



# Town of Berwyn Heights

5700 Berwyn Road  
Berwyn Heights, MD 20740  
Tel. (301) 474-5000  
Fax (301) 474-5002

## Town Meeting Minutes April 13, 2016 7:30 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. Present were Mayor Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Chris Rasmussen, CMs Patricia Dennison, Maria Robles, and Lynn White. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Officer Paul Roberson, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Clerk Kerstin Harper and citizens.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 1. Hearings

***FY 2017 Town Budget:*** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy announced that citizens will have an opportunity to comment on the FY 2017 budget at the hearings she is about to open. She said that the Council plans to decline reducing its tax rates to offset an increase in tax revenues due to rising assessments. Instead, it is proposed to keep the same real property tax rate of 53 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation, and the same personal property tax rate of \$1.325 per \$100 of assessed valuation, which will generate an additional \$89,000 in tax revenues. This allows the Town to stop pulling money from surplus to fund day-to-day government operations.

The additional revenue will be used to fund promotions, as well as COLA and merit salary increases that went into effect in November 2015. Further, it is proposed to fully fund the vehicle replacement reserve so that heavy-duty specialty trucks and equipment can be purchased in accordance with their replacement schedules; to purchase a hybrid vehicle for the Administration Department with a matching grant from the Maryland Energy Administration; and to finance IT and security upgrades across Town departments. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy further noted that a couple of this year's capital projects came in under budget: the animal shelter study will require an \$8,000 instead of a \$10,000 contribution and the emergency generators project will cost the Town \$65,000 rather than the \$80,000 budgeted.

The councilmembers then each gave an overview of their departmental budgets.

MPT Rasmussen said that the general government budget comprises the Mayor & Council budget, the Administration Department budget as well as the municipal and Town Center budgets. The overall general government budget is proposed to decline by 4%. The savings are due to outsourcing custodial work, moving IT expenses to the non-department budget, implementing a new VOIP telephone system, and other operational efficiencies.

CM Robles thanked Code Supervisor Glass and TA Cowles for together developing a good Code Department budget. The main change from the FY 2016 budget is a 20% increase in the

*part time labor* appropriation, which allows the department to increase part time hours from 30 to 35 hours per week and hire a second code officer. The second officer will help patrol the Town during evenings and weekends.

CM Dennison said that the Parks and Recreation budgets includes a \$2,500 increase in the *Sports Park* appropriation requested by the Boys & Girls Club to pay for the flood lights electric bill. The Council also approved a \$1,000 increase in the Recreation Council's *special events* appropriation.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said that the Police Department will maintain the same staffing levels as this year and provide around-the-clock police protection. There is an 8.4% increase in the salary appropriation to cover 2 promotions. Further, there are modest increases in the *dues & conferences* and *training & seminars* line items to keep officers abreast of the latest laws and regulations. Also budgeted is a \$7,400 expenditure for new bullet proof vests, which will be charged to the public safety reserve, and a small increase in the National Night Out appropriation, which regularly has been over budget.

CM White said that the proposed Public Works Department budget will reduce staffing levels from 9 full time employees to 8 full time and 1 part time administrative assistant, which has proved sufficient in most circumstances. The budget has funding for hiring temporary workers for leaf season and storm cleanup. There are also modest increases in the *tools, uniforms* and *mosquito control* appropriations, some of which reflect price increases for goods and services the Town uses. There is a fairly sizeable increase of \$8,000 in the *street signs* budget to bring all Town stop signs into compliance with federal height and reflectivity requirements. Lastly, CM White said she is pleased to have secured \$750 for beautification projects in Town.

At 7:48 p.m., Mayor Kulpa-Eddy opened the public hearing and invited residents to comment. She read an email from resident Gerald Shields consenting to keeping tax rates the same as this year.

Michael Roberts, 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue, asked whether the Council will be discussing assessments. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy replied that all property in the Town of Berwyn Heights was re-assessed in December 2015 resulting in higher home values and, in this proposed budget, more taxes for homeowners and more revenue for the Town. The assessments are done by the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (MDAT) on a triennial basis and potential tax increases in any individual year are capped at 10%. With no further comments, Mayor Kulpa-Eddy closed the hearing at 7:54 p.m.

***Public Safety Taxing District Budget:*** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy explained that this budget is separate from the general fund and applies only to commercial and industrial establishments located in Town. These businesses pay a special tax which funds one Berwyn Heights police officer, in this case Detective Unger. The proposed FY 2017 PSTD budget maintains the same tax rate of 10 cents per \$100 of assessed real property valuation, and 15 cents per \$100 of personal property valuation. The budget will be reviewed and voted on by the Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) on April 19. That meeting is open to the public.

At 8:01 p.m., Mayor Kulpa-Eddy opened the hearing and, without any comments, closed the hearing at 8:02 p.m.

## **2. Minutes**

Clerk Harper read a summary of the March 9 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM White, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

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

Treasurer Rodriguez gave the Treasurer's report for the month of March. She noted that 3 new accounts were opened at Old Line Bank to hold different reserves for vehicle replacement, infrastructure and cable TV. There is no separate account currently for the NW/EP trailer reserve, but the money is tracked separately in the general fund. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy suggested that it might be integrated into the vehicle replacement fund in the future.

