



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Minutes Town Meeting September 13, 2017

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Cheryl Jewitt, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Patricia Dennison, Chris Rasmussen and Gerald Shields. CM Shields arrived at 7:19 p.m. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Code Compliance Supervisor Freddie Glass, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Pepco Representatives Ivan Lanier, Olaf Pederson and Andrea Hayden, Green Team member Diana Agonoy, Recreation Council President Susan Jones, NW/EP Co-Chair Mike Attick, and citizens Phil Ventura and Jared Golub.

Mayor Jewitt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Pepco Presentation

Mayor Jewitt welcomed Pepco State Affairs Manager Ivan Lanier, and Emergency Preparedness & Emergency Services Coordinator Olaf Pederson for a presentation on Pepco's severe weather preparedness program. Mr. Lanier said that he spends much of his time representing Pepco in Annapolis but also visits cities and towns to explain Pepco initiatives. He brought a 38-year veteran and emergency expert, Mr. Pederson, to explain Pepco's severe weather preparedness program.

Mr. Pederson said that Pepco's emergency response follows a 6-step power restoration process ordered by priority. The top priority for restoring power is addressing life safety situations, such as power outages at a hospital, followed by repairing those parts of the power grid that impact the greatest number of people. This starts with transmission lines from a generating facility to substations, the substations themselves, distribution lines into communities, secondary lines within neighborhoods and, lastly, individual homes.

Mr. Pederson said that Pepco follows strict safety protocols when restoring power in order not to endanger the lives of its electricians. No corners are cut to restore power faster because mistakes are deadly when working on power lines. For the same reason, only thoroughly trained staff are allowed to work on the power lines. When there is a major power outage, multiple crews are dispatched to work on different parts of the grid, and staff are working 16-hour shifts with 8-hour breaks until all customers are back online.

Pepco is in regular contact with other first responders to improve coordination in responding to emergencies. After an event, Pepco holds thorough debriefs, which serve to improve the process going forward. Much has been learned in the wake of the 2012 derecho and several winter snow storms, and wide-spread outages have been reduced in recent years.

Mayor Jewitt asked what possible reason there might be for a power outage affecting approximately 20 homes on clear, windless day, such as occurred in Berwyn Heights recently and whether the affected homes might be moved to a different feeder. Mr. Pederson replied that Pepco can certainly research what the likely causes of this outage were. Usually such outages are caused by falling branches, animals, or overload due to the use of appliances and devices that require an electrical upgrade. Most causes of an outage can be addressed by minor changes to the equipment on the poles, rather than moving homes onto a different feeder.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said her home was one of those affected by this outage. She wonders if the age of the Pepco equipment may have had something to do with it. Mr. Pederson replied it is unlikely, since the equipment is engineered to last for a very long time. Further, there has not been a significant increase in electricity demand from the relatively small homes one finds in this town. MPT Kulpa-Eddy commented that Pepco has greatly improved its communications and is now able to inform customers when power will be restored with some precision. She asked if Pepco could also publicize the causes for particular outages. Mr. Pederson replied that the cause of an outage is usually posted on Pepco's website, although there may be a delay. The Pepco mobile app has received very favorable reviews from customers for the ease of reporting and receiving information about outages.

Susan Jones, Pontiac Street, asked what reason there might be for very brief power outages that cause lights to flicker and appliances to reset. Mr. Pederson said it is the system's protective response to a power surge through the opening and closing of the affected circuit. Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue asked questions about the Branchville substation, a Pepco show and tell trailer, and filing claims for damaged equipment. Mr. Pederson replied that Branchville is likely a distribution substation with transformers that step the current up or down. Pepco continues to operate a mobile simulation trailer to give demonstrations about how its power grid works. Mr. Attick will be furnished with a telephone number for Pepco's claims department where he can file request for reimbursement for equipment damaged by a power outage.

CM Shields said he received a comment about Pepco being slow to respond to an outage but that service was restored quickly after contacting the Town. Mr. Pederson said that the most effective way to address power outages during a natural disaster is to work through the Town. Municipalities should contact Ronald Gill, Director of the Prince George's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) about power issues. Pepco has staff in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Pepco is in continuous contact with Mr. Gill during emergencies.

2. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the August 9 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, the minutes were approved 4 – 0 – 1, with CM Rasmussen abstaining.

3. Mayor's Report

Mayor Jewitt reported that the Council held an executive session regarding personnel matters at the September 11 worksession. She also highlighted a parking concern brought to her attention. Homeowners do not have a claim to the parking spaces in front of their home, as Berwyn Heights does not have reserved parking on public streets and cannot enforce it, unless there is a violation. Mayor Jewitt received a letter from the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) declining the Town's request for a noise study on Kenilworth Avenue between Greenbelt Road and Pontiac Street.

