

**CITY OF READING, OHIO
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – SPECIAL SESSION
JANUARY 27, 2026 – 7:30 PM**

For the full detail of this evening's Council Meeting, please visit www.watchreadingohio.com.

CALL TO ORDER

President of Council, Mr. Mattscheck called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President of Council, Mr. Mattscheck 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 & Clerk of Council Carla Bronner

GUEST SPEAKERS: NONE

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: NONE

COMMUNICATIONS:

Email received from Reading Resident, Michele Naish:

Subject: School Wants vs Community Needs

Dear Council Members,

Our community has always shown up when it truly mattered.

When our children needed a safe, modern place to learn, the city and its residents answered that call.

Property owners and local businesses invested through their taxes because education isn't optional—it's essential.

That was a shared sacrifice made for the common good, and it reflected the values of a community willing to support real NEED.

What's being asked now feels different.

Asking the city to refurbish a football stadium & do a lopsided land swap for fire & admin and then lock property owners into a 28-year bond crosses the line from shared responsibility into misplaced obligation.

A stadium is a WANT, not a NEED, and WANTS —no matter how passionate—should not be funded on the backs of taxpayers who may never benefit from it.

I WANT a swimming pool in my backyard, but I don't expect my neighbors to pay for it.

If I can't afford it, and don't truly NEED it, I find another way.

That same common-sense principle should guide our public spending.

The city NEEDS not to be in the stadium business.

The city NEEDS to be in the business of serving EVERYONE in the community.

We NEED spaces that bring the entire community together and infrastructure that strengthens safety, efficiency, and quality of life—not projects that divide residents over long-term debt.

We funded education because it was a true community NEED & because this was necessary, and a responsible investment.

The Stadium refurbishment/ firehouse/ police / admin & land swap only supports school athletics and tradition, while placing a long-term tax burden on property owners for a limited-use facility driven by a WANT not a NEED. And, at the same time, misses an opportunity to utilize the only large city owned piece of land we have left in this town to do something that benefits the entire community.

What the city leaders should prioritize:

- *A community center that benefits residents, workers, families, and visitors.*
- *A centralized facility for police, fire, and city administration to meet essential needs efficiently.*

In my opinion.....

- *Public funds should be reserved for projects that serve the entire community's NEEDS, not WANTS that benefit only a very small portion of it.*

Thank you for listening and hopefully you take in to consideration my point of view.

*Kind Regards,
Michele C. Naish*

Mayor Bemmes Response: Commented that he does believe the stadium repairs and refurbishment is a need for the community. Mr. Bemmes cited obesity and physical health statistics to support his belief. He also mentioned that in the last couple years the field usage was significantly less than what it could have been.

Shelly Kroeger Response: Believes that a Community Center is a "want," and not a "need." While she respects Ms. Naish's opinion, since she worked in the administration building for a very long time, and knows the conditions of this building, and Ms. Naish's understanding of the need of a new fire house, Mrs. Kroeger disagrees with Ms. Naish's view that the stadium is something that most of us aren't going to use down the line. It is her belief that redoing the stadium is something that generations will benefit from. She went on to state, *"As it is now, our community is aging, and it is very difficult for patrons to get into the stands that are handicap, or need more assistance. I believe, in time, our insurance may come to us and require the City to shut down the stadium completely because it's not ADA compliant, just like they did with our bleachers at the park. I do believe it is a "need," not only for the field state space, but the rental capabilities and the income possibilities renting it out."*

Katie Eadicicco Response: Mrs. Eadicicco added, *"Studies have shown that the kids involved in sports and activities, keeping them busy, keeps them out of trouble, as well as the health benefits. Another part of this is a refurbished track, which part of the agreement is that the stadium will be open to the public - it will not be locked up. I know a lot of people in this community use the track now and it's getting worse every year. It's getting unsafe to run on, and close to unsafe to walk on, so having a usable track definitely benefits a lot of people in the community, outside of the school kids. And, it's not just going to be football games; it's soccer games, it'll be track meets, and that's all ages - not just our high school students. It'll be from little league to preschool kids, and if we put the extra lines on the field for instructional soccer, so it does go generations."*