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

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy announced that executive sessions were held on April 4 to select the citizen of the year and on April 11 to discuss a legal matter. The pedestrian bridge has been manufactured and will be transported to Berwyn Heights via Branchville and Ballew Avenue on April 22 to be installed on April 22 and 23. Metro's Green Line will be shut down between Greenbelt and College Park during this construction. County Councilmember Dannielle Glaros will hold a Town Hall and Resource Fair on April 20, where citizens can obtain information about the status of the FBI headquarters, the Purple Line and other projects and issues of interest in this area.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reminded residents that the Maryland presidential primaries will be held on April 26, with early voting starting on April 14. Candidates running for Town Council will have the opportunity to engage with voters at Candidates Night on April 27 and the Town Council election will be held on May 3 at the Town Center. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

#### **5. Department Reports**

**Administration:** MPT Rasmussen commended TA Cowles for managing a long and complex budget process to produce a balanced budget. He reported that the Town has entered into a contract with tree consultants Savatree to conduct a study of the Town's tree canopy. The study will produce data on the number, location, species and health of mature trees, and make recommendations on how to best protect the Town's tree canopy. The emergency generators have been installed and are awaiting connection to Washington Gas' infrastructure.

At the last worksession, the Council had a presentation from Jerry Pasternak, Pepco's Vice President for Government Affairs & Public Policy, who discussed Pepco's vegetation management practices generally, and specifically as they relate to Berwyn Heights. The Town received notice that it will be reimbursed for most expenses related to the January blizzard. However, in the future the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will only provide reimbursement when a storm produces more snow than any previous one on record.

Further, the Administration Department now accepts credit card payments, but will charge a fee to recoup associated costs. A new website will go live in May under the URL [berwynheightsmd.gov](http://berwynheightsmd.gov). The Department continues to work with human resources consultants on a compensation study and overhauling personnel policies. Next week, the Department will begin to advertise the Public Works director job opening, for which the Council recently approved a revised job description.

**Code Compliance:** CM Robles reported that Code Supervisor Glass has been busy keeping track of the demolitions of 2 condemned properties. The demolition of the 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue house has been completed and the lot returned to a buildable condition, while the work at the Cunningham Drive property is ongoing. The Town has asked residents for help with clearing out storm drains located on private property to prevent flooding. Residents that need help unblocking a storm drain should contact the Town's Code Department or the County's Department of Permits, Inspections and Enforcement (DPIE). Lastly, recent rains have caused grass to start growing quickly. Residents are asked to keep their lawns cut at a length not to exceed 10".

***Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:*** CM Dennison said Berwyn Heights Day is on May 7. Volunteers are still needed and should contact the Recreation Council.

***Public Health and Safety:*** Officer Roberson reported for Chief Antolik, who was away at the Maryland Chiefs of Police conference. He said that the Police Department took a training about accepting credit card payments. Reporting on police activities, he said there were 4 thefts from autos and 1 assault for a total of 5 Part I offenses last month. The police also issued 206 citations and 330 speed camera tickets, all on Greenbelt Road. Currently, there are no crime trends to report, but residents are reminded not to leave valuables in unlocked cars, including when fueling at a gas station.

In response to Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, Officer Roberson said that the police made an arrest in connection with the recent robberies of several 7 Elevens. He is not sure the suspect robbed the Berwyn Heights stores, but it is being looked at.

***Public Works:*** CM White reported that the Public Works crew disposed of 102 tons of household trash, 23 tons of recyclables, and 14 tons of yard waste. The Department also worked on repairing lawn mowers, servicing vehicles, fixing potholes and installing ATHA bicycle wayfinding signs. In the course of picking up refuse, they also issued several violation notices for not disposing trash as required by Ordinance 117.

## **6. Committee Reports**

***Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:*** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reported that the Berwyn Heights CERT will be hosting its 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Wine Tasting festival on April 30, starting at 2 pm at the Town Center. A \$10 admission will be charged. The next NW/EP meeting will be on May 4. On May 7, Berwyn Heights Day, the NW/EP Committee will again have their trailer on display.

## **7. Unfinished Business**

There was none.

## **8. New Business**

***Ordinance 171 – 1<sup>st</sup> Reading & Introduction of FY 2017 Town Budget:*** Clerk Harper read the adopting language of Ordinance 171. Without any comments, the Council voted 5 to 0 to introduce the FY 2017 Town Budget.

***Ordinance 172 – 1<sup>st</sup> Reading & Introduction of the FY 2017 Public Safety Taxing District:*** Clerk Harper read the adopting language of Ordinance 172. Without any comments, the Council voted 5 to 0 to introduce the Public Safety Taxing District budget.

## **9. Citizens Discussion**

Michael Roberts, 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue, said that there is a problem with speeding on the 8500 block of 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue where children walk to school. In addition, the County busses use this street as part of their route, making it unsafe to walk in the street. He suggested the Town consider placing a speed camera on this block, which is within the ½ mile school zone around the elementary school, to slow down traffic.

Mr. Roberts also complained about gravel scattered on the roadway leading toward Lake Artemesia by trucking businesses located on 55<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He asked that the Town talk with the businesses about cleaning that up because it is a hazard to bike riders. Further, Mr. Roberts asked if the Town can do something about residents who cut down trees on their property and whether there are any regulations about beekeeping.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said that beekeeping has come up in the Prince George's County zoning regulations re-write currently underway. In the proposed new regulations, keeping of bees is allowed only in an agricultural zone, along with keeping chickens and other livestock. However, a number of citizens and some municipalities have requested that non-commercial beekeeping and raising of chickens be allowed in residential zones.

MPT Rasmussen commented that the Town has no legal means to restrain homeowners from felling trees on their properties. The Town has contracted with tree consultants who are performing a tree inventory and will make recommendations on protecting the Town's tree canopy. One outcome of the study might be a new regulation that requires a Town permit for cutting down trees on private property if it is above a certain size, on the assumption that those trees are a community asset. This would be a regulation for the next Town Council to debate.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

*Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*