

**CITY OF READING, OHIO
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – SPECIAL SESSION
JANUARY 29, 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 Pro-Tem, Mrs. Eadicicco called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President of Council Pro-Tem, Mrs. Eadicicco 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, Safety Service Director Patrick Ross & Clerk of Council Carla Bronner

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: NONE

GUEST SPEAKER:

None scheduled, but President of Council, Pro-Tem, Katie Eadicicco, invited Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Damon

Davis to speak: *"On behalf of the Board of Education, we are very excited for the opportunity to work with the city - to continue to grow, and develop Reading, that's become a very special place to me, our school district, and the history of our community. Just a couple things: one thing I just wanted to clarify that has been a question that I've often answered recently is, as you look at this project and into the future, the school district would not own the stadium. It would still continue to be owned, if the community wanted to go forward with this, at some point, 10 to 12 years from now, once that bond issue was paid for, then ownership would transfer to the school district. The question really has been, "Will the school allow that to continue to be a community space?" The answer is, 100% yes. That will continue to be a community space - that is in the heart of the community - for the lack of green space that we have for community sports, for youth sports, for community members to use the track, to be able to just be there. So, I know the Board of Education feels very strongly that they would continue to honor the same system, which is from dawn to dusk, every day, that the community could have access to. And, obviously the city would continue to own that for the next 10 years or so. I just want to thank Patrick, and the city, for working very hard and wanting to have the best for Reading."*

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

(1) Theresa Riley – *"If in fact, the school board, or the public schools, are gonna take over the stadium in 10 years, in ownership, why are we going to update this field now? Why can't it just wait until School take ownership? I mean it's a big ask for the community just for the new public administration building and the fire department."*

Mayor, Bo Bemmes Response: *"The discussions on the stadium have been going on since I was elected for Council in 1999, and quite honestly, long before that..."*

I've been on long enough to where, I was ready, and it wasn't gonna be my decision alone, but as the mayor of the city, I was offering the stadium for free. We'll give it to you. A lot of people would say "wow, that's quite a quite an offer from the mayor." And, again, Council would've had to approve that, I'm not a dictator, until they grouped together and thought about it. Even back then, several million dollars to improve it, to be really a viable place for a school to own. In all this time, our schools have their financial challenges, always, and we do too, every single day.

No matter how much money you would give either of us, we could find a lot of wonderful things to do with it. But we would sit and talk, "Why would we take as a gift, something that was gonna cost us millions of dollars?" So, the conversations went back-and-forth, and within the last couple years, I think we have finally reached between the city and schools, what would be a positive for both of us...

Whether the City's paying for it, or the School's paying for it, it's taxpayer dollars. And it is. It's almost hard to distinguish one from the other, except for the fact we have our budget, and they have theirs. I'm a mayor. I have a police chief, a fire chief, chief of public works - I don't have an athletic Director and coaches. I don't have teams...

We have finally, after all this time, and I will give a lot of credit to Patrick, to Damon Davis, to Jen Burke, to Todd Owens in particular, that sat patiently, and have come up with something that would be of a benefit for both.

We've gotten to this point, and tonight, hopefully, we'll make a decision, to put something on a ballot for everyone to decide. And if you oppose it, I totally understand. I'm not gonna sit there and criticize anyone for opposing this. But there is also a wonderful amount of people too, who have wanted this for so long."

(2) Mark Heufle – Expressed concerns with the already raising prices for residents (gas, electric, appliances, cars, fuel, etc) and how the addition of this property tax that will come with the bond is something he can't afford.

(3) Carrie Hoffman – Why are these levies connected, the fire department and the school? They seem separate and really different issues. Where did you get the figures from? The \$5 million and the \$23 million - where did the figures come from?

(4) Peggy Sutton – Who is running the show with the school and the city on these plans? Is there a committee? Who is it?

Response from Safety Service Director, Patrick Ross: Myself and the Fire Chief (Todd Owens), working with Damon & Jen (the Superintendent & Treasurer of the schools) and we both have been working with VSWC (they're an architect firm) and KDF Designs.

