



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR

Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Special Worksession Minutes January 10, 2022| 7:00 p.m.

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the recent surge of the omicron variant of COVID-19 and was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents could comment by calling (301) 474-9570 or e-mailing Mayor Dewey at adewey@berwynheightsmd.gov

Call to Order

At 7PM, Mayor Amanda Dewey called the meeting to order. Also present were Mayor Pro Tempore Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmember Chris Brittan-Powell, Councilmember Jason Papanikolas, and Councilmember Ethan Sweep. Also present were Town Manager Laura Allen, Town Clerk Melanie Friesen, Lt. Daniel Unger, and Officer Brandon Wright. Michael Phelan was present for Altumint.

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey let everyone know that because of the heavy agenda, resident comments would be taken after each item. She reviewed that the worksession was being held virtually because of the current Covid situation. She also encouraged everyone to get vaccinated, boosted, and tested as necessary.

2. Approval of Agenda

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to approve the agenda. CM Sweep seconded the motion. After no discussion the motion passed unanimously.

3. Discussion Items

a. Speed Limit- reduce to 20MPH Town-wide and discussion of enforcement technologies, strategies, and needs

TM Allen briefly introduced the subject and Lt. Unger from BHPD and Michael Phelan from Altumint, Lt. Unger expressed that the reduction of the speed limit to 20 MPH would not be very cost effective. State legislation has been passed that would allow the Town to designate the Town as a Residential Zone, which would set the speed limit at 25MPH but would allow for speed camera placement outside of school zones. Officer Wright shared some of the benefits of the possible new speed cameras, as well as a handheld LIDAR device that would allow officers to initiate a speeding ticket without interaction with the offender. Council discussed some of the benefits and drawbacks to other speed reduction techniques such as speed bumps. Mayor Dewey reviewed comments from the zoom chat, that included reducing the speed limit on Greenbelt Road, requesting speed control devices on Edmonston Road, and a reminder that the Town has a grant that will help cover the cost of a traffic engineer to evaluate all the recommendations of the Walkable Bikeable Berwyn Heights task force. WBBH co-Chair Drew Carlisle asked for clarification on if the consideration was to

reduce the speed limit, to add speed cameras, or both. Mr. Phelan explained that it was possible to do both, but that it would be preferable to not do both actions simultaneously.

Resident Mike Attick asked if there could be a copy of the walkable bikeable Berwyn Heights recommendations at the office? He also asked if any people been struck in Town by vehicles. Lt. Unger replied that he doesn't believe there have been any pedestrians struck outside of Greenbelt Rd. Mr. Attick also stated that he believes speed bumps are a bad thing, due to emergency vehicles being forced to slow down and the difficulty they present to trucks plowing snow.

b. Status of the vehicular noise ordinance

Lt Unger stated that signs have been received to install in Town that notify drivers that modified exhaust systems are prohibited. He stated that you can issue the driver a citation or repair order, and BHPF is looking to do more education on the subject. CM Brittan-Powell asked about establishing an ordinance that would allow the Police Department to issue a citation based on a Town Ordinance as well.

c. Establishing plan to address Rt 201 vehicular noise

CM Brittan-Powell asked the Town to consider installing a sound fence, something that would buffer the traffic noise. MPT Kulpa-Eddy gave some background that tree loss due to Pepco activities had reduced the natural sound barrier. She reported that SHA explained the area did not meet the guidelines for a sound fence and encouraged any replacement barrier should be natural, as in planting new trees. Mayor Dewey reviewed the tree barrier, including maintenance and the difficulties of getting the trees to grow due to conflict with invasive species. CM Sweep stated that concrete barriers would take years to install as well. CM Brittan Powell stated he wanted to do something along the lines of posts and lumber instead of concrete. MPT Kulpa-Eddy reminded everyone this is SHA land and that whatever we want to do would need to be approved by SHA. CM Papanikolas reviewed that he doesn't believe the noise issues meet the standards based on SHA guidelines for assistance. Mayor Dewey summarized the comments, including making sure that Pepco doesn't cut the trees again.

d. July "4 Cities" Meeting: set date to host and agenda items for January 27 meeting

Mayor Dewey reviewed that the July meeting is typically held the 4th Wednesday of the month. MPT Kulpa-Eddy suggested Thursday the 28th instead, to avoid conflict with the Historical Committee meeting, and the Council agreed. The Council decided that agenda items to be submitted for the January 27th meeting would be: Covid best practices, ARPA updates, and vehicular noise abatement issues.

e. Policy determining virtual or in-person meetings

Mayor Dewey reviewed the last worksession that focused on the meeting status being tied to Prince George's County Public Schools. She reviewed the resolution that TM Allen put together. TM Allen stated the policy focuses on the 4 schools that directly affect Berwyn Heights (BH Elementary School, Greenbelt Middle, Parkdale and Roosevelt High Schools) rather than the entire District as a whole. CM Papanikolas mentioned that as the resolution is written, it states that if one of the 4 schools closes, then Council meetings would be virtual and that Council meetings will remain virtual until all 4 schools have returned to in-person learning. Council discussed the merits and complications of the policy and determined to leave it as currently written, as a school in the Berwyn Heights area being closed would indicate significant Covid community transmission.

