night will not be shown here, as the reverse situation would be for members of council to attend a school board meeting to discuss City business. It doesn't belong there. I suggest that the District contact ICRC directly to produce a program to their liking on this matter the same as they do for televising school-sponsored athletic events.

However, discussion of City-related business, such as the stadium lease or a property transfer to the City involving the Central School property would be appropriate. If Mr. Enix has City business to discuss, he is welcome to step to the microphone and state the City business."

Motion made by Mrs. Kroeger, seconded by Mr. Bronner to allow Mr. Enix to give his presentation. Motion carried by a 6-1 roll call vote (Mr. Powell, Mr. Bronner, Mr. Bishop, Mr. Thamann, Mrs. Kroeger & Mrs. Eadicicco voting "yes" and Mr. Boehner voting "No.").

GUEST SPEAKER:

Mr. Jason Enix, Superintendent of Reading Schools, displayed a slideshow to educate and address any misinformation that has transpired since his first presentation in January. For the full slideshow presentation, please visit <http://www.icrctv.com/communities>, click on “Reading,” and then click “Reading City Council 03-15-2022.”

Scott Thamann – Addressing President of Council, Mr. Daum: “I would like to thank you for making sure we separate this Council from the Board of Education. They are a decision making board. They make decisions for their organization, same way we do for ours. However, we are one community and it is impossible to separate one from the other. We are not here to persuade our constituents in any way. It’s simply information. We’ve had guest speakers nearly every meeting from UniCity and so-on – it’s not been a problem. We have our Academic Hall of Fame back there for some reason. So apparently lines have been crossed - blurred in the past. I would like to mention that we could play three degrees of separation for just about anybody and any organization within this town – it’s a small town. Connected to people doesn’t influence people necessarily. I trust the honor of this board to do their jobs properly.”

Dave Powell Question to Mr. Enix’s presentation: How would the district see revenue from the Duke Pipeline?

Answer from Treasurer Ms. Burke: Revenue will come from public utilities based on the total valuation.

Tony Gertz (401 Pike Street) – Wants to understand all of the ramifications of the tax increase. He brought this up two years ago that the school would need a levy. His concern is that the issue is on the ballot during a Primary election and not many people will make it out to the polls to vote on it – many people are not even aware that this issue is on the ballot. There is also a new school opening up in Reading and attendance to Reading Schools will/may decrease as well as losing Reading teachers to the new school. His questions and concerns are leading him towards voting “no” on this issue. Thinks this levy possibly shouldn’t be happening at this time.

Mr. Enix – The timing of this levy is critical. School works on a School calendar. If this levy doesn’t pass, they have to cut from their budget within the next fiscal school year. If property valuations go up we only collect on the rate during the time that the levy is passed.

Ms. Burke – Is aware that OhioCheckbook.com is not updated. This is actively being worked on and they are moving to a new system.

Jennifer Dick (222 Harvest Lane) – If the levy passes, does that mean that another school counselor is added? If the levy does not pass one will be let go. Many Reading residents have commented that until the school bullying issue is taken care of their vote will be “no.”

Mr. Enix’s response: Bullying is a number 1 priority of the administrators and the school employees. Mr. Enix stressed that if something is happening (in any form) we need to be notified.

The budget is a “General Operating Fund” and will keep what we currently have in place. It will not add anything (including an additional Counselor). School Board Meeting tomorrow at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor Bo Bemmes – Reading Schools does not turn away any child that comes to the school regardless of grade average. The relationship we have with our school is the most important relationship we have.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: None Requested

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

READING OF RESOLUTIONS:

(1) THE FOLLOWING IS A RESOLUTION ENACTED BY THE CITY OF READING OF HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO, HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS THE LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY (LPA), IN THE MATTER OF THE STATED DESCRIBED PROJECT.

Motion made by Mrs. Boehner, seconded by Mrs. Eadicicco to suspend the rule that requires a second and third reading.
Motion carried by 7-0 roll call vote. Motion made by Mr. Boehner, seconded by Mrs. Eadicicco to adopt the resolution.
Motion carried by 7-0 roll call vote.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED

RESOLUTION NUMBER 2022-09R

READING OF ORDINANCES:

(1) AN ORDINANCE TO MAKE APPROPRIATIONS FOR CURRENT EXPENSES AND OTHER EXPENDITURES OF THE CITY OF READING, STATE OF OHIO, DURING THE PERIOD ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2022.

Ordinance was declared a first reading only.

(2) AN ORDINANCE VACATING THAT PORTION OF THIRD STREET ABUTTING PROPERTY OWNED BY NITTO DENKO AVECIA, INC., AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

Motion made by Mr. Kroeger, seconded by Mrs. Eadicicco to suspend the rule that requires a second and third reading.
Motion carried by 7-0 roll call vote . Motion made by Mr. Bronner, seconded by Mr. Bishop to adopt the ordinance.
Motion carried by 7-0 roll call vote.

ORDINANCE ADOPTED

ORDINANCE NUMBER 2022-10

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS:

Mayor Bo Bemmes:

- Saturday, March 19: American Legion's Ladies Auxiliary will be holding a Monte Carlo/Reverse Raffle at Haffey Fieldhouse. Proceeds go to the fireworks fund.
- Saturday, April 2: SPP Academy will hold a Texas Hold 'Em Tournament/NCAA Party at St. Peter & Paul Academy. Texas Hold 'Em has \$100 buy in. Call Mike Theis (513-532-2774).
- Special Council Meeting: Tuesday, March 22 at 7:30 p.m. in Council Chambers with Special Guest, Police Chief Edens.

Mark Bishop –Utilities, Lands and Buildings Committee Meeting on March 22 at 6:00 p.m. in the Caucus Room. Topic: UniCity (Citywide WiFi project).

Dwight Daum: Stated that Mr. Thamann has “zero degrees of separation being that you work at the school, so any teacher layoff would - could, affect you directly. So need to watch your recusals there.”

Scott Thamann: “I will recuse myself whenever the opportunity calls for it.
I work for the community, times two”

Dwight Daum: “Well said, and others may also need to consider the same thing.”

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn came from Mr. Boehner and was seconded by Mrs. Kroeger. Motion carried by voice vote. There being no further business, the meeting was declared adjourned at 9:08 pm.

X _____

Carla Kacher
Clerk of Council

X _____

Dwight Daum
President of Council