Bob Boehner Response: Mr. Boehner provided the cost breakdown. *"The fire and administration building would cost \$18 million dollars. To remodel this building for the police department, \$1 million dollars. The stadium renovation would be \$5 million dollars, with a \$3 million dollar contingency fund. One of the problems I have, among many, is the turfing of "Centennial field," or "Bemmes field," whatever you want to call it. The way that's configured now, soccer uses that now, even little league football can use that now. I think it's unsafe for kids in grade school to put all the equipment on and be on a turf football field. Turf football fields are not made for bouncing around kids, I think it's dangerous. Then I find out that people actually park their cars on Centennial Field during football games. So if we turf that, who's gonna prevent cars from parking on brand new turf field? I mean it doesn't make sense. The track, the biggest problem with the track is on the west side of the track, right near the South endzone."* Mr. Boehner later stated, *"I don't like the idea that we're spending that much money on the football field and 11 years, or 10 years, or whatever the number of years are, we're gonna give that to schools. I think that's running counter to what our mission's all about. That's tax payer money we're giving away, and I just don't think that's proper."*

Mark Bishop Response: Mr. Bishop commented that even since he moved to Reading in 1991 he's heard rumblings about the stadium, the fire department, and the police department needing new facilities. He went on to say, *"There's been talk for years about working with the school to get something done. The Schools, they got a new school out of it, they were reluctant to do anything else for a long time. We, at this point, we have a proposal out there that cost what it costs - these are estimates. These*

are preliminary estimates, likely, put out there - it should be less than that when it gets done, but they're preliminary estimates. This is the first time anything has really been proposed that sort of solves all those issues. You take care of the fire department with a new facility. The city offices actually get a new facility they can use with enough room to move around, and storage facilities. You get a police department that has a bigger facility, not just a hallway and a stairwell on the side of the building. They can bring cars inside and transport people. You get a stadium that's refurbished to the point where the school likes it, and we'll take ownership of it. You get a turf field - I'm not a big fan of turf fields, but you got a turf field because if you wanna play, the number of teams are gonna play on, including VYO, you need a more durable field - you can't do it on grass. It is what it is - it's a proposal. If people don't want it, they can vote against it, but it is the first proposal I've seen, out of all the councils, the first proposal since 1991 that came forward, where everybody agrees, that we can do this. So, if people vote for it, wonderful, we'll move forward. If not, well, this is what we get, and the stadium stays the same - it'll deteriorate until eventually somebody shuts it down. But I've heard talk for a long time - everybody campaigned on it - on getting a new stadium, getting it fixed up, and getting the fire department built and things of this sort. So, I think the only thing is gonna happen in the future is the prices are gonna go up. That's unfortunate, but that's the way it is."

Dave Powell Response: "Since I wasn't privy with any of the discussions with the School, I've heard through the rumor mill, that once the improvements to the stadium are made, that it's a 10 year plan to turn it over to the school district, but in those 10 years, the school district would be responsible for all maintenance, repairs, replacements at the stadium. Is that correct? Has that been ironed out yet?"

Mayor Bemmes replied, "We'll double check that. The only thing I think the city will maintain is part of the scheduling, but the upkeep, the maintenance - I've heard the same thing."

Katie Eadicicco confirmed, "I talked to Patrick, and I believe that's what he said is in the plan, is that the school will be required all the maintenance upkeep of it in that timeframe."

President of Council, Kevin Mattscheck Response: Mr. Mattscheck commented, "Isn't this something that we should know about before this is even brought to us?" He went on to say, "I love the school. I'm a big supporter of the school. Love that we're working with the school, but I don't see where it's working evenly with the school, at this point. If you look at the property that we own as a city, compared to the property we are going to be receiving, I'd like to know more about what the properties are worth, as they sit, right now. It's a lot of money to throw another five to \$6 million into a project that, where it's already worth more than what we're receiving."

Katie Eadicicco Response: "I've had this question a lot - 'why not just do the land swap?' The best way that I can explain it is, the city gets 4 acres of developable land, build-ready, and the school gets a \$5 million dollar project. It all comes down to taxpayer money, whether it's the school or the city, that's the way I look at it. I don't see it as lopsided. I see it as benefiting the city as a whole. I campaigned on the division that was definitely present on council, between council and the school. I experienced it firsthand, many years ago, I think maybe like five or six superintendents ago, that they just would not work together. We do have a good working relationship with them now. With the school, the relationship we have now, I don't see it as "us versus them," that they're getting a better end of the deal or we're getting a better end of the deal. I see it is something that could benefit the community, as a whole. Stadiums bring people in from all over, and it's representative of our community. It's what people from outside our community see. We need a functional fire department, a functional administration building - so that's the best way I can explain it when the land swap idea comes up. I don't think that's an even trade. I think it's giving the school a \$5 million project, we get build-ready land."

