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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Reading, PA Recognized for National Sustainability Leadership**

*STAR Communities awards a 3-STAR Rating to the City of Reading*

<https://reporting.starcommunities.org/communities/93-reading-pennsylvania>

**Reading, PA** – Last week, Reading, PA was awarded a 3-STAR Community Rating for sustainability leadership. Reading is the first community from Pennsylvania to achieve certification under the national STAR Community Rating System (STAR).

The STAR Community Rating System is a robust sustainability rating system for cities, towns, and counties, which helps communities evaluate themselves across seven areas related to sustainability, such as built environment; climate and energy; economy and jobs; education, arts and community; health and safety; and natural systems. For instance, communities get credit for reductions in energy use or increased transportation access. STAR provides support as localities benchmark progress, and a third-party review ensures accountability.

Brian Kelly of ReDesign Reading announced the community's 3-STAR Rating at the one-year anniversary of the organization on Wednesday, May 5. "The STAR verification process helped us take a critical look at where we are meeting sustainability benchmarks, and more importantly, where we, as a community, have room for improvement. Several initiatives, such as the establishment of the Local Food Policy Council and passage of a Zero Waste Resolution, were the outgrowth of community partners coming together through the STAR process and taking initiative." ReDesign Reading is a community development corporation that promotes community wealth-building in the City of Reading by designing and implementing economic development initiatives in an ongoing working partnership with city development agencies.

"Receiving STAR Communities certification is a very big deal for City of Reading, especially being the first in Pennsylvania," said Mayor Vaughn D. Spencer. "Finally, we have a national standard and very rigorous and objective third party verification program that proves our city is moving in the right direction, using best practices when possible."

The STAR framework is comprehensive, including everything from how safe residents feel, how successful schools are, and how fast emergency response times are, to things like workforce readiness, housing affordability, and civic engagement. Over 50 partners collaborated over the past nine months to collect data to measure the community's progress towards national sustainability standards. Reading scored highest in the "Built Environment" and "Education, Arts, and Community" categories. Notable achievements within the assessment include:

- **Built Environment:** Reading is meeting standards for drinking water quality, safe wastewater management, and safe stormwater management. The City also showed concentrated development in compact, walkable centers and neighborhoods that connect to transit, offer diverse uses and services, and provide housing options for families of all income levels.
- **Climate & Energy:** Reading demonstrated a 12.76% reduction in total solid waste generated within the jurisdiction since 2010. Waste reduction efforts are supported by the Berks County Solid Waste Advisory Committee, a regional coalition to address waste issues, and programs such as the Artifacts Bank of Reading, which provides adaptable re-use of materials from building demolitions, restorations and rehab projects.
- **Economy & Jobs:** Reading has demonstrated increases in workforce training outcomes, including increased employment retention and higher numbers of youth degrees/certificate of attainment, such as certificate program completions through the Local Workforce Investment Area Strategy (LWIA) with the Berks County Workforce Investment Board.
- **Education, Arts & Community:** 99% of all Reading residents live within 1 mile of a community venue that is open to the public and offers free services or events. Community Cohesion is further supported by youth development programs such as the Reading Youth Violence Prevention Program, the "ImmaBe" Mentoring Program, the YouthBuild Life Skills Readiness Program and the Helping Hands Food Pantry.

Communities pursuing STAR certification accumulate points for their achievements across seven goal areas that are used to determine their rating. There are three STAR certification levels: 3-STAR Community (200-399 points), 4-STAR Community (400-599 points), and 5-STAR (600+ points). Reading received a score of 234.1, which qualifies them as a 4-STAR Community, recognized for “national excellence” in sustainability. Only two cities have received a 5-STAR Community rating, the highest achievable. Other 3-STAR communities include communities such as Cleveland, OH; Fort Collins, CO; and Woodbridge Township, NJ.

“Sustainable cities provide a healthy environment, support a strong economy, and continually improve the well-being of the community,” said Hilari Varnadore, Executive Director of STAR Communities. “The data and information that Reading gathered through the process should help them continue to make improvements that benefit the whole community.” Nearly 100 communities are actively using the STAR Community Rating System, with more than 60 engaged in the certification process.

To learn more about the STAR Community Rating System, visit the STAR Communities website at [www.STARcommunities.org](http://www.STARcommunities.org). To learn more about sustainability in Reading, visit [www.redesignreading.org](http://www.redesignreading.org) or contact the Mayor’s Office of Sustainability through <http://www.readingpa.gov/sustainability>.

**STAR Communities** works to evaluate, improve, and certify sustainable communities. The organization administers the STAR Community Rating System, the nation’s first framework and certification program for local sustainability. For more information, visit [www.STARcommunities.org](http://www.STARcommunities.org). Like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on Twitter [@STARCommunities](#).

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