Mr. Mike Attick called and stated that he feels this is an unnecessarily complicated policy. He also inquired if the Town could require that attendees for the Council meetings be vaccinated.

Ms. Terrie Mauceri stated she believes that for safety reasons, meetings should be

virtual if one school is closed.

f. Identification of goals for ARPA spending cycle

Mayor Dewey reviewed the history of the ARPA process to date- and that the calendar established in December has the Council identifying 3-5 goals for the first cycle (this spring) of spending ARPA funds. She clarified this is only for the first spending cycle of potentially multiple cycles. CM Papanikolas stated that the final rule on spending was just released and it will allow more flexibility in allocating funds, especially for government services.

Mayor Dewey identified the following as her understanding of the top goals from the surveys and community meetings: allocate funding to stormwater projects including two public areas of town; provide support to NGOs (non-profits) addressing child care, learning loss, and mental health; and to increase resident communication with the government. CM Brittan-Powell asked about cost for the projects. Mayor Dewey reviewed that the calendar has the Council identifying goals in this meeting, with the next meetings identifying projects and prices for the projects. MPT Kulpa-Eddy requested the addition of a goal to provide short-term relief in the form of rental, mortgage, and utility assistance to residents while they are being connected to longer-term social services. CM Sweep identified a number of stormwater projects that could be identified that are not large projects. CM Papanikolas would like to see the Council look to the low-hanging fruit, such as helping community groups recover from Covid. CM Brittan-Powell discussed other issues, including that there are people in the community who have not given input and his belief that spending should not be undertaken until those residents have been heard from. He also stated that it is his belief the spending should be public health oriented, and advocated hiring a professional to help facilitate spending in that area.

In the chat section of the Zoom telecast, several questions/comments were raised by residents. Christopher Mann asked CM Brittan-Powell if he is saying that the Council has done a poor job of getting ideas for spending the funds. Alexandra Brozena asked is there a risk of time running out on using these funds. Genevieve de Messieres stated that while increasing diversity in town government is a high priority, she didn't understand what specifically CM Brittan-Powell is proposing. She continued that the proposed ideas are well researched, come from resident engagement, and will benefit all Town residents. It was either Jeff or Laura Knutson who stated that they appreciate the desire to provide help to people in need, but don't see how the town can administer extensive social support better than the existing service organizations.

Councilmembers vigorously discussed the disenfranchised communities within the Town and questioned if the historical and decades long disenfranchisement could be solved in the time required before the spending decisions had to be made. Resident Mike Attick asked if all the non-profits we are considering are 501(c)(3) organizations. TM Allen stated that she recommends that there be an application process and a contract that would standardize the requirements for receiving funds. Mr. Attick continued and stated that communication and outreach to diverse ethnic groups has been going on for decades and that the county has organizations we could utilize that wouldn't cost the town money.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy stated that she would like to see an identification of short-term, temporary, immediate needs, as well as long-term needs.

The Council ultimately identified the following as goals; improve employee safety, identify two communal spaces for stormwater management projects, address childcare gaps, mitigate learning loss (specifically engaging Berwyn Heights Elementary), improve mental health, improve resident communication with Town government, assist residents with emergency needs, confer with an expert in public health, provide

residential relief, identify planning for public meeting spaces outdoors, and reimburse town groups for the extraordinary costs that they've incurred as a direct result of the pandemic.

CM Sweep stated he would appreciate the goals organized by the amount of staff time required.

g. Council Rules Update

CM Papanikolas reviewed that the current Council Rules are somewhat arcane and proposed that Council consider revising the rules so that they are more accessible. He proposed a change to Rule #1 that would adjust agenda development such that each agenda item would list the sponsoring Councilmember's name, and two Council sponsors would be required to add a new item to the agenda. There was considerable discussion around this, with CM Sweep expressing concern that attaching names to an agenda item could be problematic when a number of CMs propose the same item, and could lead to scorecarding on the agendas. The discussion continued and several Councilmembers stated their preference to return to a previous worksession agenda format to try to increase transparency as to the origin of each agenda item.

h. Determination of need for extension of leaf collection

CM Brittan Powell asked about the ability to pick up loose leaves beyond the end of December. TM Allen reviewed that the loose leaf pick up has been extended through January 9th, but snowstorms have delayed the operation and made that deadline more difficult. She noted that there is a "hard stop" because the facility that processes our loose leaves closes on Jan 21st.