4. Department Reports

Code Compliance (discussed out of order): Supervisor Glass gave the code statistics for the month of August. The department issued 59 code violations, most related to grass and vegetation, as well as 3 building permits, 5 dumpster permits, 24 rental licenses, and collected total revenues of \$23,250.

In response to Mayor Jewitt, Supervisor Glass said that residents who need to dispose of large amounts of bulk trash, should contact the Code Department as soon as possible. The Code Officer will come out to inspect and assess a fee for removal. During daily patrols, Code Officers and Public Works staff will take note of homes that have a large amount of refuse at the curb, then check to see if it may be a rental cleanout or an eviction, and decide how best to remove it. In response to Mr. Attick, Supervisor Glass said that the call-a-bus is currently out of service in Greenbelt. For taxi service, the Code car is used.

CM Rasmussen reported that there are 207 rental homes this year as opposed to 193 last year in August. This may be due to the Town's revised rental regulations, which require rental licenses for owner-occupied homes where only one room is rented (owner plus one). Evictions are sometimes the endpoint of a series of problems associated with a rental home, such as health and safety violations or conflicts among tenants that require Police intervention.

CM Rasmussen said he received inquiries about what the Town can do about long vacant homes. Unfortunately, the Town has no authority to force the owner to sell the home but it can and does enforce violations of Town ordinances, particularly relating to maintenance of the exterior of the property. The Town maintains a list of vacant properties and communicates with the owners about any problems. Residents have also asked about the revocation of a rental license in response to repeated problems at a rental property. Again, the Code Department maintains a record of problem rentals, and responds with escalating fines, but views the revocation of the license as a penalty of last resort. Lastly, CM Rasmussen noted that the Town responds to complaints about neighbors when there are Code violations but does not mediate conflicts between neighbors.

Administration: MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that the Town is considering hosting a vaccination clinic in October to administer flu, tetanus and hepatitis B shots. Interested residents are requested to call the Town office and indicate which vaccines they need. The cost depends on the copay of a person's insurance carrier. Secondly, online merchant Amazon.com is looking into opening a 2nd headquarters, and the D.C. area. The University of Maryland in cooperation with the City of College Park and Prince George's County are planning to submit a proposal. Lastly, Prince George's County provided new tax differential guidelines, which will facilitate municipalities receiving reimbursement for the services they provide. The guidelines were developed by a task force set up following a County Executive's budget meeting with municipalities in February.

Treasurer Rodriguez gave the Treasurer's report for August.

TA Cowles said the tax differential task force also succeeded in giving municipalities credit for purchases of Police and Public Works vehicles, regardless of whether they are financed by loans or paid in cash. This is an important win, as such vehicle purchases are a significant expense in Berwyn Heights' budget.

TA Cowles announced that on September 20 the Town will host an emergency response workshop which will be attended by some 60 high-level municipal and County officials, including those with direct responsibility for emergency management. The workshop facilitators will come here from Texas, where they are currently involved in the Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Shields reported that he has revised a citizen survey on Town services to make it shorter, and has shared it with the Council. He also announced the upcoming community garden party.

Public Works (discussed out of order): CM Dennison announced that Public Works Director Cox resigned.

TA Cowles gave the report. Public Works removed a dead tree at the corner of Ruatan Street and Berwyn Road, installed a stop bar at Pontiac Street and 57th Avenue and delivered mulch to the school garden. A service request form has been developed, which Town organizations will be asked to use to request services from the Department. In coming weeks, 25 new crosswalks will be installed at key intersections in Town. The Department expects to hear from SHA, which is in the process of performing a traffic analysis of 58th and Branchville Avenues at Greenbelt Road for the purpose of determining whether to add a left turn arrow to the traffic light. TA Cowles concluded with a report on the refuse collection percentages for August.

Public Health and Safety: Chief Antolik said Berwyn Heights Police will miss Clerk Iris Cruz, who has done good work for the Department. She is leaving to take a federal government position. Police had extra officers, plus Neighborhood Watch volunteers patrolling around the school when school reopened last week.

Chief Antolik asked for a moment of silence to remember 9/11 and all who died in the attacks. He then gave the police activities report for August. There were 4 Part I offenses, as opposed to the 5-year average of 5.2. The year-to-date total was 32, as opposed to the 5-year average of 41. Officers issued 276 municipal and state citations and 37 speed camera tickets, all on Greenbelt Road. Chief Antolik cautioned residents to be on the lookout for false donation requests in connection with relief for Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and not use forms of payment that cannot be traced.

