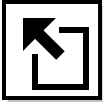


NEWS > HOUSING

Where they stand: Mayoral candidates on housing issues in Reading



Reading Eagle: Ben Hasty

The Reading Skyline looking East from Museum road in Wyomissing.



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Just about 40 percent of Reading's homes are owner-occupied, according to census data. That means the city has a high proportion of renters. We asked the mayoral candidates for their view on this issue. Here is how they responded:

Mayor Wally Scott

"You need a blend of housing," said Reading Mayor Wally Scott in a phone interview. Reading's housing problem is not that the city has so many renters, it's that the city has so many absentee landlords who don't take care of their properties.

"Those are the kinds of people we have to watch out for," Scott said.

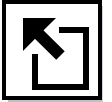
Scott said known slumlords shouldn't be allowed to take part in sheriff's sales of buildings that come up for auction, but he didn't call for specific policies to address the problems that come with negligent property owners.

He said the city needs more rooming houses to help with the city's transient population, but added that those buildings – where a person can rent a single room as opposed to an entire apartment – need to be inspected often to make sure they're safe.

"If we don't do it legally, where are all these people going to live?" Scott said.

Scott said that property owners need to take responsibility for taking care of their properties and caring about their neighborhoods.

Scott owns eight rental properties in the city, according to Berks County tax



Annarose Ingarra-Milch called owner-occupied home ownership important to neighborhood and city stability.

“Educating residents on the benefits of owning a home and reducing barriers to home ownership are crucial to increasing the percentage of owner-occupied properties,” she said in an emailed statement. “For renters, we must make sure that the building owner maintains the property, rents equitably, and provides a residence that adds to the tenants’ quality of life.”

As to the question of what she would do as mayor to address home ownership, Ingarra-Milch said:

“We will turbocharge our relationships with Neighborhood Housing Services, Habitat for Humanity, Reading Housing Authority, Reading Redevelopment Authority, and other organizations with existing home ownership programs.”

Frankie Graham Jr.

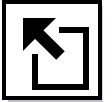
Frankie Graham Jr. called the owner-occupancy rate a serious concern. He criticized property owners who live outside the city and neglect their rental properties.

“Since we have many properties with owners outside the City of Reading, some of these owners are only interested in making money and not interested in maintaining their properties,” Graham said in an email, “until the occupants or codes department push these slumlords into proper maintenance.”

He said Reading needs “an administration to create regulations to protect tenants from neglecting landlords, and incentives for people in our community to invest into buying their first homes. A first-time homebuyers program would be beneficial to the entire community.”

Eddie Moran

Eddie Moran drew on his experience as a Reading School Board member in looking at the issue.



Moran called for a comprehensive plan to improve Reading's housing stock.

"It will be important to me as your next mayor to help stabilize our community by creating a comprehensive housing plan that includes the school district as a stakeholder," Moran said. "We will tackle issues of blight, work to revitalize our neighborhoods, and focus on economic development within these areas of the city."

Louis Perugini

Louis Perugini, the only Republican in the mayoral race, said it's not the role of City Hall to try and influence the housing market.

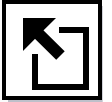
"It's delusional to think as mayor that you have control over that," he said in a phone interview.

Perugini said the problem with the city's housing stock is the high number of vacant and abandoned houses, a symptom of Reading's aging rowhomes. He said nonprofits like Habitat for Humanity should be encouraged in the work that they're doing to build and renovate homes for first-time homebuyers, but the city's row homes, built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are obsolete. As a result, he said, the homes only become attractive to people who can't afford anything better.

"The poorest city attracts the poorest tenants," Perugini said.

Perugini said as mayor he would hire city workers to demolish abandoned homes and turn the sites into parking lots for the neighborhoods, both as a way to alleviate parking and generate money for the city.

Robert Melendez did not respond to emailed requests seeking comment.



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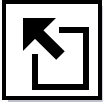
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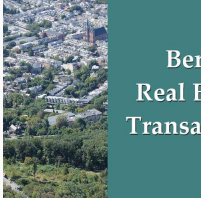
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Friday, August 21



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