Mrs. Sutton also spoke to having better communication with the residents about this issue. She gave the example, and personally volunteered her time, to stuff flyers in the water bills. She stated, "we've got to get to the people who are not on Social Media."

Mayor Bo Bemmes Response: There is a City newsletter that goes out every year and I give out my phone number. Mrs. Sutton said she won't call him because it's not on record what he says. Mr. Ross pointed out that Administration & Council's emails are public record as well.

(5) Robin Knight (2125 Bolser) – Would like to see Council press the pause button on this resolution. Mrs. Knight feels as though this is being rushed and not enough information has been provided. In order to earn her trust, come to her with facts and transparency. In her opinion, a school stadium and firehouse should not be on the same ballot together. She commented that should the bond be voted in, the property tax increase that will result is more than some folks, especially older residents on a fixed income, can afford. Mrs. Knight thinks this issue needs to be looked at differently.

Mayor, Bo Bemmes Response: "This group is going to decide to put something on a ballot. The people of this community will decide whether it goes up or down. Council can't do that. All they can do is give people a choice."

(6) Megan Whitson –

“Council Members,

*I’m asking you tonight to **delay placing the proposed 27 million dollar, 28 year bond issue on the May ballot**, because moving forward now—without full understanding of the facts—would be irresponsible and unfair to the residents you represent.*

*At this moment, it is clear that several members of this council **do not have a complete grasp of the details surrounding the land-swap agreement between the city and the school district**. That alone should be reason enough to pause. You are being asked to approve a decades-long financial commitment while still unclear on the basic terms of a deal that directly affects the value of city assets and the long-term financial position of our community.*

*The land swap, as currently structured, is **deeply lopsided in favor of the school district**. The city would receive an undeveloped parcel valued at roughly **\$250,000 to \$300,000**—a piece of land with no existing infrastructure, no income-generating potential, and no immediate public benefit; a piece of land that would require **18 million dollars** to build a fire and administration building. In exchange, the school district would acquire a **newly renovated stadium**, sitting on a significantly larger and more valuable piece of property, with **ongoing revenue potential** from events, rentals, and community use.*

This is not an equal exchange. It is not even close.

Before you ask voters to take on a 28-year bond obligation, you owe it to the public to fully understand—and publicly explain—why the city is giving up a major asset and receiving so little in return. Right now, that explanation has not been provided, because many of you do not yet have the information yourselves.

Pushing this bond issue onto the May ballot under these conditions would signal that the priority is speed, not stewardship. It would tell residents that their council is willing to advance a multi-million-dollar proposal without fully understanding the implications of the land deal tied to it. That is not how trust is built, and it is not how responsible governance works.

A delay is not a denial. It is a commitment to due diligence.

*I urge you to **slow this process down**, look at alternative options, obtain the information you currently lack, evaluate the fairness of the land swap, and engage the public in a transparent discussion before placing anything on a ballot. The community deserves clarity—not a rushed decision with decades-long consequences.”*

Dave Powell Response: Responded that this bond issue is being set in place to arrange financing. “As far as contractually with the school, that will be negotiated later. And I believe that is typically how it is done with the bond issues with other communities. So right now, that’s what the bond issue is – to put the financing in place so then we can go into the brass tax, negotiating out the contracts, developing the architectural plans and whatnot. But we have to have that financing in place before we negotiate the rest of it.” Responding to the issue of the “deal” being lopsided, he commented, “What deal? There’s no deal. There’s no contract yet.”

Mrs. Whitson clarified, “The “intent” that has been made clear is that the stadium will be transferred to the school district in 10 to 12 years, when the residents have paid off the renovation. As it stands now, it is not an equal swap. The undeveloped land for Central is valued at \$250,000 to \$300,000. Who has the current estimated value of the stadium property?”

Patrick Ross responded, “the land for the stadium, according to the Auditor, the land value for the stadium and Bemmes field is about \$192,000.”

