



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Minutes Budget Worksession March 23, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. Present were Mayor Cheye Calvo, MPT Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Patricia Dennison, Chris Rasmussen and Anthony Schreiber. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Director of Public Works Adrian Lockley, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Volunteer Fire Department President James Hurley, Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Representatives Ron Shane and Mike Attick, Boys & Girls Club Treasurer Maria Robles.

1. Mayor

Announcements: Tonight a number of representatives from Town organizations will present budget requests to the Council.

2. Budget

Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department budget request: Mayor Calvo explained the Council started a conversation with the BHVFD about its long term plans for upgrading the fire house last year, and increased its annual contribution from \$1,000 to \$10,000. The President of the BHVFD is here tonight to give an update on the plans and financial status of the Fire Department.

James Hurley gave an update on last year's activities. The BHVFD will pick up a new 2015 ambulance this week to replace one that was damaged when it was hit by another car last year. The price has gone up to almost \$200,000 since the last purchase, but BHVFD was able to roll in the financing with that for the ladder truck and will be saving about \$30,000 in interest. The Department receives a 25% share of ambulance bills because it owns its ambulances, and up to 75%, if the ambulances are staffed with volunteers. Ambulance bills make up about 37% of all BHVFD revenues, and is used primarily to pay off the apparatus. The ambulance billing process handled by the County continues to be a problem.

The BHVFD has also put together a committee to spec and purchase a new rescue squad at an estimated cost of around \$800,000. The purchase will not be made until 2016, or 2017. The two rescue squads now in use have lot of mileage on them, and the new one is currently in the repair shop. Further, the BHVFD hired a professional grant writer to apply for a \$300,000 FEMA grant for recruitment and retention of volunteers, and BHVFD is still working on repairs from the June 10, 2014 flash flood, which ruined the station generator, and collapsed a concrete stormwater drain. It is also in the process

of renovating the kitchen used by 13 live-in volunteers.

Mr. Hurley said that BHVFD continues to explore moving or upgrading the fire house. It is leaning more toward renovating in place and is in negotiations with the County about the best way to do that. The County has money in its capital budget to help finance fire station improvements, but it is cumbersome to work with the County's architects and engineers. Therefore, BHVFD has hired its own architect to help evaluate the options and come up with a plan that maximizes the space. Despite support from the County, a station upgrade would be a substantial financial commitment, probably in the range of several million dollars. It is not clear how the project would be paid for in addition to the regular replacement of the Department's apparatus, but the sale of BHVFD property is being considered.

In response to questions from the Council, Mr. Hurley provided more details on the BHVFD finances, property, organization and relationship with the County. The \$10,000 contributed by the Town is very helpful, and this year it will be used to buy a new stretcher, backboard and signage for the new ambulance. The Branchville Fire Department is now 100% volunteer but operates on limited hours with the BHVFD helping to cover their area. The BHVFD is responding to more calls every year.

Mayor Calvo thanked Mr. Hurley for this status report. The Council hopes to keep the BHVFD in Town and has again included a \$10,000 contribution in its FY 2016 budget. The Council would like to meet again when there are more definitive plans on the station house upgrade.

Boys & Girls Club budget request: Mayor Calvo welcomed Maria Robles, Treasurer of the Boys & Girls Club (BHBGC), for a budget request relating to the Sports Park batting cage. Ms. Robles said that she has been active in the Club for 11 years, starting as a coach and then as Treasurer of the BHBGC Executive Board. The Club is doing well financially and has saved up \$3,000 to overhaul the batting cage. The cage has started to sag in some places and is no longer holding up the netting on top. The Club has received a quote for \$5,900 from Metropolitan Fence Company to repair the fence. The Club is requesting the Town to pay a share of the bill because the cage is used by residents other than Boys & Girls Club members, and on Berwyn Heights Day.

Mayor Calvo explained that the Town owns and programs Sports Park, but it is on Park & Planning land, and Park & Planning has done most of the maintenance in recent years. The Town therefore has not had to budget money for Sports Park maintenance and lost sight of repairs that may be needed. He thinks it is appropriate for the Town to pay a share of the fence repairs under those circumstances.

In response to questions, Ms. Robles explained that the BHBGC has not increased its \$30 fee in many years but is feeling the pinch in its budget. The Club maintains a minimum reserve of \$5,000 that is replenished with fundraisers and grants and pays for needed equipment and repairs. Last year, the Club received other fence bids that were in the same range. Area businesses have been approached about donations for the batting cage fencing, but there were no takers.

Lastly, Ms. Robles asked if the Club can take down the wooden platform behind the concession stand because it a safety risk for young children. The Council had no objections and will ask Public Works to assist with that. Mayor Calvo said that he would like to schedule a meeting with the Club's executive

board sometime during the summer and thanked Ms. Robles for coming in. The Council will consider funding a share of the batting cage repairs.

At 8:20 p.m., the Council took a 20 minutes break.

Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness budget request: Mayor Calvo welcomed NW/EP Chair Ron Shane and Mike Attick. He explained that the Town has helped fund the NW/EP Committee since it came into being in 2001. In recent years, any money of the Town's \$3,000 annual contribution that is not spent has been set aside in a reserve to purchase a new trailer. The reserve will exceed \$6,000 this year.

Ron Shane explained that it is NW/EP's mission to help the Town be prepared for emergencies. The Committee maintains a trailer that stores supplies for emergencies including generators, power cords, chain saws, cots, blankets, etc. The trailer is nearing the end of its useful life and is no longer road worthy to go out of Town. The Committee intends to replace the trailer using the money in the reserve.

This year, however, NW/EP would like to replace the radios it uses to communicate in an emergency or when participating in patrols and Town events. The current set was given to them by the Police Department almost 10 years ago. They worked very well initially, but now only 2 out of 8 are in working order. The 10 radios and chargers they want to purchase would cost approximately \$6,000. The Committee hopes that the Town might assist with the purchase.

Mike Attick explained that NW/EP has looked into different types of radios. The Police Department has applied for a grant to obtain Motorola radios, which may cover between 30%-60% of the cost but don't know whether they will receive the grant until 8 weeks from now. A second option is a radio from Metrotalk, currently used by the Public Works Department. Either type would allow NW/EP to communicate with Public Works and the Police in an emergency or a Town event.

Mayor Calvo said he is inclined to consent to the request, but believes that the radios should be purchased with the money now in the reserve. This would give NW/EP an incentive to be judicious in its purchase. Mr. Shane said he does not feel comfortable using the entire reserve for radios because the trailer may need to be replaced in the near future. He asked if the Council would consider a match. Mayor Calvo said that it would not be a match because the money now in the reserve was also given by the Town. The NW/EP reserve is intended for capital expenses such as this. When the need to replace the trailer arises, the Council can address the potential for possible supplemental funding at that point.

Public Works capital needs: Director of Public Works, Adrian Lockley, said a couple of problems have come up during the past year that should be addressed.

1. Public Works had difficulties keeping some areas free from ice during this winter because of water released from sump pumps that are not tied into underdrains. The worst of these areas is at the corner of Osage Street and 57th Avenue where the entire intersection iced up and Public Works crews had use a backhoe to break up and remove the ice from the roadway repeatedly. It is proposed to rebuild the curb and gutter at Osage and 57th to prevent water from ponding there at a cost of \$7,000.

2. Temperatures in the new meeting room and the lounge in the Senior Center are often uncomfortable because the outer walls are not insulated. The new HVAC vents installed during the recent renovation

cannot supply enough warm air in winter or cold air in summer because the air handler is not powerful enough. It is proposed to install a new high-efficiency air handler that is able to keep the rooms comfortable year round at a cost of around \$12,000. He has applied for grant funding through a Maryland Smart Energy Communities (MSEC) but will not know whether the grant is awarded until May. A second option is to purchase a dual zone mini split air conditioner to service the two rooms at a cost of \$5,000.

3. The gravel on the 60th and 58th Avenue footpaths gets washed off after each rainstorm and accumulates on lower-lying roadways. Public Works re-gravels these paths every year and periodically cleans the roadways from washed off gravel. It is proposed to surface the footpaths with asphalt milling at total cost of \$3,000 to reduce annual maintenance.

4. The 58th Avenue extension from Nevada Street to Goucher Drive is breaking apart and should be rebuilt. Much of the damage is at the intersection with Nevada Street where water tends to pond and erode the surface. Town trash trucks collecting trash at the one residence accessed from this road contribute to the damage. Rebuilding this stretch of road with a proper sub-base, crown and drainage would cost up to \$25,500.

Mayor Calvo said this is an expensive repair for a public driveway that serves only one residence. He would like to find a cheaper way to do it, such as piggy-backing onto a larger road project. It may be sufficient to rebuild the swale to guide water to the creek, using the contractor now working on the sidewalks, and then just mill and overlay the extension. The property owner served by the road could be asked to bring his refuse down to Nevada Street for pickup.

The draining of sump pumps into the street is a policy issue that probably should be addressed through Ordinance 118, Roads & Right-of-Ways. Residents who connect their sump pump drains to the street should be asked to obtain a permit. The problem of insufficient heat or air conditioning in the Senior Center should be addressed with a more energy efficient HVAC air handler, hopefully with money obtained from the MSEC grant. The upgrade should not affect the size of emergency generator the Town plans to have installed this year. The asphalt milling proposed for surfacing the footpaths is recycled asphalt but contains less petroleum. Therefore it is more permeable, yet holds together better for a more durable surface than gravel.

Mayor Calvo said that Director Lockley will be asked to return for a separate discussion on roads later. Meanwhile, he would ask the Council to consider increasing the road repair line item in the Public Works budget to \$20,000 to give the Department more money to patch up Town streets until a major road project can be undertaken.

Commercial District visioning budget: Mayor Calvo reported that he met with Stuart Eisenberg of the Hyattsville Community Development Corporation (CDC), which has done a lot of community planning work in and around Hyattsville. He obtained sample requests for proposals (RFP), as well as good advice. Based on Hyattsville and Greenbelt examples, he has developed a framework for Berwyn Heights, which has the following components 1) an inventory of existing businesses; 2) an analysis of current zoning and land uses, as well as future zoning potential; 3) an analysis of residential-commercial transition standards; and 4) a market analysis.

Mayor Calvo explained that hiring consultants to perform this type of study would cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000. The cost might be reduced if a market analysis, the most expensive part of the study, can be done in conjunction with a neighboring municipality. A market analysis would help determine the markets to which Berwyn Heights belongs, and what kind of commercial and other uses

would work in these markets. Based on the findings, the Town could develop initiatives to promote and encourage the types of businesses it would like to see in its commercial district.

The Council was requested to review the sample RFPs so that a framework for an economic development study can be worked out at upcoming worksessions. Mayor Calvo suggested to set-aside \$30,000 from the Greenbelt Station Reserve to fund the study. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said she hopes this product will be in hand in time for commenting on the Prince George's zoning rewrite, which is likely to have a big impact on the Town.

Administration capital projects: TA Cowles gave an overview of projects that would upgrade some Administration Department services. This includes 1) an overhaul of the personnel manual, possibly in conjunction with a position classification and compensation study; 2) an upgrade of the Town website, with electronic payment portal; and 3) paving the Town Center parking lot.

Ms Cowles said that the personnel manual overhaul is probably the most pressing need, as the last comprehensive revision occurred during the 1990s. Although off-the-shelf models are available that can be adapted to Berwyn Heights, an outside personnel consultant would bring objectivity and expertise to the revision process. It would also afford the opportunity to add-on a position classification and compensation study, which could serve as the basis for comparisons with other municipalities. The preferred quote comes from a Florida consultant, who would charge \$8,000 for revising the personnel manual, \$6,000 for the compensation study and \$3,000 for an assessment of the performance evaluation process, for a total of \$17,500.

The website is the public face of the Town and would benefit from an upgrade. Although it currently provides essential information, it lacks interactive features that would allow residents to make payments submit forms or make reservations online. The first year cost for redesigning the website is between \$4,000 and \$6,000, which includes the cost of implementation, while the subsequent annual maintenance costs are expected to be in the \$2,500 range. Live streaming of meetings would add approximately \$2,500 a year.

The resurfacing of the entire Town Center parking lot is very expensive, costing nearly \$70,000 for milling and overlay, and \$220,000 for a complete replacement of the existing surface and sub-base. Resurfacing just the entrance area and adjusting the slope, so that water does not puddle there, would cost approximately \$5,000.

Mayor Calvo commented that these are all useful investments but funding them is a matter of setting priorities. In his mind, the personnel manual overhaul is the most important item, followed by a review of the performance evaluation process and then the compensation study, which may not need to be outsourced. An upgrade to the website is not an immediate need, but acceptance of credit card as a form of payment should occur soon. CM Schreiber suggested the Town may want to consider looking into video recordings as a detailed record of Town Council meetings instead of lengthy written minutes. Most minutes he has come across are brief summaries. Mayor Calvo thought that it would be helpful to have recordings of meetings available on the web. However, the written minutes published in the Bulletin are what residents read to follow Town news.

It was agreed that decisions on funding of projects will be made at the next worksession.

Surplus calculation: Mayor Calvo said that he has worked with TA Cowles on the one-page summary of the FY 2016 budget that will be published in the April Bulletin. It will provide a simplified summary of the reserves and surplus section. TA Cowles elaborated that she went through recent audits to arrive

at the projections for reserves and the surplus in the FY 2016 budget. After reconstituting the reserve amounts from audits, and correcting a booking problem with speed camera receipts, the surplus amounts to approximately \$500,000. It still includes some items that could be broken out as reserves, such as the money set aside for Health Reimbursement Accounts and some liabilities, including unpaid vacation and sick leave, that should not be spent.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:36 p.m.

Kerstin Harper