i. Preparations for Winter snow and ice

CM Sweep reviewed the procedure for public works crews, including pre-salting when storms are predicted and housing crews in nearby hotels to make sure they are available to plow during the storm. Resident Genevieve de Messieres commented that she'd like to see there be non-salt alternatives for the roadways. CM Sweep expressed concerns about some of the alternatives being not as effective as salt, but instead would like to see continued effort to improve spreading efficiency.

j. Snow shoveling resources for residents with limitations and possible use of town youth and citizens to assist

CM Brittan-Powell expressed frustration in years past about non-shoveled sidewalks. Mayor Dewey reported that during this most recent snowstorm, the Police Department began to gather volunteers who were willing to shovel for those who were unable to shovel snow themselves. A chat question was posted: "what does the Town do about residents who don't shovel their sidewalks?". TM Allen replied that this has not been a consistent concern but would be handled by Code Compliance. However, most people who do not shovel their walkways are also those who are in need of assistance with shoveling.

k. Able-bodied citizens with sidewalks shoveling of snow

Covered in the discussion above

l. Assistance to residents vulnerable to extreme cold

Mayor Dewey shared that the Berwyn Heights Police Department has an officer who checks in on seniors. CM Brittan-Powell suggested that Town Hall be open to take names and contact information for people who are vulnerable.

m. Adequacy of pay/salary structure for Public Works employees - need to be adequately competitive & evaluating such need for other departments.

CM Sweep explained that with a small tax base, it is difficult to be competitive with salaries compared to other larger communities, and any salary study should include all departments, not just Public Works. TM Allen reviewed that it is also important to consider all compensation, and not just pay-- including days off, benefits, and other employee handbook policies. She stated the public works department has stabilized and is nearly fully staffed. She also mentioned the police department is in the process hiring a new officer, but that hiring police officers is difficult across the state of Maryland at this time.

Mr. Attick called, stating that he was displeased with the way the salt was deployed prior to the storm, and stated that weather had a huge part to play in the way the snow was cleared and that public works shouldn't receive all the credit for the cleared roads. He also stated that he believes there has been considerable turnover in PW.

n. Allowing beer and wine service on Berwyn Heights Day

Mayor Dewey reviewed that in 2019 that there was an issue with the Town procuring a one-day liquor license for Berwyn Heights Day, with the Boys and Girls Club being the ones who were selling the beer. She reviewed that the Council decided at that time that if a community group wanted to sell beer or wine, they could but they would need to procure the license in their own name rather than the Town getting the license. CM Papanikolas explored a few difficulties with selling alcoholic beverages. He also suggested that organizations who want to sell beer or wine at Berwyn Heights Day should take training on how to safely serve alcohol, similar to training provided to volunteers who staff the concession stands at UMD.

CM Sweep was excused from the meeting at 10:33

o. Establishing Long Term Arrangements between the Town's Basketball League and the MNCPP.

Mayor Dewey reviewed that in December the Council authorized a one-year extension of the current agreement. TM Allen reviewed the steps that have been taken since the meeting.

p. Addressing current status and impact of 'virtualization' of schooling

CM Brittan-Powell expressed that in some ways this was covered under the ARPA discussion, but that he has received feedback from residents regarding the Council's decision on learning pods. He continued that there is a need to have the psycho-social needs of the students addressed.

4. Department Reports

Mayor Dewey asked that people be very careful during the current covid surge, and please get tested and vaccinated. She thanked Officer Wright who acted quickly to an overdose and was able to save a life. She reviewed the snow days schedules and how to get the updates on the Town website and social media when things are changing rapidly. She also reviewed that there is a video on the Public Works page that shows how to shovel snow so as to prevent your driveway from being blocked in by snow from plows. She also reminded residents that all fireworks are illegal in BH and in the County. Lastly she mentioned the County Police Accountability Board, and how to apply to serve on the board.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy provided an update on the Paint Branch Golf Course, stating that Park and Planning has determined the golf course will not be used to build a new Track and Field facility for UMD. The County has updated their raincheck rebate program in several ways, and now includes “conservation landscaping”. The County Council approved the Countywide Map Amendment, which updated the 50+year zoning laws. These new zoning regulations become effective on April 1, 2022.

CM Papanikolas reported a slight uptick in building permits being issued. He reminded residents if you need to get a permit from the county, you need to get one for the town as well.

CM Brittan-Powell reviewed that this is the beginning of budget season and that administrative staff will be working hard on that for the near future.

5. Resident & Community Comments

No further community comments. *MPT Kulpa-Eddy* reported that the County contractor for the Seminole Street storm drain issue has told the homeowner they plan to begin repairs in the next few weeks.

Adjournment

CM Brittan Powell moved to adjourn the meeting. *CM Papanikolas* seconded. After no discussion, the motion passed unanimously (4-0) and the meeting adjourned at 10:50.