Mrs. Whitson went on to further clarify her point, *“the intent behind this, from what I’m hearing from Council, is that you guys are planning on this being a transfer to the school district in 10 to 12 years. At that point we will have already invested \$5 million dollars, or more, into renovations, and it’s just not, it’s not in favor of the city. This is not going to be an even exchange.”*

Mr. Powell answered, *“I understand that. But me, as a Councilman, I have not been part of those discussions. Whatever has been discussed, that’s between them. The contract will come to this body, to Council, for negotiation, and it is up to Council to approve that contract, whatever that contract is. There is no official land swap until that contract is there.”*

Mrs. Whitson asked, *“So how will we be permitted to build on Central’s property without that agreement in place?”*

Mr. Powell replied, *“There is no building at this point. We are setting up the financing for the project. That is what the bond issue is about – getting the financing in place. Then you go into the negotiations for how you’re going to accomplish what you’re going to accomplish with the bond issue.”*

Mr. Boehner interjected, *“I understand what Dave is saying. I agree with Dave. But the point I think he’s trying to make, he needs to go one step further. When all the projects are done, and the contract between us and the school to give them the stadium comes up, that’s where we negotiate with the school. We can say to the school, you need to pay us whatever we spend on the stadium, or you gotta pay 50% or whatever to make it fair. But until we get to that point, we can’t negotiate until we get to that point.”*

(7) Sue Renderle – Mrs. Renderle also feels Council is rushing this issue. She asked what the values are right now? We need to get a true value of the stadium right now before we proceed. She believes the stadium is worth more than what the City is receiving. Why can’t the school buy the stadium now, as is? The City needs to get out of this. They should have got out of it years ago, even though she knows the school didn’t want it. What happens if Ohio gets rid of property taxes in 5 years? How are we going to fund these bonds? She believes this is a lopsided deal, and this will tax the elderly out of their homes. Asked if anyone could tell her how much this process is costing the tax payers. What money have we invested in this already? Also asked, what if we have a new school board in 10 years and they no longer want the stadium? Has the City ever thought of selling the stadium to a private company? It is Mrs. Renderle’s view that if the stadium was to be taken out of the levy, it could pass.

Patrick Ross then read through a series of frequently asked questions and answers regarding this issue:
BOND/LEVY ISSUE FAQs and Information

- Why did the city turn money down from a prominent alumni to pay for the field and track improvements?
 - This never occurred.
- Why did the city select the former Reading Central Location for the new Fire Station and Admin Building?
 - A feasibility study was conducted that evaluated multiple sites within the city. The site at Reading and Vine St. was strongly considered, but the city does not control the entire site and there is an active business owner still operating there.
- How will the Fire/EMS respond from the Central site?
 - The primary response will be from Mechanic Street. Our ambulances and fire trucks will have direct access to Reading Rd. from Mechanic St. to make all emergency responses.

- How much will this cost me?
 - Based on county auditor evaluation, the MAXIMUM cost will be \$206 per 100K Auditor's Market Value for a term of 28 years. The cost could be less depending on final costs of the projects.
- What is the cost?
 - The estimated costs are between 25-27 million dollars. There are contingencies and inflationary costs built into the estimates.
- Will the public be able to even use the improved stadium, track, and Bemmes field?
 - YES, the facility will be open to public approximately from dawn to dusk when it is not currently being used for games or practices by youth teams(Reading Youth Soccer & Little League Football and Cheer) or Reading Schools teams.
- Why does the city need a turf field and new track?
 - The track currently is unsafe for track and field events as a result of cracks and trippers throughout it. There has not been a competitive meet in over 10 years. Our grass fields present major maintenance issues for the volume of use on it. The city heavily restricts use to preserve the field. The field is only allowed to be used from mid-August through the end of October. With turf it can be used year-round and more youth teams will be able to practice and play games on the turf fields.
 - Studies show for well kept grass fields, usable time should be around 100 hours, based on our current usage, the field already exceeds this. A turf field allows up to 3000 hours annually.
- Is the city planning to do anything to address parking for crowded events?
 - We will look into improvements in the future if possible with existing space, but will not be included in improvements.
- Does the stadium facility really need upgrades?
 - The stadium has not had major capital improvements since opening in 1967. The restrooms and stands are not suitable for those with disabilities. The locker rooms and all rooms under the stands have water leak issues and the furnishings(fountains, bathrooms are largely the original ones)
- Why do we need new admin space?
 - The new admin building adjacent to the fire station will be a one story structure that is ada compliant. It will also give room for those conducting city business the ability for privacy(ex. Filing your local taxes). The police department will also be able to occupy the current water/tax office for improved training space. The new building will also hold a meeting room large enough for up to 49 people that could be used by city organizations that have such need. The building, zoning, and code enforcement will also be housed in the new building instead of a separate location.
- Why doesn't the project include improvements for the Police Department?
 - The project does include improvements that are needed for the department. The Police Department will be able to utilize the current fire department and general office space including the bays where the fire department trucks and ambulances currently are housed. In addition to gaining space for