5. Committee Reports

Green Team: Green Team member Diana Agonoy announced that the Green Team led the BHES garden cleanup, and thanked Public Works for delivering mulch and removing the waste. She announced the upcoming community garden picnic. All are welcome to attend and bring a dish to share.

Historical Committee: Clerk Harper reported that the Historical Committee will elect next year's officers at its September 26 meeting.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: NW/EP Co-chair Mike Attick announced the next meeting on October 4, and a *Sip 'n Paint* fundraiser on October 13, with musical accompaniment provided by Phil Ventura. In response to CM Shields, he confirmed that the emergency trailer will be displayed at an upcoming CERT conference.

Recreation Council: Recreation Council President Susan Jones announced a September 19 Ice Cream Social. There will be games for children, and community service hours are available for volunteers.

6. Unfinished Business

There was none.

7. New Business

Resolution 07-2017 - Sustainable Community Designation Application: TA Cowles explained that the State of Maryland has a *Sustainable Communities* program that provides development grants and technical assistance for designated communities. Once Berwyn Heights is designated as a *Sustainable Community*, the Town's government, businesses and residents become eligible for these resources. Over the summer, a University of Maryland intern worked to put together the application, with input from a work group that had representatives from the Town Council, the business community and Town organizations. The Resolution to be adopted expresses the Town Council's support for the *Sustainable Communities* designation.

Clerk Harper read the Resolution. MPT Kulpa-Eddy clarified that the term "sustainable" is not synonymous with "renewable," and does not only apply to the environment but to other aspects of development. The program is the successor to the former *Community Legacy* program. CM Dennison moved to adopt the Resolution and CM Shields seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Resolution 08-2017 – Emergency Operations Plan: MPT Kulpa-Eddy explained that this Resolution introduces an extensively overhauled Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for the Town, replacing the original plan dating from 2003. It is based on FEMA's 2010 comprehensive preparedness guide that incorporates the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and other disasters. The draft is going to be used for a drill during the upcoming emergency preparedness workshop, and the results will in turn be used to further refine the document.

Residents are encouraged to comment on the plan, which is posted on the Town website and is available in the Town office. In particular, people may want to review the priorities for recovery listed under "Planning Facts & Assumptions." The Council plans to adopt the Plan at the October or November Town meeting, depending on the feedback received. Clerk Harper read the Resolution. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to introduce it. CM Dennison seconded. CM Shields thanked MPT Kulpa-Eddy and the entire Council for their work on the much-needed revision of the EOP. The motion passed 5 to 0.

8. Citizens Discussion

Mayor Jewitt said she received additional comments on the Humvee acquisition, including one just before this meeting opposed to the acquisition. CM Shields said he received 3 more comments on the Humvee, all opposed to the acquisition.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, commented that he would support Chief Antolik having the Humvee because he trusts him to use it responsibly. He said the Town might do well to “grow” its own Public Works director and held up long-serving Director Joe Coleman as an example of an excellent home-grown director. He suggested giving Foreman Cardenas the opportunity to rise to the position of Public Works director, and offered his services to help run the Department in the transition.

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, commented that he has noticed rats again since the elementary school property's grass has not been cut in a while. He clarified that he is opposed to outfitting the trash trucks with automatic lifts. He inquired when the Police Chief received his last raise, suggesting he should have received a salary increase when a new pay plan was adopted. He asked if SHA has any plans to address the Pontiac Street - Kenilworth Avenue intersection traffic backups, and whether non-employees will be allowed to drive the Town vehicles during emergencies. Further, he said NW/EP should have been notified of the upcoming emergency preparedness workshop since it is their mission to prepare and respond to emergencies. Lastly, he expressed his support for obtaining the Humvee as a free utility vehicle, noting that it is not currently equipped for military use.

Joan Hayden, Seminole Street, commented by telephone that she agrees with Mr. Ventura about the Public Works Department having performed better when it was staffed with men who lived in Berwyn Heights and cared about the Town. She also expressed her opposition to spending up to \$20,000 to outfit the trash trucks with automatic lifts. Residents are only asking for recycling bins on wheels. Lastly, she agreed with Mr. Attick that the NW/EP should have been notified and invited to participate in the emergency preparedness workshop.

Casey Blelock, Goucher Avenue, commented by telephone that he is opposed to the acquisition of the Humvee because it may alienate minorities.

Mr. Ventura and Ms. Jones addressed the Kenilworth Avenue/ Pontiac Street traffic issue again, saying the traffic light does not give enough time for all lined-up vehicles to exit the Town and is causing traffic backups, particularly on Edmonston Road.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk