



Annual Council Activity Report 2014

Council Staff

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Introduction

City Council Staff prepared this report to provide an overview of the activities of both Council Staff and City Council for 2014. This report provides some detail on the number of complaints fielded during 2014 with the resolution rate, along with highlights of the legislation adopted, and updates on the issues addressed by City Council, Council Staff and the Boards, Authorities and Commissions served by Council Staff. Citizens and other agencies still rely on the Council Office to be either their last resort or their first “go to” place for assistance and information on a wide variety of issues.

City Council Accomplishments

City Council, as set forth in the City of Reading Home Rule Charter, serves as the Governing Body of the City of Reading. As such, all powers of the City not otherwise provided for by the Home Rule Charter are exercised in a manner determined by City Council.

In 2014, City Council addressed a wide range of issues that directly affected the lives of citizens. **Key accomplishments** include:

- Concluding negotiations with the Water Authority resulting in a new Lease Agreement
- Amending the Act 47 Recovery Plan
- Amending the Purchasing Policies
- Amending the Animal Control Ordinance requiring registration of more than six (6) dogs and cats per household
- Repair Wyomissing Park Street Lights
- Revising the Business License Revocation regulations
- Consolidating the Appeals Boards
- Memorial Review Process

City Council adopted resolutions to **appoint and reappoint 44 Board, Authority and Commission members**. Council did not need to remove any BAC members for non-attendance at meetings during 2014.

City Council assisted the Administration by **adjusting program fees** to enable the City to cover its costs to provide various programs, including increasing Trades and Fire Prevention fees, Business Privilege License Revocation and DCR Appeal fees, Egelman's Baseball Field and Keffer Field house rental fees, and the Curbside Waste Collection fee.

City Council also supported the Administration's desire to expand the **Quality of Life Ticketing program**. Prior to the Quality of Life Ticketing program Property Maintenance Inspectors (PMI) were required to post notices for complaints like high grass and weeds, animal excrement, snow removal, etc. The PMIs were then required to go back to the property five (5) days later to check for compliance. The majority of time property owners would refuse to comply and the citation process would begin. This process was found to be ineffective and expensive and served as a reminder system for basic quality of life property maintenance. QoL tickets are scaled from \$25 for the first ticket, to \$50 for the second ticket and \$100 for the third ticket. The Property Maintenance Division reported monthly on the Quality of Life Ticketing program used to address individual complaints and sweeps covering the entire City in 2013. In 2014, 9,799 QoL Tickets were issued (compared to 11,839 in 2013) with the amount billed of \$455,800 (compared to \$686,930 in 2013). QoL revenue received 2014 was \$228,995. In 2014, 357 appeals were heard and 330 or 92% were granted. Analysis of the data shows that 74% of the tickets were issued to rental properties.

City Council empanelled the **Charter Review Commission** in 2013 to review the City's Home Rule Charter and make recommendations for amendments. Six (6) proposed amendments were placed on the November 2014 ballot resulting in five (5) changes to the Charter. The Law office is currently working to update the Charter language. An internal work group was formed by the Managing Director to address the question concerning the Administrative Code and Administrative Manual.

City Council also continues to participate in meetings with the **Albright** Administration, Reading Police Department and College Heights representatives concerning **off-campus student housing problems**. Communication between the parties is coordinated by the Council office, resulting in a significant decrease in complaints from residents in the Albright neighborhood. The Zoning Ordinance now prohibits new Student Rental properties in the R1 and R2 low-density zoning districts.

However, approximately 15 new unregistered student rentals were reported to the Council office. The Zoning office is undertaking enforcement. Albright has applied for six (6) student home permits – two were withdrawn, two were denied by the Zoning Hearing Board in February 2014 and two were permitted by right as they are within the Institutional Overlay zoning district.

Council adopted **97 Ordinances** and **138 Resolutions** in 2014. By the end of 2014, five (5) Ordinances were withdrawn; one (1) Ordinance before Council was NOT enacted; one (1) resolution was withdrawn and one (1) resolution was not adopted. Staff, in cooperation with the Solicitor's Office and other departments, provided research and support for the preparation of all legislation. Every effort was made to ensure the final product was of the highest legal and technical quality. The original copies of legislation are indexed, bound and stored in the vault for research and historical purposes. In addition, the legislation is scanned and uploaded to the City's website for access to the general public and to keep the digital version of the City's Code of Ordinances up-to-date.

In addition to Regular Meetings and Committee meetings, Council conducted four (4) **Public hearings** of which two (2) were Charter required budget hearings, one (1) was a zoning hearing to change the zoning designation of 15 Prospect St, which was approved and one (1) was regarding a change to the Zoning Ordinance for parking in the Commercial Core zoning district, which was withdrawn. Council also held four (4) **special meetings** to authorize an RFP for independent legal counsel for Council, to authorize a sewage grant for the WWTP project, to introduce the budget and tax ordinances, and to name the developer for the Penn Street properties. In addition, Council **overrode four (4) vetoed ordinances** – amending the Administrative Code to allow all Departments, Divisions, Offices and Agencies to initiate the RFP process, dissolving the Water Authority (repealed after new lease agreement was enacted), amending the Water Authority lease agreement, and transferring funds from the contingency fund to the Charter Board and the Council office for legal fees.

The recently created **Audit Committee** (Finance Chair, City Clerk, City Auditor, Administrative Services Director and a citizen with a financial background) met to review the findings identified in the 2013 external audit prepared by Herbein & Co. and developed a plan to rectify five (5) of the repeat findings in the audit.

The **Capital Committee** composed of the Administrative Services Director, Community Development Director, Public Works Director, Fire Chief, Police Chief, Auditor and one member of Council appointed by the Council President, which was created in 2012, will

begin meeting during 2015 to develop a capital plan.

In addition, five (5) **Conditional Use hearings** were held concerning the following properties:

- 1233 Green St – approved converting a first floor commercial space to a rental unit
- 246 N 9th St – approved a temporary shelter
- 139 S 10th St – denied converting a single family home to two units
- 321 N 8th St – approved two units plus one efficiency unit
- 714 Franklin St – denied converting a two unit rental to a one unit rental with three rooms

Also, two (2) **HARB appeal hearings** were held:

- 733 Madison Ave – approved in part and denied in part
- 306 S 5th St - denied

Council held seventeen (17) **budget review sessions** in addition to **discussing the budget during Committee of the Whole meetings**. During budget discussions, several topics were discussed which need further follow up including:

- Pension Reform
- Evaluation of non-emergency ambulance service
- BPT collection rates
- Review agreement with Redevelopment Authority
- Towing
- Productivity of Property Maintenance Division
- Zoning backlog
- Take home vehicles
- Policy for outside legal counsel
- Police and Fire overtime

City Council intervened in several decisions of the Zoning Hearing Board to the Court of Common Pleas that were appealed by **Orange Stone/Fire Tree**. During 2011, with assistance from the Law Office, Barley Snyder LLC (outside legal counsel for the City), and Hartman/Shurr (legal counsel for the College Heights Community Council) all zoning related cases were merged into a single case. Favorable decisions were obtained from the Berks County Court of Common Pleas and the Commonwealth Court. The Mandamus action, which sought an immediate zoning permit from the Zoning Administrator, filed by Orange Stone/Fire Tree was denied by the Commonwealth Court. This decision provides language that will further assist in this legal battle, as it

states that the proposed reuse of the property is not a non-conforming, pre-existing use. A tax exemption application filed by Orange Stones was also denied by the Assessment Board.

The Zoning office issued an enforcement notice in 2012 to stop Orange Stone from conducting business in the property without a zoning permit. The enforcement action was made possible due to Orange Stone's testimony at the Tax Exemption hearing where they admitted to operating daily with multiple employees at the former Caum Home property. The matter is still pending in the Court of Common Pleas.

The property has been actively marketed for sale and the list price has been reduced to a reasonable level. Several potential buyers have shown interest.

The **repaving of Cotton St** was completed and the **street light project in Wyomissing Park** is well underway.

In addition to attending standard Council sessions and assigned Committees, City Councilors also participated in the following areas:

1. Act 47 Implementation Work Group
2. Blighted Property Review Committee
3. Recreation Commission
4. Audit Committee
5. Reading Area Transportation Study
6. Berks Community Action Plan
7. Housing Board of Appeals
8. Local Redevelopment Authority
9. Berks County Criminal Justice Advisory Board
10. Diversity Board
11. Capital Improvement Project Committee
12. Main Street Board

Council Staff Key Accomplishments

1. Staff was responsible for providing administrative support to the following City agencies. These organizations play a vital role assisting City Council and the Administration in advancing their respective positions. These organizations promote citizen involvement in government and advance the concept of participatory democracy.