Mayor, Bo Bemmes Response: "It has been a discussion, both the stadium and our facilities, for many years. It's taken a lot to get to this point. It's not easy for administration, and not easy for council, to sit here. A lot of work, between financially strapped school system that has to be looking way into the future, making sure they remain fiscally solvent, and the same way with the city. What this will do, either tonight or Thursday night, hopefully, we will decide whether to put an issue on the ballot or not. We have the entire month of February, March, and April, to go through every detail." Mr. Bemmes went on to say, "All of these things will have a long time to discuss; debate. Bring your questions forward, and his Mark said, vote it up, or vote it

down. It's been a long time to get to this point." Mr. Bemmes continued to explain that the City came close to something similar in 2006/2007, but the money wasn't there. He also continued, *"It's hard to put issues on the ballot. I'm an anti-tax person with all of you. I don't like taxes. In 2006, as an anti-tax Republican, I supported an earnings tax increase, because if we didn't, we would have watched this city decline rapidly. We were spending \$800,000 a year more than what we were brining in back then. Police would have been cut, fire would have been cut – long list. But here now, we stand at a point where we gotta decide, and they're hard decisions... but do we buy into the future, or do we sit and do nothing and watch ourselves slowly decline? Never, in the history of mankind, has [an increase] taxes been an easy decision. Never. I applaud this Council for sitting here in front of you all, willing to at least put it on the ballot and let the people decide."*

Brenda Wehmer Response: Clarified to Council, and all voting residents, regarding the "discussion, or transfer, or the sale of property - that will be a separate transaction. If the bond issue passes, the bond issue is authorizing public funds, and the expenditure of those public funds, for the capital improvements - the fire station, the admin building renovations, the stadium improvements. The bond issue does not specifically authorize any sale or transfer of property - that will be an item to be separately negotiated between the school and city Council. Those contracts will come back to council at a future time. So before council is asked to authorize any such property sale, or property acquisition contracts, you will then have all of the facts before you are asked to approve any kind of real estate contract. While they're related to the bond issue, they are separate transactions that will require separate, and future council approval, and action. That's why it hasn't necessarily all been ironed out at the time that you're authorizing the bond because it's going to be a separate transaction that will come. If the bond issue passes, then those parties will move forward with those negotiations and discussions, and see if they can have a meeting of the minds. The intent is what is being talked about, whether that's actually what's agreed to, we don't know, but it will come back to you with facts at that time."

President of Council, Kevin Mattscheck Response: "Thank you for your clarification, that makes a big difference to me."

Mr. Powell Questioned: *"If the bond issue passes, and we can't come to an agreement with the school district, we don't necessarily have to sell the bonds?"*

Brenda Wehmer Answered: *"Right, you have options. You will be authorizing bonds up to, as we discussed last week, the maximum amount of. If you decide to take some of the projects off the list either because prices go up, or for other reasons, you don't have to issue all of the bonds - you don't necessarily have to do all of the projects. You can do the stadium improvements, and keep the stadium property, and go buy a different piece of property for the fire station, if that's available. Part of the reason the city was interested in the land swap was to shift the maintenance responsibilities to the school, although, I do believe they've been undertaking those for a few years. Just taking the maintenance off of the city's list, particularly once you put turf field on it, and then that turf field has to be replaced, if that property gets transferred to the school, then that becomes the school's responsibility to replace the turf in the future, so that the city is not continually having to replace the track, and the turf, and so forth, into the future. But those are things that will be discussed, and agreed to, or decide to go a different route, in the future. That has not been solidified at this point. It is, I think, the general intent of various parties, but those deal terms have not been fettered out, and agreed to. So, as I said, it's related to the bonds, but it is not part of what is being approved with the bond issue, and it will require future negotiation and approval."*

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

READING OF RESOLUTIONS:

(1) RESOLUTION DETERMINING TO PROCEED WITH BOND ISSUE AND TAX LEVY IN EXCESS OF THE TEN-MILL LIMITATION. (\$27,000,000.00) (Second Reading)

Mr. Thamann commented, *"A lot of the talk has been about the stadium, but our Chief's have told us that they have grown out of the current facility. They were centralized here in the 1950s. Most of the hilltop property neighborhoods were still being developed at the time. And since then, we've picked up Arlington Heights as part of our responsibilities. Our safety departments, fire and police, need bigger spaces to work efficiently and effectively and keep us all safe. And I think that ought to be the focus."*

Resolution was declared a second reading only.

READING OF ORDINANCES: NONE

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 8:06 pm.

X _____
Carla Bronner
Clerk of Council

X _____
Kevin Mattscheck
President of Council