training, the police department will gain locker space and a restroom with shower facilities. The police department vehicles will be able to park inside in a more secure environment.

- Why is the city paying for the Stadium for the school district?
 - The Stadium is owned by the city and has owned and operated the stadium since it opened nearly 60 years ago. Negotiations between the city and school are ongoing, but the basic premise of this agreement, in a future date to be determined later, the school will take over ownership and operations of the stadium. The fields and track will remain community assets that can be used by the public when not in use. The school district will give the former Reading Central property to the city to be used for the new Fire Station building. It is expensive to maintain and operate a stadium property, which includes future replacements, and that responsibility would fall on the school's shoulder's in the future.
- Why doesn't the city apply for grants to pay for this?
 - The city has applied for grants through the NFL in the past to assist with field replacement. The city has currently applied for \$1,000,000 in funding from the State of Ohio through their capital budget. The city will know by the end of June at the latest if they are awarded funds from the state.
- Why are they only doing a 6 lane track as part of the plans? Will meets be able to held?
 - Due to space constraints to allow for a soccer field that is regulation with, there is not enough room to do an 8 lane track. Currently our track is 7 lanes.
 - The following CHL teams(Madeira, Wyoming, Mariemont, Indian Hill, Deer Park, and Finneytown currently have 6 lane tracks and are able to hold meets
- Why not do grass fields instead of turf?
 - Grass allows for a smaller amount of usage. With turf, it can be used year round and in all types of weather. The city has lost playable fields with the loss of the former Rohm and Haas(next to pool) fields that were able to hold soccer, baseball, and softball games and practices. This causes more conflicts for teams. Having turf will allow youth and school teams to practice on the turf where in the past, it has never been used except for games between August and October. As explained above, according to studies on grass and turf, the city exceeds the recommended usage hours already only being used 3 months of the year, in the future the usage will expand exponentially.
- How will the field be replaced in 10-12 years?
 - The school district will take official ownership after the city pays off the cost of the initial replacement and will be responsible for future replacement. The school can not officially own the property while the City is paying off the debt for the stadium portion of the project.
- Why are there not renderings or official plans for the Police Department at city hall?
 - There will not be any changes at City hall until completely after the project is completed for fire/admin. The new building still has to be fully designed by an architect and engineer. Then the project will be put to bid then construction can start. The process will likely take 1.5-2 years. When an architect is selected for this project, they will also be tasked with renovation designs at city hall which will not be able to begin until the new building were to open.
- Why are you putting police in a building that is so bad?

- The building itself is not deplorable, as some have said. Is it an old building, yes, but the primary issue in the entire building is space. There is not sufficient space currently and no room to expand. Our departments do an excellent job despite this, but there is just not space to do give our departments more room. The police department's usable area will dramatically increase by close to three times.
- Why not just build the city building where the stadium is?
 - The stadium's prime tenant is the school, but it is also rented by Reading Youth Football and Cheer and with turf, the full intention is to let youth soccer also use it. We do not have large green spaces to build new fields as it stands now. There are conflicts for recreational space , especially in the spring. With turf, teams can practice and play games on it without concern for how many games or practices are on it and no matter the weather. The full intention is to have a community recreational resource to be used by all, not just reading schools. Many kids that play youth athletics are not Reading schools students.
 - The Reading Central Site is not large enough to have a stadium with adequate seating, parking, and facilities such as bathrooms.
- How will property reevaluations impact the millage cost for homeowners?
 - The city's legal counsel that advises the city on all bond/levy and borrowing questions provided the following answer:

“Triennial and sexennial reappraisals should not cause any increase in the millage rate for the bond levy. They should only cause a potential reduction in the millage, if new construction value is added to the duplicate then everyone's millage would go down (whether the reduction amount is noticeable or not is another issue).

