



TOWN OF BERWYN HEIGHTS

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MAYOR
Stephen D. Isler
COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jason W. Papanikolas (Mayor Pro Tem)
Amanda M. Dewey
Ethan D. Sweep
Jeffrey Jay Osmond

Draft Town Meeting Minutes April 10, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jason Papanikolas, presiding, Councilmembers (CMs) Amanda Dewey, Ethan Sweep and Jeffrey Jay Osmond. Mayor Stephen Isler had an excused absence, Also Present were Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Chief Kenneth Antolik, Public Works Director Kenneth Hall, and citizens.

1. Approval of Agenda

CM Sweep moved and CM Dewey seconded to approve the agenda. The motion passed 4 to 0.

2. Public Hearing on FY 2020 Budget

At 7:03 p.m., MPT Papanikolas opened the Public Hearing.

TM Broadbent gave an overview of the FY 2020 budget, which has been published in the Bulletin and on the website and is available at this hearing. The budget to be introduced tonight includes a 1.5 cent real property tax increase, as well as staffing changes in the Code Compliance Department, addition of 1 officer and 2 vehicles in the Police Department, scheduled replacement of 2 public works vehicles, some road improvements and funding to implement semi-automated recycling pickup.

The Public Safety Taxing District (PSTD) budget also to be introduced tonight will be reviewed by the Commercial District Management Authority on April 17. The PSTD tax rates will remain unchanged. A summary of budget highlights is attached to respective budget ordinances.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, noted that the FY 2020 budget does not adopt the constant yield tax rate. Rather it raises the current tax rate, increasing the annual tax burden for the average household to approximately \$3,000 as opposed to \$2,250 two years ago. He thought the tax rate indicates there is not enough revenue to cover expenditures and the Town needs to be more conservative in spending money. Instead the Town making available to the public a free electric vehicle charging station in the rear of the Town Center. He believes this will be expensive because there is no limit on how much electricity can be used. He said it could cost \$5,000 per year if someone charges their EV once a week, assuming an equivalent price of \$1.15 per e-gallon to the price of \$3.00 per gallon of gasoline.

CM Dewey replied that the cost of electric fuel cannot easily be equated to the cost of gasoline. It costs her about \$7.00 to fully charge her EV but it fuels the car for 270 miles. The annual charging cost of her vehicle is nowhere near \$5,000. It was the intent of the Council to provide a service to the community when installing the charging stations and to address potential cost issues if the Town's utility bills spike. This has not been the case to date.

Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Ruatan Street, commented she was shocked to see a tax increase. She is not sure why the additional money is needed and was hoping to hear an explanation tonight of what it would be

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spent on. She has not looked at all the budget details and asked if it would fund additional staff. This tax increase comes on top of the tax increase residents will see due to increases in assessment, plus federal and state income tax increases. This will be hard for people on fixed incomes. She hopes the Council might take another look at the budget and make adjustments to forgo the tax increase.

Councilmembers replied the FY 2020 budget provides only for one additional police officer and two position upgrades in the Code Department. Ms. Kulpa-Eddy asked whether the additional officer is needed. CM Sweep and Dewey replied it enables BHPD to have a second on-duty officer per shift as a backup and plans for the coming retirement of officers. There ensued further discussion about a 9th police officer and other uses of the funds raised.

Former Councilmember Gerald Shields, Nevada Street, suggested including a sunset provision on the tax increase that would coincide with the completion of the road project. TM Broadbent informed him this Council cannot bind future Councils to its budgets.

CM Sweep noted one of the new items in the FY 2020 budget is a reserve for police vehicles. TM Broadbent said there is no reserve for police vehicles but \$7,000 has been set aside in the Public Safety Taxing District Budget (PSTD) to start a reserve for the PSTD officers. This will ensure that the police vehicle fleet remains up to date. Additionally, a substantial contribution has been made to the Public Works vehicle replacement reserve. Some expenses, such as the purchase of new recycling containers, were moved to this year's budget and will be paid with fund balance.

CM Osmond said, in his opinion, next year's budget is about public safety, sustainable budgeting, countering inflation, maintaining excellent services, and employee retention. To him Public safety is a top priority and he prefers Berwyn Heights officers to keep the Town safe.

CM Dewey thanked everyone who came to share their comments. This is the proper time to discuss how to best spend the Town's money. However, there is no spending priority everyone agrees on. Some believe that tree care is a top priority, while for others place public safety at the top of their list. This Council has combed through the budget to fund those needs they believe make Berwyn Heights a great place to live.

