



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Town Meeting Minutes January 13, 2016

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Patricia Dennison and Lynn White. Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Chris Rasmussen and CM Maria Robles had an excused absence. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, and Clerk Kerstin Harper.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 1. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the December 9 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM White and second by CM Dennison, the minutes were approved 3 to 0.

### 2. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Rodriguez gave the Treasurer's report for the month of December 2015.

### 3. Mayor's Report

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy gave a State of the Town address. She said that 2015 saw many changes on the Town Council and in staff. Former Mayor Calvo and CM Schreiber resigned to pursue job and educational opportunities that did not leave time for service on the Town Council. Luckily, their seats were filled by two residents, CMs Robles and White, who learned the job quickly. In addition, there was turnover in the leadership of the Code Compliance and Public Works Departments, but both are now under competent direction from Code Supervisor Freddie Glass and DPW Acting Director Kenneth Hall.

Despite the turnover, the Town Council and staff were able to finish several big projects. Five years in the making, the sidewalks project was finally completed and people appreciate them and the new bus stops and benches that came with it. The bikeways project is nearly done, with all bike racks and repair stations installed and construction on the emergency generators project has begun and should be finished by spring. On the legislative side, the Council was able to revise the Election Ordinance in time for the next election in May 2016. By the end of the term, she hopes to have all the priorities of the 46th Town Council checked off.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said the recent real property reassessments are showing an increase in home values of around 9.5% for residential properties and around 16% for commercial properties after a drop of 27% in 2010 and another 17% in 2013. This will generate more real property tax revenues, unless the Council decides to adjust the tax rate to yield the same amount of revenue as this year. With the upcoming FY 2017 budget process, directors have been asked to submit both, a hold-the-line budget option and a budget with a 5% increase in spending. Residents are welcome to give input.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy further noted that there are further delays in repairing the pedestrian bridge, which was damaged by a construction crane last April, and may not re-open until April 2016. Other projects scheduled for this spring include a personnel manual update and continued IT improvements. Residents are requested to keep the stormwater drains clear so as to facilitate runoff from melting snow and spring rains. Problems with a stormwater drain can be reported to the County's Office of Highway Maintenance at 301 499 8523.

Among the big projects the next Town Council will have to tackle is the renovation of Town streets in the wake of the WSSC water main replacement project, scheduled to conclude in 2017. Coming up with a plan and options for financing the resurfacing is likely to take up a good deal of time. They will also need to monitor the impact of the Greenbelt Station development on Berwyn Heights, particularly in terms of traffic, public safety and public schools. Lastly, Mayor Kulpa-Eddy thanked her fellow councilmembers and Town staff for solving problems and working together in a positive, cooperative fashion.

#### **4. Department Reports**

**Administration:** TA Cowles gave the Administration Department report as MPT Rasmussen was absent. She said that the Department is finishing up a couple of capital projects, which are the Safe Routes to School sidewalks and the emergency generators. The generators should be operational in late February. The Department has also released a request for proposals for the Urban Forest Initiative and expects to receive proposals by the end of next week. She and Treasurer Rodriguez are working on wrapping up the 2015 audit and working with the directors on preparing the FY 2017 budget. By the end of February, the Department expects to receive both a real property tax and an income tax disbursement, the two largest sources of revenue for the Town, as well as a Highway User Revenue payment.

**Code Compliance:** TA Cowles gave the Code Department report, as CM Robles was absent. She said that the Code Department has worked closely with the County's Department of Permitting, Inspections and Enforcement (DPIE) in processing two condemned properties. The owners of the 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue property have contacted the Town about rehabilitating the house and are making progress in returning it to habitable condition. The Cunningham Drive property has been reviewed by the County's Office of Law and approved for demolition, which is expected to occur in the next few weeks. The Code Department is also reviewing the Rental Housing Ordinance and creating a version with proposed changes, as well as working with the County to improve service delivery of the call-a-bus.

**Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:** CM Dennison said that the Recreation Council has started planning for Berwyn Heights Day and is putting out the word for volunteers. The Education Advisory Committee has been reconstituted and will next meet on January 14. Upcoming events include a Re-gifting Party on January 23, and a bat-themed craft event on February 6. She then announced the winners of the holiday decorating contest: 5804 Ruatan Street was chosen as best decorated house, 8502 Paxton Court as best decorated yard, and 8708 60<sup>th</sup> Avenue as best overall.

**Public Health and Safety:** Chief Antolik gave the monthly report on behalf of the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department (BHVFD). Ladder Truck Company 14 was named busiest in the County with 1,117 runs in 2015 while the BHVFD rescue squad handled a total of 6,110 runs overall. At the January meeting, President Hurley appointed a Rescue Squad Committee, which will design and develop specifications for a new Heavy Rescue Squad. They will be ready when the Department is notified about a grant award that will help pay for the vehicle.

Chief Antolik continued with the monthly police activities report for December. There were 5 Part I offenses, 2 burglaries and 3 larcenies, as opposed to the 5 year average of 4.8. Year to date, Part I offenses numbered 78, which is somewhat higher than the 5 year average of 72. The police also issued 171 state and municipal citations and 234 speed camera tickets. The police are in the process of solving a December 23, 2015 burglary on Berwyn Road, where several musical instruments were stolen. Some of the instruments were recovered from a Guitar Center in Virginia, where they had been pawned.

Chief Antolik also highlighted developments in the last 10 year period. Serious crimes declined significantly after 2010, when they hit a high with 139 Part I offenses, and are holding steady with annual rates ranging between 60-80. Last year, Iris Cruz was hired as new police clerk, and Thomas Hollowell and Yomira Ramirez as police officers. Officers attended training and conferences to maintain their certifications. Looking forward, the Department is working on a policy for body cameras and plans to continue regular meetings with community groups, i.e. NW/EP, Seniors, and Berwyn Heights Elementary School, as well as with affiliated agencies.

**Public Works:** CM White reported that 2015 saw many changes in the Public Works Department. A new interim director, Kenneth Hall, was hired as well as several new employees. Several vehicles were surplused to make room for a new trash truck and dump truck. Last month, the crew patched potholes, installed a radio in the new trash truck and emergency lighting in the trucks designated for snow plowing. The Department is now working on its FY 2017 budget and is planning improving service delivery and possibly launching a beautification initiative.

## **5. Committee Reports**

**Historical Committee:** Clerk Harper, who chairs the Historical Committee, said that the Committee is planning an event that will feature a series of oral histories with Town residents, which will take place sometime later in spring. The Committee is also working on its next street marker, which will feature the Berwyn Heights Association. In the course of researching the topic, a few interesting photos from 1920 were found and published in the January Bulletin and on the BHHC website.

**Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reported that the NW/EP Committee elected new officers at its last meeting. Merrill Weinrich and Mike Attick were elected co-chairs, Helen Weinrich Secretary and Shirley Attick Treasurer. On February 6 and 7, a CERT training course will be held at the Landover Public Safety Complex through the Prince George's Office on Homeland Security. People may call Mike Attick for more information and to register. The next meeting will be on February 3.

**Recreation Council:** CM Dennison said that the President of the Recreation Council, Tim

# **Minutes Town Meeting February 10, 2016**

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Chris Rasmussen, CMs Patricia Dennison and Lynn White and Maria Robles. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Election Judges Sharmila Bhatia, Sharon McCraney, Debby Steele-Snyder, Robin Walukonis, and Executive Director of Maryland Milestones/Anacostia Trails Heritage Area Inc. (ATHA) Aaron Marcavitch.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **6. Swearing-in of Election Judges**

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy swore in Chief Judge Sharmila Bhatia and Election Judges Sharon McCraney, Debby Steele Snyder, and Robin Walukonis.

## **7. ATHA Presentation**

Executive Director of ATHA/ Maryland Milestones, Aaron Marcavitch, gave an update on ATHA activities. After wrapping up the War of 1812 events, ATHA is now focused on improving bicycle trails and bike amenities in Prince George's County. By October, the last connection of the trail along the Anacostia between Bladensburg and Benning Road should be completed, which will allow riders to travel from here all the way to the Nationals Stadium in D.C. ATHA is also working on bringing Glenn Dale and Cheverly into the trails system and is fundraising for a Heritage Center in Hyattsville.

The Heritage Center will be the new home for the Pyramid Atlantic Art Center, a nationally acclaimed paper arts association currently located in Silver Spring, as well at the Neighborhood Design Center, and ATHA. The Center will be located across from Hyattsville City Hall and near the trolley bicycle trail. Outfitting the center is projected to cost \$15,000 and it is hoped that each of ATHA's 15 members might contribute \$1,000. Member benefits include access to grants, technical assistance with projects and all types of free cultural events.

Responding to questions, Mr. Marcavitch said that ATHA has forwarded to each member municipality a Memorandum of Understanding to sign that would formalize cooperation and coordination on bicycle infrastructure, principally to ensure that the trails link up and work as whole system. Most ATHA member cities have already signed the MOU but several, including Berwyn Heights, have not. He is happy to come to a worksession to give more information when Berwyn Heights has had a chance to look at it.

Mr. Marcavitch further explained that ATHA is working with M-NC Park & Planning and other organizations to celebrate 2017 as the year of the bike when all parts of the Anacostia Trail are finished. The Heritage Center will have galleries, conference rooms and studios and offices. Individuals may support the Center with contributions at [www.gofundme.com/mdmilestones](http://www.gofundme.com/mdmilestones).

## **8. Minutes**

Clerk Harper read a summary of the January 13 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Robles and second by CM Dennison, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

## **9. Treasurer's Report**

TA Cowles gave the Treasurer's report for the month of January, as Treasurer Rodriguez was absent.

## **10. Mayor's Report**

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reported that the main event since the last Town meeting was the blizzard that dropped 2 feet of snow on the area. Public Works staff was on duty throughout the storm to plow the streets but it took 5 days to get back to normal service. Most streets had at least

one lane open by Sunday afternoon but trash pickup was suspended until Wednesday when the County landfill and recycling center reopened.

At this stage, the Town is reviewing its handling of the storm to determine what can be done better and educate residents on how they can help. The best assistance residents can give is to move their vehicles off the road so the snow plows have as much space as possible. Code regulations against parking on unpaved surfaces are suspended during these snowstorms. The Council has been considering whether to implement parking on one side of the road only. Residents are reminded to clear snow off the sidewalks in front of their homes. Throughout the storm, the Town will post information on the website and on Twitter about office closings and changes in the trash collection schedule.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy next shared information about the Prince George's County zoning rewrite now underway. At the last Four Cities meeting, the Council received an update on Module 1 of the rewrite, which sets forth land use in the redefined zones. Several changes have been proposed that could affect Berwyn Heights. For example, developers will be allowed to build multifamily homes in commercial and industrial zones by right, provided they follow certain standards. In residential zones, homeowners will be allowed to build certain accessory structures by right, including in-law suites and apartments. If residents want to comment on the proposed changes they may attend a briefing on February 18 at the Town office or do so online at <http://zoningpgc.pgplanning.com>.

Lastly, Mayor Kulpa-Eddy announced that School Board Member Lupi Grady will attend the March 21 worksession. Residents are welcome to attend.

## **11. Department Reports**

**Administration:** MPT Rasmussen reported that the Administration is engaged in ongoing efforts to make the Town government more open and efficient through a review of its personnel management practices and upgrading information technology. The installation of emergency generators was delayed by the snow storm but is scheduled for completion by the end of next week, with a period of testing and training to follow. The Safe Routes to School sidewalks project is nearly finished and is welcomed by parents who have children walking to Greenbelt Middle School. TA Cowles and Acting Public Works Director Hall inspected priority 1 sidewalks and found several cracks and other deficiencies which the contractor will be asked to repair under warranty.

MPT Rasmussen further noted that the Administration Department received only one response to an RFP for an urban tree study, which it is reviewing. He and TA Cowles are considering revising the RFP and going out to bid again.

**Code Compliance:** CM Robles reported that code violations are down at this time of year and residents have been responsive to notices sent out by the Code Department. CM Robles thanked Public Works for their hard work clearing the snow and Code Supervisor Glass' assistance in getting residents to move their cars off the main road ahead of the storm. During the last worksession, Code Supervisor Glass presented his budget, which the Council will have a chance to discuss at future budget worksessions. As one of the goals for the next fiscal year, the Department will strive to strengthen the cooperation with Public Works, Police and Town committees to improve all aspects of code compliance. Another goal is to update the Rental Housing Ordinance and revise the rental license form application to eliminate areas of misunderstanding. She thanked Mr. Glass and code staff for keeping up with the workload while being one code officer short.

**Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:** CM Dennison reported that the Recreation Council has begun to plan Berwyn Heights Day and is seeking volunteers. She announced that the Education Advisory Committee will meet on February 11 at 7 p.m.

**Public Health and Safety:** Chief Antolik asked for a moment of silence for two sheriff's deputies who were killed in a shoot-out with a suspect in Abingdon, Maryland. Then he gave the monthly report for the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department (BHVFD). The BHVFD was staffed with 3 crews of 6 volunteers for the duration of snow storm Jonas to be able to respond to any emergencies. The new ambulance's four wheel drive capabilities came in very handy. The BHVFD also established a standing grants committee and appointed a part-time grants administrator to handle the SAFER grant and other grants that may be awarded. Notice of a grant award for the new Rescue Squad will not be received until later this year.

Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for January 2016. There were 3 Part I offenses as opposed to a 5 year average of 5.4. Year-to-date totals were the same as January totals. The police also issued 162 state and municipal citations and 2 speed camera tickets. The low totals were probably due to the snowy and icy condition of the roads. Chief Antolik concluded with an explanation of winter weather driving conditions.

**Public Works:** CM White said that the Public Works crew was very busy during snow storm Jonas and put in 72 hours of around the clock 12 hour shifts between Friday January 22 and Monday January 25. She commended them for their work especially in light of their relative inexperience with snow plowing. She also thanked residents for their patience and kind notes. In addition to the snow operations, Public Works disposed of 72 tons of solid waste and 22 tons of recyclables during January.

In response to MPT Rasmussen, TA Cowles explained that the Public Works building has a bunk area where employees can stay overnight. The Town purchased new air mattresses and provided food during the storm. The Town is planning to create better overnight accommodations by clearing up some other areas of the DPW building. All staff on duty during the weekend are paid overtime. This was included in the FEMA reimbursement request for storm-related expenses.

## **12. Committee Reports**

**Historical Committee:** Clerk Harper reported that the Historical Committee continues to work on creating an oral history highlights video and had consultants in to explain how they could help produce such a video.

**Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reported the NW/EP would like to attend the February 22 worksession to present their budget. The NW/EP sponsored wine tasting is scheduled to take place on April 22. The next meeting will be on March 2, 7:30 p.m.

**Education Advisory Committee:** The EAC will meet on February 11, 7:00 p.m

## **13. Unfinished Business**

There was none.

## **14. New Business**

There was none.

## **10. Citizens Discussion**

There was none.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

*Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*