- a) **Blighted Property Review Committee** – The Blighted Property Review

Committee (BPRC) Ordinance, enacted in 2007, assigns the City Clerk to the BPRC to ensure that the process is well managed and continues through successive administrations. During 2011, the City Clerk worked with the Law Office and Property Maintenance Manager to shift blighted property support from the CD office to the Property Maintenance Office and create an automated support process using the Hansen program. The hearing process was again refined to use a consent agenda approval format for properties that do not have representation at the hearings. The acquisition of five (5) properties occurred in 2013 through eminent domain. Four (4) properties in the 300 block of North 4th Street were transferred to Habitat for Humanity and one (1) property on Fairview Street was transferred to Neighborhood Housing Services. In 2013 an internal team prepared a handbook on the seven (7) acquisition processes available through tax sale, foreclosure, Conservancy, eminent domain, etc. The handbook will be used to identify the most expedient and least expensive acquisition method. In 2014 the Administration asked the BPRC to reduce the number of hearings held per year to increase the ability of Property Maintenance to manage the properties going through the process. The BPRC now conducts only two cycles of Determination and Certification Hearings per calendar year. Several properties were de-certified as they were rehabilitated and approximately 45 properties were certified.

b) **Board of Health** – The Board of Health met eight (8) times in 2014 to focus on the following topics:

- o Pet Limitation – The Board discussed the need to enact legislation to limit the number of cats and dogs per household which culminated in a revision of the Animal Chapter. The Board’s recommended amendments were passed by Council in 2014.
- o Fluoride in the Public Water System – The Board discussed this issue and determined that the current level of fluoride added to Reading’s water system is safe and within the limit set by US EPA and PA DEP and should continue to be added.

The Board will continue to monitor health issues affecting the City and its residents.

c) **Board of Ethics** – The Board of Ethics met six (6) times during 2014 to

- o approve the necessary forms for campaign finance reporting
- o draft an advisory opinion regarding an employee serving on an authority and a potential conflict of interest

- draft an advisory opinion regarding an employee and political activity
 - process a complaint
- d) **Environmental Advisory Council** – The EAC was recognized by the Berks County Conservation District as “Conservation Organization of the Year”.

Environmental issues reviewed throughout the year included:

- Rain Barrel educational workshops
- Stormwater Issues
- Steep Slope Ordinance
- Riparian Buffer Ordinance
- Alternative Energy Ordinance
- Fluoride in Public Drinking Water
- Dam tour
- Recycling program and legal challenges
- BCTV program “Our City Our World”

In addition presentations were heard from:

- Joseph Reeves – Reading Green Manufacturing and Recycling
- David Ruyak and Lester Kissinger – Shade Trees and Tree Inventory
- Brian Kelley – Redesign Reading
- Frank Denbowski – Zero Waste Initiative
- Brian Kelley – STAR Initiative

- e) **Reading Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA)** – The LRA submitted all required documentation to HUD and the Navy at the end of 2012 and the Navy began to undertake the lengthy process to decommission the Navy Marine Center, located in the 600 block of Kenhorst Blvd. and transfer it to Mary’s Shelter and the Reading Redevelopment Authority. Mary’s Shelter took title to the main facility in December 2013 and the Reading Redevelopment Authority purchased the remaining acreage from the Navy through a negotiated sale. The transfer to the Reading Redevelopment Authority occurred in December 2013. Originally the Redevelopment Authority wanted to sell the parcel to a developer for market rate residential housing; however, the Navy prohibits the Redevelopment Authority from selling the recently acquired parcel for a three (3) year period, unless the proceeds over the price paid to the Navy are paid back to the Navy. Although the LRA’s job is technically completed, the LRA must remain in place to monitor the reuse of the parcel and to make sure that the use continues to be

aligned with the Reuse Plan approved for the parcel by the LRA, HUD and the Navy.

Mary's Shelter has started making the required renovations to the Navy Marine main facility. They plan to move into the facility by the end of 2015.

- f) **Bernhart's Park** – In late 2011 the remediation of the Park was completed. Exide paid for the care and maintenance of the Park for 2012 and 2013. It is hoped that the Public Works Department will work with Muhlenberg Township to develop a plan to continue the maintenance of the park in an exchange of services.

2. During 2014, the Deputy City Clerk completed her certification and is now recognized by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) as a Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC).

3. Council Staff participated on many **Continuous Improvement Teams**, the Chamber Governmental Affairs Committee, Municipal Secretaries Forum, Six Sigma Greenbelt Teams, Curbside Waste Collection Work Group, and Act 47 Implementation meetings.

- a) The City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk updated the **Welcome to Reading Guidebook in 2013**. The update was necessary to get important information to residents. The Guidebook contains information about many City services and works to answer questions and provide contact information for additional information when needed. The project is now complete as it has been printed and distributed.

b) Council Staff provided support to the City's **Business Analyst** as he works to audit many of the City's program and operational areas. During 2014, there was work on the following projects:

- Zoning Ordinance amendments for Alternative Energy, Steep Slope and Riparian Buffer regulations
- Document Management
- Special Event Permit
- Purchasing Policy Update
- Engaging City Employees
- Time Tracking in the Law Office
- Submission Process for Items Appearing on Council agendas
- Update of the Employee Handbook
- Update of the Frequently Asked Questions section of the website

- Fiscal Provisions in Administrative Code in compliance with Purchasing Policies
- Review of Administrative Code in light of Charter amendment

c) The City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk updated the **Council Policy Handbook**. The Handbook contains policies for Council procedure. The Policy Handbook was reviewed by the Law Department. The review identified the need to clarify some poorly worded sections of the Administrative Code. Amendments to the Administrative Code to make the clarifications were enacted in January.

d) The City Clerk assembled an electronic **Local Ordinance Handbook** for Police and a **Parking Handbook** for the Parking Authority. The book is linked to the City Code posted on the City's web site. The officers have the Handbook available on their laptops and can refer to it quickly and easily when a situation occurs and they are unfamiliar with City regulations. Using this information a Patrol Officer identified an illegal rental in late 2012. PMD undertook enforcement action.

4. Council Staff identified and corrected disconnects with the receipt and review of tax assessment, tax assessment appeal, tax exoneration applications and PLCB liquor license applications. Council Staff also assisted the AOPC (Administrative Office of PA Courts) to correct their citation database and convert their system to match the re-codified City Code.

5. Council Staff researched and drafted ordinances. The most prominent are:

- Charter Board mediation policy
- Water Authority Lease Agreement
- Memorial Review Application Process
- Prohibiting advertising material from being placed on automobiles

Council Staff also assisted the Administration with researching and amending various additional ordinances.

6. In addition to drafting legislation and organizing a wide variety of meetings, Council Staff composed **38 commendations** and many recognition certificates. Council commendations are issued to recognize the many achievements and heritage of local individuals, businesses, and organizations. In addition, certificates for athletic and academic accomplishments were issued to those named in the

Reading Eagle Berks Best for Reading High School and Berks Catholic High School and to the Reading JROTC scholarship winners.

7. Council Staff further refined the process for managing **appointments to City Boards, Authorities and Commissions**. A system of improved background checks was implemented. These checks enable staff to determine if an applicant is in good standing in the community. The background check determines if a candidate has unpaid parking tickets, warrants, delinquent taxes, delinquencies with the Water Authority, Solid Waste Office and Codes Office. If the background check uncovers problems, the applicant is notified and asked to contact the proper office to resolve the problem. This information is handled confidentially. **A total of 62 applications were processed resulting in 44 approvals.** Twenty-nine (29) applicants were identified to have problems during their background checks. Of those, fourteen (14) have not rectified the problems identified.

8. Council Staff participated in the bi-monthly meetings with the City's **Act 47** Coordinators regarding the Recovery Plan initiatives and the amendment to the Recovery Plan.

9. During 2010 the City installed the **Granicus webcasting system in Council Chambers**. The webcasting system makes the meetings, press conferences, etc. available to all residents in Reading, Berks County and across the nation through the City's website. Currently City Council, the BPRC and the Zoning Hearing Board are the only groups to stream meetings to the City's website. With the Administration's approval, the system will be installed in the Penn Room, which will enable further expansion of the webcasting system and the internal use of the system will increase to provide improved transparency to the public. The meetings and functions streamed are archived on the City's website so people can watch any meeting or event recorded at their convenience. Council Staff has also encouraged the Administration to use the non-public webcasting system for employee orientation and training, as employees will have the ability to review training programs recorded for internal use at their work stations, which makes the training efficient and affordable.

10. Council staff updated the **City Council Facebook** page to update citizens about important news, legislation and upcoming meetings.

11. Council staff continued the **newsletter** in 2014. Articles appearing in the newsletter included:

- Information on the Water Authority negotiations
- City Light Ministries
- Human Relations Commission
- Do Not Call Registration
- Homestead Tax
- Vision Resource Center
- Rain Barrel Workshop
- Cotton Street Repaving Project
- Albright area parking
- Property Tax Reform
- Habit for Humanity's Re-Store
- Animal Ordinance Amendment re six dog/cat registration requirement
- BAC openings

12. Began work on **Standard Operating Procedures** for Council staff.

Administrative Accomplishments

The Council Office is a fully functioning municipal office, which has many responsibilities in addition to providing support to City Council. The head of the office, the City Clerk, is the official keeper of record. As such the City Clerk is responsible for the maintenance of all **municipal records**, their dissemination to relevant and interested parties and attesting to their authenticity. This important responsibility necessitates a large and complex system of document management and storage. Five (5) particular areas were addressed by staff in 2014:

1. Binding of the Journal of Council, Ordinances, and Resolutions;
2. Organizing the vault, which serves as the City's records repository;
3. Utilizing technology to scan items of historical and administrative value into an electronic document management retention system;
4. Coordinating the Municipal Records Retention Program with all Administrative Offices.
5. Drafting a spreadsheet to track contracts with outside vendors.

Journals of Council are prepared by the office annually. The Journal contains the Council minutes, ordinances, resolutions, reports, support documentation and the budgets (CDBG, General Fund and CIP). Copies of the Journal are required to be sent to the Berks County Law Library and the Reading Public Library, as well as being kept on record in the office. In 2015 Staff will continue to aggressively pursue document management by utilizing the DocStar software. Having all documents stored electronically will greatly increase our ability to research issues. The Council

Office is the only City office currently using this technology consistently.

Vault organization remained a priority in 2014. The digitizing of documents continues as a priority as the office strives to make records available digitally. This has greatly improved accessibility and the ability to research City documents. 2014 focused on contract files. Digitization of contract files and ordinances prior to 1988 will be the focus of 2015.

The **City Code** is updated annually. Books are provided only to the Berks County Law Library and the Reading Public Library. For the last eight (8) years, Council staff has been **posting newly enacted ordinances and resolutions on the City's website** which provides instant access to new legislation for employees and citizens and has reduced the cost of the annual supplement of the Codified Ordinance book. Council staff works with the Webmaster to place links to the new legislation inside the online City Code. The Police Handbook and Parking Authority Handbook were updated and are now linked to the online Code.

Constituent Service

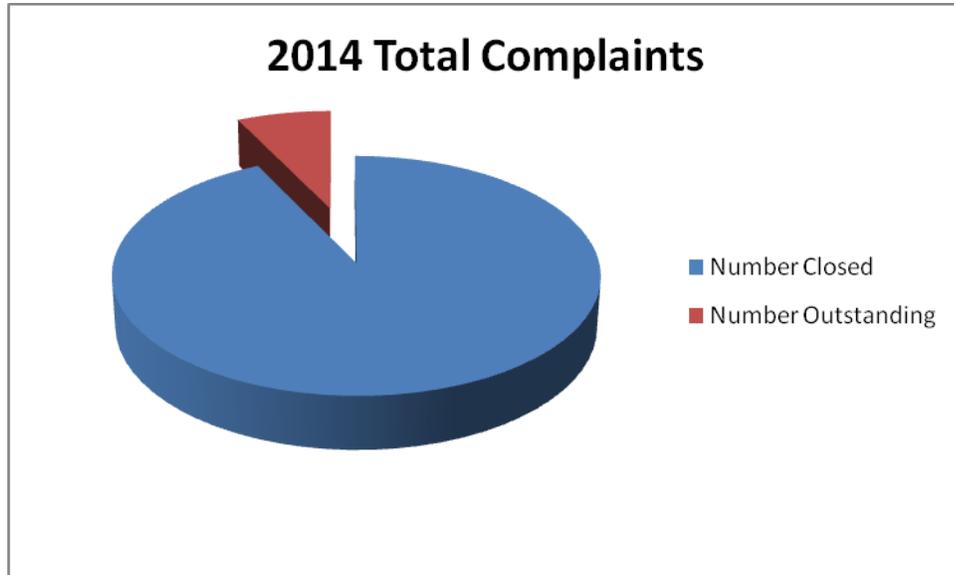
Council staff recognizes that we serve as your full-time support service and are a reflection of Council. As such we make every effort to conduct business in a courteous and professional manner. The opening of the Call Center – and now the Citizen Services Center - has not reduced the number of calls our office receives. Calls are tracked and managed according to category. The largest category, Calls for Service includes general questions about City operations and specific questions about City Council and City issues.

Beginning in 2012, the Managing Director allowed Council staff to work directly with the Citizen Service Center manager for complaint follow-up. In addition, the CSC manager has been working with individual offices for more timely and informative updates. These two items combined are showing improvement in complaint resolution.

This process continued in 2014. When complaints are received, they are recorded in a database, which staff regularly monitors. The database tracks the complaint by showing when the complaint was recorded, where the complaint was sent for further action and what action was taken regarding the complaint.

Council staff generates requests for updates monthly. It is the goal of the Council office to have 100% complaint resolution. The complaint resolution **rate for 2014 is**

93%. The resolution rate is up from the resolution rate of the Citizen Service Center in 2012 (63%) but is still down from 2006 (94%) when Council staff directly handled all complaints.



The following tables show a tabulation of the number of constituents assisted by the Council Office in 2014:

Breakdown of 2014 Calls by Type

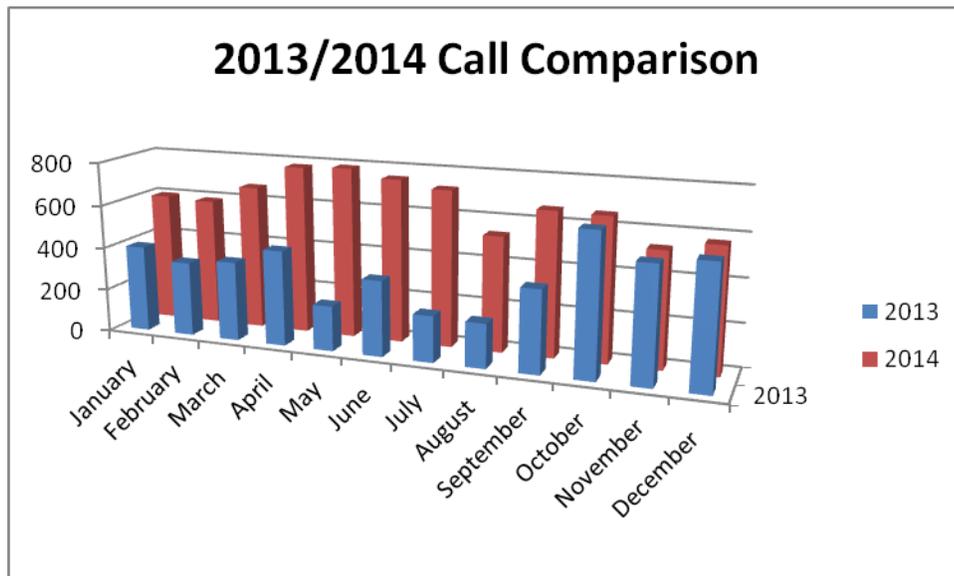
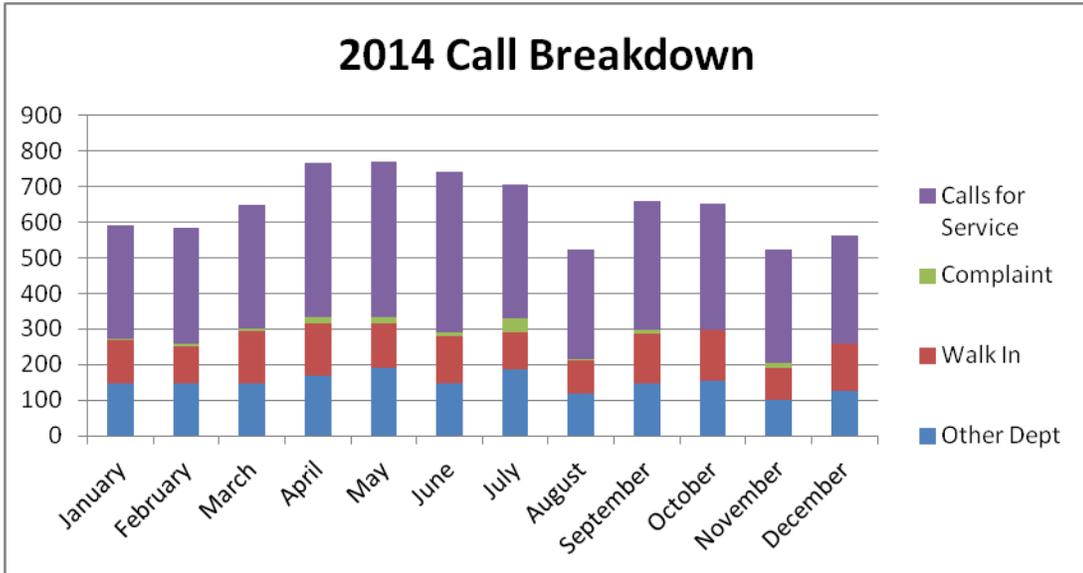
<u>Other Department</u>	<u>Walk-Ins*</u>	<u>Complaints</u>	<u>Calls for Service</u>	<u>Information Request</u>	<u>Spanish Speaking</u>	<u>Total Calls</u>
1,789	1,469	136	4,337	52	75	7,858