MPT Papanikolas agreed, saying the Council tries to be a good steward of Town funds. He does not relish raising taxes on citizens because it increases his taxes, too, but the amount of additional taxes is relatively small. This Council will try to offset some of the impact by working to maximize the tax rebate from the County for services rendered by the Town, such as trash collection.

Meg Miller Shane commented there are two sides to a tax increase: on the one hand, more money comes out of one's pocket but on the other, home values go up. She is willing to pay more for good services and to keep the Town safe.

CM Osmond said this budget seeks to correct budgeting practices that were unsustainable and to address needs that had been left unattended. Once these objectives are attained and the budget functions as it should, the Council may decide to make an adjustment and reduce tax rates.

Mr. Ventura said he did not see any "give and take" in the making of this budget. The Police Department, for example, had had its list of requests approved without significant reductions elsewhere in its budget. He also took issue with increasing benefits to retain employees.

CM Sweep objected to Mr. Ventura implying the Council had not done its due diligence in making budget decisions. If Mr. Ventura had attended the budget worksession he might have seen Councilmembers quizzing the directors in depth about the reasons for their budget requests. TM Broadbent added that almost every new initiative proposed by the directors has been modified or reduced. For example, the funding for the officer position was reduced to cover only half a year; Public Works vehicle maintenance was reduced by half because several old vehicles will be surplus; and the recycling improvements and welcome sign were capitalized in the FY 2019 budget.

Angela Wolfinger asked why funding of the welcome sign was reduced from \$10,000 to \$2,000. CM Sweep replied it was done because a decision on what type of sign to get will take more time. The \$2,000 will cover research and design of signs that would be purchased in FY 2021.

At 8:02 p.m., MPT Papanikolas continued the public hearing and encouraged residents to submit comments in writing or telephone.

3. Approval of Minutes

On a motion by CM Dewey, seconded by CM Sweep, the minutes of the March 13 Town meeting minutes were approved 4 to 0.

4. Mayor's Report

There was none.

5. Department Reports

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Rodriguez gave the report for March 2019. She said the focus of her work was on the budget; otherwise it was a normal month. Treasurer Rodriguez also completed a class on intermediate governmental accounting.

Administration: TM Broadbent reported she and Treasurer Rodriguez spent much time on examining the details of previous budgets to construct the FY 2020 budget. On the Code Department front, she will propose changes to the enforcement process to move away from placing liens on properties and issue municipal infractions to achieve compliance. One aspect of the changes could be an appeals board of qualified citizens hearing code appeals, instead of the Town Council performing this function.

Code Compliance: TM Broadbent reported, as acting Code Supervisor, she has dealt with a number of the property maintenance cases. She is finding that code violation complaints are often made by residents about their neighbors to whom they have never spoken because at times the neighbor is not a native English speaker. She believes most issues between neighbors are easy to fix and can be solved with a conversation. The Police Department is launching an initiative to reach out to the Latino community to help bridge the divide.

Parks & Recreation: CM Dewey announced a series of upcoming public workshops scheduled by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to discuss the proposed widening of the Capital Beltway. The nearest one will be on April 23, 6:30 p.m. at Eleanor Roosevelt High School and residents are encouraged to attend. She also announced an April 28 education community forum in Greenbelt with School Board Chair Dr. Alvin Thornton and thanked the Historical Committee and Recreation Council for hosting an awesome Team Trivia night, as well all the people who helped with the raingarden replanting.

Public Works: CM Sweep said he will attend the workshop on the Beltway widening as this is the best opportunity for citizens to make their voices heard. He thanked Public Works for working on the

raingarden and other landscaping around Town. Currently, the Public Works Department is looking to fill 2 positions. Residents are welcome to refer anyone who may be interested in the job.

Director Hall said his Department is getting ready for grass cutting season and preparing for Berwyn Heights Day, checking all the needed equipment and supplies. He commended Foreman Luis Cardenas for obtaining his commercial drivers' license, not an easy feat.

Public Safety: Chief Antolik reported that Detective Unger passed the police chiefs academy training; that a code of conduct was adopted for the Senior Center following a recent incident; and that BHPD is launching an outreach program to the Latino community. BHPD will also participate in a Senior Citizens Day celebration at the Senior Center to which the Council is invited.

Detective Unger gave the police activities report for March. There were 4 Part I offenses, including 1 assault, in March and 18 year-to-date. Detective Unger said he is working on several fraud cases, a couple of which were telephone scams, in which callers purported to be collecting an IRS debt and another where callers demanded the victim purchase gift cards in connection with a pending lawsuit. Residents should beware of such scams and not respond. Debts and fines are not usually collected over the phone.

CM Osmond said if a citizen suspects that a call is a scam, they might want to write the number down and report it to an FBI or Federal Trade Commission hotline. This helps authorities to track down the perpetrators and end the scam. Chief Antolik said BHPD is planning to produce some public service videos this summer, one of which will deal with this type of fraud and explain how best to react.

Detective Unger further reported that he, Officers Krouse and Rufino responded to a report of a homicide at Lake Artemesia Park on March 14. Early investigations concluded that the murder was gang-related and did not occur in or near Berwyn Heights. Second, Officer Rufino completed training in responding to animal cruelty incidents and is looking forward to taking on that role.

6. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: CM Dewey thanked those who have signed up to serve on the Education Advisory Committee (BHEAC) and invited anyone with an interest in education to join. The first BHEAC meeting will be held on April 29 and the Committee will have a booth on Berwyn Heights Day.

Green Team: CM Dewey thanked all who participated in the raingarden event, which was very successful. During April the Green Team is celebrating Earth Month and Arbor Day with a 'Trees of Distinction' contest, in which residents are invited to nominate their favorite tree. Nominated trees will be showcased on Berwyn Heights Day and online. The next Town cleanup is on April 20, 10:00 a.m. and students can earn community service hours.

Historical Committee: Clerk Harper reported that the Historical Committee co-sponsored the very successful Team Trivia Night, attended by some 60-70 people, and thanked Jodie Kulpa-Eddy for pulling the event together. For Berwyn Heights Day, the Committee will participate with a tent and exhibits focused on the Berwyn Heights Company, which was established 100 years ago.

Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness: No report.

Recreation Council: Angela Wolfinger, Boys & Girls Club, said an Easter Egg Hunt will take place on April 20 at the Community Center. CM Dewey added that Berwyn Heights Day is around the corner

and many volunteers are still needed to help with activities throughout the day. Members of any club, organization or church are welcome to march in the parade. Prizes will be awarded to organizations that have a float. All are invited to come out and join the festivities.

7. Unfinished Business

There was none.

8. New Business

Ordinance 177 – 1st Reading & Introduction of FY 2020 General Fund Budget: Clerk Harper read the adopting language. TM Broadbent said that the Ordinance sets forth the proposed General Fund revenues and expenditures, the real and personal property tax rates, and funds a variety of reserves. The accompanying staff report highlights important changes. CM Dewey moved and CM Sweep seconded to introduce Ordinance 177. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Ordinance 178 – 1st Reading & Introduction of FY 2020 Public Safety Taxing District Budget: Clerk Harper read the adopting language of the Ordinance. CM Sweep moved and CM Dewey seconded to introduce the Ordinance. The motion passed 4 to 0.

9. Citizen Comments

Jodie Kulpa-Eddy said she attended a meeting on the new zoning regulations Prince George's County adopted last year. The regulations are now in the process of being implemented, with zoning map amendments coming out in mid-May. The Council may want to keep an eye out for this because the maps will tell which zoning designation the properties north of Branchville Road will have Berwyn Heights annexed in 2005. She believes the properties, currently zoned as Mixed-Use Transit, will be grandfathered in. However, it is possible industrial uses will no longer be allowed, meaning the Town may lose an important source of revenue from these businesses. Municipalities that would like an update on the rezoning can request a presentation from M-NCPPC's Planning Department.

Phil Ventura suggested the Town may want to hold off on investing money into recycling program upgrades and wait to see how the market reacts to China's stricter standards for processing recyclables. It may be that the County will have to abandon single-stream recycling and permit only 'clean stream' recycling to be able to make money. Second, Mr. Ventura said the intersection in front of Town Hall still lacks a crosswalk. He suggested that painting the crosswalks would be a cheaper and probably more durable solution than thermoplastic strips.

CM Dewey replied she remains comfortable with implementing the recycling program changes. Based on a recent conversation she had with the manager of the recycling facility, the County is nowhere near ending single stream recycling. TM Broadbent added, as long as it is cheaper to recycle than to landfill these materials, it makes sense to recycle. She reminded residents that, come next Monday, the Town will no longer pick up recyclables that have plastic bags in the mix.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk