



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Minutes Town Meeting January 14, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Cheye Calvo, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Patricia Dennison, Chris Rasmussen and Anthony Schreiber. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Treasurer Suzan Lape, Clerk Kerstin Harper and citizens.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **1. Swearing-in of Officer Ben Hollowell**

Mayor Calvo said that Officer Hollowell has over 30 years' experience as a police officer and last served as a detective in the homicide division of Prince George's County Police. After retiring from the County, he worked several years in internal investigations of the Prince George's County Public Schools. Officer Hollowell is also a veteran of the U.S. Army. Mayor Calvo then performed the swearing-in.

Officer Hollowell introduced members of his family and shared some information about himself. He said that he comes from a family of New York City police officers and moved to Maryland in 1988. He now lives in the City of Greenbelt and is familiar with the area. While serving in the military, he was stationed in Germany and served as an undercover drug agent and in the executive protection services for Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell. He is looking forward to being an officer for this Town and to meet the residents he is sworn to protect.

### **2. Minutes**

Clerk Harper read a summary of the December 12, 2014 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by MPT Kulpa-Eddy and second by CM Rasmussen, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

### **3. Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of December.

### **4. Mayor's Report**

Mayor Calvo gave his annual State of the Town address. He said that in the last year the Town has seen many changes. The Town Council added two new members in the last election and has

grown into a cohesive governing body. MPT Kulpa-Eddy has stepped into her leadership role and has become the Council's point person on regional development issues; CM Schreiber has taken on the big job of leading the Public Works Department and will be helping to develop the new Director. CM Rasmussen, while familiarizing himself with the Code Department, has helped the Council work through several important Code initiatives and a revision of the Clean Lot Ordinance. He will face another challenge in finding new leadership for the department as the recently-hired Code Supervisor has resigned. He has also become an advocate for trees and is working on re-establishing a Shade Tree Board. CM Dennison continues to assist the many Town committees and clubs while helping her ailing mother at home. The Council also enjoyed with the newly-hired Town Administrator, Jessica Cowles, who has brought a new energy and a fresh perspective to the many challenges facing Town government.

Mayor Calvo continued that the Town is now in the fifth year of operating in the challenging fiscal environment of substantially lower real estate assessments. After the real estate market crashed in 2009, the Town lost more than a third of its assessable value. Despite the revenue losses, the Town remains in better financial shape than when the real estate market collapsed. This was achieved by responsible management of expenditures and staff, long-term planning, eliminating debt and reserving for capital expenditures, and, unfortunately, raising the real property tax rate. The Council is looking forward to the upcoming reassessment at the end of this year, which is likely to reflect rising real estate values.

Mayor Calvo outlined four priorities that he believes should focus the Town government in the near future.

First, he said that the Council must continue its focus on adding and supporting amenities and services that make Berwyn Heights an attractive place to live and raise a family and contribute to higher home values. He noted significant progress on this front in recent years, including new sidewalks, upgraded playgrounds, and a new community garden. But more needs to be done. He is excited about a grant to improve bikeways in Berwyn Heights and has had some conversations about getting play equipment for older children. He also hopes to get a dog park in Berwyn Heights, an effort that has been delayed by the difficulty of finding a place to put it.

Mayor Calvo said that the Town also needs to do more to help its local schools, particularly Greenbelt Middle and Parkdale High School, and to come up with a plan to renovate its streets. These are things that people will look at when deciding where they want to live.

Second, he said that the Town Council must give serious consideration to employee salaries. Although the Town has given merit and cost-of-living increases, the overall payroll has remained nearly flat for 5 years. The Town wants to ensure that its salaries remain competitive to attract and retain quality staff, a fact underscored by the departure of Code Supervisor Simpson, who was hired only last summer.

Third, Mayor Calvo noted that he hopes the Council will be able to start an effort to re-envision the Route 193 corridor and engage the Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) to do so. The Town first needs to develop a vision of what it wants its commercial district to look like in the future before it can embark on the work of moving toward the vision. The development on Route 1 and what is starting to take shape at Greenbelt Station could serve as a

catalyst to redevelopment along Route 193, but only if the Town is strategic and willing to hire outside expertise to develop a plan for the transformation.

Finally, Mayor Calvo said that he increasingly believes that the Town will need to think and act regionally to successfully move Berwyn Heights forward. We already do this to some degree when working through the Four Cities Coalition and the PGCMA on targeted efforts, like the FBI Headquarters and the Route 1 animal facility feasibility study. However, as the area changes and grows, we will need to partner with our larger neighbors and pool financial and staff resources to make the big changes that work for Town residents. This is certainly the case for the redevelopment of Route 193 but also in ensuring quality schools, economic development, transportation, and regional recreational amenities.

Mayor Calvo also remembered Dave McCaffrey, an anchor of the community for many years, who passed away on January 9 and will be laid to rest at Fort Lincoln cemetery. Lastly, the Green Team will sponsor a nutrition workshop on January 17, with tips and information about how to prepare healthy meals.

## **5. Department Reports**

**Administration:** MPT Kulpa-Eddy gave an overview of the Administration Department which she was appointed to lead after the last election. The Department is responsible for the important functions of finances and record keeping, which are carried out by a staff of six: TA Cowles, Treasurer Lape, Clerk Harper, Administrative Assistants Odoi and Forbes, and custodian Darlene Erickson. The Department hired a new Town Administrator last year, whose role has been strengthened within an updated and unified organizational structure. Among last year's accomplishments is the creation of a new meeting room and a face lift of the 2nd floor of the Town Center. The Administration Department also obtained two grants, one for building a sidewalk in the 8900 block of 63rd Avenue and another for improving bicycle routes in Berwyn Heights.

In the coming year, the Department will be busy drafting the FY 2016 budget, hiring new employees, overseeing the completion of the sidewalks project and installation of emergency generators, and beginning to work on updating the Town's personnel manual. MPT Kulpa-Eddy thanked the administrative team for their service and assistance to the Town Council.

**Code Compliance:** CM Rasmussen reported that Code Supervisor Simpson will be resigning on January 23. This is a big disappointment because he brought a lot of skills and code experience to the job. It also means figuring out how to manage the department and complete staff training on the new code tracking system until a new supervisor can be hired. The Town Council is thankful for everything Mr. Simpson accomplished in the short time he worked here.

CM Rasmussen said that he would like to add the urban tree initiative to the priorities Mayor Calvo outlined earlier and hopes it can be addressed next year. He believes that trees not only add aesthetic value but also help increase property values in Town. He said that he enjoyed the "wonky" discussions of Clean Lot Ordinance provisions to distinguish different categories of trash. Lastly, he noted that his kitchen renovation is moving forward and permits are being processed by Prince George's County and the Town of Berwyn Heights.

***Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:*** CM Dennison said tonight she would like to advertise a new "Lose It To Win It" initiative, in which the Green Team partners with the University of Maryland to promote healthy lifestyles. CM Rasmussen had proposed to do a public weigh-in at an earlier meeting and brought a scale to start off the campaign. CM Rasmussen stepped onto the scale and weighed in at 295.5 lbs. This will serve as his baseline for losing 40 lbs. by the end of this year. Mayor Calvo weighed in at 174 lbs., and stated his goal is to arrange for healthier meals during worksessions. MPT Kulpa-Eddy weighed in at 185 lbs. Her goal is to eat healthier foods and exercise more. CM Schreiber weighed in at 208.5 lbs. He said he will work to get to his ideal weight. CM Dennison also stepped on the scale and said that she will try to lose weight.

CM Dennison also announced upcoming events and meetings. All committees and clubs are invited to attend the next Recreation Council meeting to start planning Berwyn Heights Day.

***Public Health and Safety:*** Chief Antolik said that he resolved to lose 40 lbs. this year and has joined a health club. He reported that Camille Carter, his police clerk for 11 years, has resigned to take up a new position in the private sector. He has begun recruitment for a replacement. Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for December. There were 8 Part I offenses, slightly above the 5-year average of 7.8. The year to date total was 72 as opposed to the 5-year average of 83. Looking back of the last 10 years, serious crime has declined noticeably from annual totals of over 100 to totals of below 100 since 2010.

Chief Antolik continued that the police in December also issued 161 municipal and state citations, and 134 speed camera citations, all of which were on Greenbelt Road. The Town's speed camera vendor has been asked to move the speed camera Pontiac Street to Edmonston Road. His officers will continue to work on suppressing crime through frequent in-town patrols, investigations and working with residents. Among last year's accomplishments are anti-terrorism training of Detective Unger and Officer Krouse, promotion of Officer Roberson to Corporal, an MOU with the City of Greenbelt and the Town of Edmonston for mutual assistance, completion of senior resident registration program, and an increase in citations issued.

In response to Mayor Calvo, Chief Antolik said that there were 3 burglaries in Berwyn Heights today, which are probably related. The burglars in all cases stole cash, laptops and other valuables in plain sight. Similar burglaries have also occurred in neighboring jurisdictions. Residents are advised to be vigilant and report unusual activities to the police. If not at home, lights, TVs or radios can be left on to give the impression that someone is home. The police will perform safety checks for home owners and give advice on how to make their homes more secure.

***Public Works:*** CM Schreiber announced that the next electronic recycling day will be on January 24, 9 to 12 pm. Drop-off is at Greenbelt's Public Works yard, which is accessible from the Buddy Attick parking lot. He also reported that loose leaf collection has been extended to January 16 because of equipment failure in December and that James Thomas was chosen as employee of the month. He thanked Bruce Hockman, who tendered his resignation, for his many years of service with the Town, and wished him well in his retirement. All Public Works employees are appreciated for continuing their work during this cold and snowy time of year.

## **6. Committee Reports**

***Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:*** MPT Kulpa-Eddy announced that a couple of CERT training workshops will take place in March. Interested residents should contact Mike Attick to register. At the meeting, Ron Shane and Joan Hayden were re-elected as co-chairs of the Committee. It was decided to hold another wine tasting event to take place on April 24. More will be announced in upcoming Bulletins.

## **7. Unfinished Business**

***Ordinance 107 - Clean Lot and Ordinance 134 - Commercial Clean Lot Amendments:*** Mayor Calvo said that the Council continues to fine-tune these two related Ordinances. The section on clean lot standards has been completed. The focus is now on improving readability and on coming up with an easier way to show the schedules of enforcement for different types of violations. No action will be taken tonight. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved and CM Dennison seconded to postpone consideration of the Clean Lot Ordinances to the February Town meeting. The motion passed 5 to 0.

## **8. New Business**

There was none.

## **9. Citizens Discussion**

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, offered to provide musical entertainment for the upcoming wine tasting. He also suggested asking any suspicious persons walking up to a neighbor's house if they have a solicitor's permit from the Town, and if not, offer to help them get one by calling the police. This will often discourage them from sticking around.

Mr. Ventura also acknowledged that he was wrong about the sidewalks and that people are using them. From his observations, the sidewalk contractors are skilled and conscientious. However, the final product might have been improved if curbs had been installed with slip joints allowing for movement of the sub-base. The Town might want to include this into their engineering specifications for future projects.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*