* Walk-Ins are counted as calls as the service provided is the same.

Breakdown of 2013 Calls by Type

<u>Other Department</u>	<u>Walk-Ins*</u>	<u>Complaints</u>	<u>Calls for Service</u>	<u>Total Calls</u>
1,387	716	60	2,468	4,631

* Walk-Ins are counted as calls as the service provided is the same.



*Note: although the call volume seems to be reduced from May through September 2013 (in blue above), this may be due to the relocation of the Deputy City Clerk for those months and the difficulty of the remaining staff to fully capture the number of calls and walk ins received and assisted during that time.

In addition, **thousands of requests for information and assistance are received and addressed via email.**

Staff acknowledges that the job of supporting Council is never finished. There are always ways of improving existing functions and finding new techniques to carry out existing tasks. As part of setting goals, staff continually evaluates the function and efficiency of the legislative branch of government, determining what should continue, what should be improved and what can be dispensed with. The consistent critical self-evaluation undertaken by staff not only benefits the office organization but Council as well. The quality of support improves as inefficient methods are weeded out. By setting clear goals for the upcoming year, staff will orient tasks to achieve those goals.

Staff Goals for 2015:

1. Organize town meetings as requested by members of Council;
2. Continue digital imaging and maintenance of ordinances and resolutions, meeting minutes and contracts (with an emphasis on contracts to allow for better search ability and to dispose contracts in accordance with the PA Record Retention Schedule in order to free up much needed space in the vault) and use the new version of DocStar to increase the availability of electronic documents to all City Departments and the public; Work to find off-site storage space for permanent records;
3. Assist the Law Department with the re-organization of their filing system, digitizing their records and merging the contracts;
3. Continue Council Corner newsletter and Facebook page and work to improve both;
4. Continue to work closely with the Administration and the Business Analyst to improve efficiency of operations to residents;
5. Provide opportunities for staff and City Council to receive training and education by attending conferences, workshops and other opportunities;
6. Work with the administration on the amendment of the Comprehensive Plan and the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance;
7. Continue to coordinate meetings with the School Board, County Commissioners and Albright Administration;

8. Monitor and attend Magisterial District Justice hearings for problem property/property owners;
9. Improve various application forms used in the Council Office;
10. Continue to work on legislative issues identified during the recodification process;
12. Develop a means to track follow up items requested by Council;
13. Develop template for Nominations and Appointments Committee interviews;
14. Scan and index ordinances prior to 1988;
15. Develop duties and responsibilities for service on City's boards, authorities, and commissions;
16. Work with the Managing Director to require departments to comply with the PA Records Retention Schedule.