The Bond levy will only generate enough to pay annual debt service which will be established and locked in at the time the bonds are issued.

The only way the bond millage should go up after the debt service is determined is if we have declining Assessed Values, which is highly unusual, but did occur following the mortgage crisis in 2008/2009

The issues related to increasing values and increasing property taxes is applicable to inside millage and certain school district levies, if the school district is at the 20 mill floor. The legislature is passing new laws to mitigate the effects of these issues in the future. Voted bond millage does not increase as a result of increasing property values.”

COMMUNICATIONS:

(1) Email received from Michele Naish:

Dear Council, Mayor & Admin,

I had intended to be here tonight for the meeting, but I am unable to attend due to illness.

I am requesting of Council not to commingle school/stadium funding with city/municipal funding.

If you truly want this project to go forward in the best interest of the entire community, then it would be logical to place the stadium proposal and the municipal complex on SEPARATE ballots, so voters can evaluate each project independently, and on its own merits.

Any stadium upgrade should be funded primarily by its users and beneficiaries, with pay– to-play, and private

contribution options fully considered.

City funds should be dedicated to a new, unified municipal complex that serves the entire community improving access to essential services for all residents under ONE roof in an easily accessible location.

Combining unrelated funding, risks undermining trust and accountability. This is so unfair to the taxpayers, and this current proposal does that.

Placing this current proposal on a May ballot completely undermines the trust of our voters who should have the ability to decide project by project separately with full transparency and fiscal responsibility.

This proposal does not do this. Based on the way this proposal is presented, I would have to vote NO.

If the proposals were separated, I would look at them on their own merit and be more inclined to vote YES.

It's a shame that this proposed project is being presented in the way it is written.

The current proposed ballot language obscures the full cost and commitment, leading people to vote yes, believing they're getting a new fire station & capital improvements, without realizing the stadium is part of the deal, locking in the taxpayers for 28 years for a project that is clearly a school issue.

This lack of transparency means everyone loses.

Holding a special election in May could cost taxpayers up to 10,000.00 or more with 65% of the cost required upfront by Hamilton County Board of Elections.

Placing the issue on the general election ballot in November would result in a nominal cost to the taxpayers.

In my opinion, I think we need to go back to the drawing board before we go forward with this current proposal. Let's work together to gain input from the entire community with focus groups and community involvement for better solutions.

I am asking council to take my points of view into consideration and vote NO on this current issue as it stands.

*Kind regards,
Michele Naish*

(2) Email received from Mandy Jo Ingram:

I am writing to voice my thoughts on the proposed bond issue. I feel you are rushing the vote. There is a serious lack of communication in our city right now. I have spoken to many citizens of Reading who have no idea about the Bond issue or the Reading Road Diet. You are relying on Facebook as the means to get the word out and not everyone uses social media. I personally wouldn't know what's going on if it weren't for Ms. Eadicicco. She does an amazing job of communicating with the people! By putting this issue on the May ballot, without informing ALL residents, it is forcing an uninformed vote.

I also feel these should be 2 separate bond issues. One for the stadium, and a second for the municipal complex.

Some of us would be likely to vote for one and not the other. So if these appear on the May ballot as the same issue, I will be voting no.

Between this rushed bond and the Reading Road Diet, I have lost trust in most of our city's leadership. With the choice of some words used last night, I feel that the decision to do the ODOT project has already been made by some of our leadership before even hearing from the residents. I am not opposed to change but I am opposed to change that will hurt the daily life of this great city. I am writing to you, the Mayor, President of Council and my Ward representative to make my voice heard in hopes of better communication between city leadership and the residents you all represent.

Thank you.

Mandy Jo Ingram

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) (Third Reading)

Dave Powell Comments: *"I have served the citizens of the City of Reading for over 10 years, first as a member of the planning commission, and as a member of City Council for the last 6 and a half years. Over the years I have heard about the need for a new firehouse, because of the insufficient quarters and not having all their apparatuses under one roof. I have heard about the need for improvements and upgrades to the labyrinth that is currently our Police Department. I have heard about the need for bigger and upgraded administrative offices to better serve the citizens. I have heard about the need for upgrades and improvements to the Stadium and practice field. Most recently I have heard from citizens that are opposed to the proposed bond issue. The proposed bond issue is a huge ask of the taxpayers of Reading and the needs are there. The issue is bigger than the seven of us sitting up here. Each voter needs to personally decide if taking care of these needs of the City of Reading is worth the additional outlay of their hard earned money."*

Scott Thamann Comments: *"The way I see it, this is an opportunity to improve our public service. Our fire chief and our police chief have been very frugal for a long time and doing more with less. I feel like we've outgrown our firehouse and we need improvements there. If we keep everyone safe and provide a nice facelift to the community at the same time, more efficient administration, I'm leaning that direction. The stadium, I understand, is a sticking point. What we've already heard here is that it is City property and has not had any kind of capital improvement since its birth. So, whether we're addressing something finally with the firehouse, the police station, you know, I couldn't sleep last night with the question, "if not now, then when?""*

Mark Bishop Comments: *"Everytime this gets put off, or somebody doesn't do anything, the cost goes up. If we would have done this 10 years ago, we were short on funds then too. If we would have done this 10 years ago, the cost would have been less, 20 years ago a far less than that. It is a big ask. But it is something that is going to keep deterioration. This building is gonna keep deteriorating us if we don't do something with it. The stadium is gonna get worse as it goes on – it does not meet code, it does not meet the handicapped accessibility which they literally could shut it down at any time. It is a big ask, but it is a very important ask. It does benefit the entire city, and we have great City services crews, administration as well. I think it's time that we actually pay the bill that we put off for so long."*

Bob Boehner Comments: *"This is my 17th year up here on Council. I worked for the Mayor for three years. There isn't*

an ounce of area that I haven't been in this building. The police department is abysmal. The fire department's just busting at the seams. I just can't go along with the stadium and that's the bottom line."

Shelly Kroeger Comments: *"I know you all feel like this is rushed. It is a big ask. When I was raising my family when my kids were little, it was a struggle. I respect that, and I recognize that. What I'm not quite understanding is why we feel the need to differentiate the need between whether the stadium is going to the school or whether the property is going to us. We're a community. Whether it's our school or whether it's the city, even if we don't upgrade the stadium and we give it to the school, chances are you're still gonna be asked to pay for it from the school. Ultimately now, if we decide to put this on the ballot, you ultimately have the final say. That's very important to all of us. You have the right to vote no on this if, in fact, we put it on the ballot. But I do see where this could be a great benefit to the city. It's gonna keep people here during the games, it's going to increase business at our local businesses. I can see it being a great asset for everyone."*

Katie Eadicicco Comments: *"Until it's on the ballot, there's only so much information we can even get together and put out. For three months we're going to be doing information sessions here, tours of facilities – we're not throwing this out to the public blindly – I would never want to do that. But we are giving the citizens a voice, and I think that is the most important thing."*

Motion made by Mrs. Eadicicco, seconded by Mr. Thamann to adopt the resolution.
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.")

RESOLUTION ADOPTED

RESOLUTION NUMBER 2026-07R

READING OF ORDINANCES: NONE

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn came from Mr. Boehner, and was seconded by Mr. Thamann. Motion carried by voice vote. There being no further business, the meeting was declared adjourned at 8:56 pm.

X

Carla Bronner
Clerk of Council

X

Katie Eadicicco
President of Council, Pro-Tem