



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Minutes Town Meeting January 9, 2013

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Calvo, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Wilkinson, CMs Almoguera, Dennison, and Kulpa-Eddy. Also present were Chief of Police Antolik, Treasurer Lape, Clerk Harper and citizens. Town Administrator (TA) Murphy had an excused absence.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the December 12, 2012 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Wilkinson, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

2. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of December 2012.

3. Mayor's Report

Mayor Calvo reported on the state of the Town. He said, in his 9 years as Mayor of Berwyn Heights, he has learned that there are many things a small Town must deal with that are beyond its control. The role of municipal government is mostly to provide a measure of stability to be able to confront adversity. The housing market crash of 2008 resulted in a 27% decline of home values in Berwyn Heights, followed by a loss of Highway User Revenues (HUR) in 2009 that almost equaled the lost tax revenues. The Town was able to weather the economic downturn better than most jurisdictions, however, because it had not overextended itself during the boom years and stuck to fiscally conservative policies. It was able to fund vehicles, infrastructure and other capital improvements with money set aside in reserves and a healthy surplus. But in 2010, a 3-cent road tax was adopted to compensate for the loss of HUR so as to be able to meet future road repair needs.

Mayor Calvo had hoped that the 2009 adjustment in the housing market would complete the downturn. However, this year's reassessment brought another 17% loss in home values. On the other hand, commercial property tax revenues went up slightly, almost all of it due to a reassessment of the PG Scrap property. With this offset, the overall decline in real property tax receipts was only about 15%. However, there are also cost increases from salary adjustments and other inflationary adjustments. When taken together, it opens up an operating shortfall of approximately \$250,000.

Mayor Calvo proposed some guidelines for balancing the FY 2014 budget:

1. Taking a balanced approach, which includes
 - Making cuts in the payroll, preferably by eliminating vacant positions;
 - Increasing revenues from other sources, such as fees and fines;
 - Increasing revenues, including raising the real property tax rate; and
 - Using surplus
2. Making changes with a longer view in mind, at least until the next reassessment;
3. Refraining from instituting furloughs and salary freezes, which would lower employee salaries and morale;
4. Leaving in place programs supporting the community, largely funded through the Parks & Recreation budget.

Mayor Calvo said that he remains optimistic about Berwyn Heights' future despite the fiscal challenges. He sees young families moving into Town and buying up properties. They come here because there are good schools and recreational opportunities and a great sense of community. For that reason, he wants to continue to work on adding new sidewalks and other amenities and programs that make the Town an attractive place to live.

Mayor Calvo noted that TA Murphy has been absent since Christmas recovering from surgery. He will likely be out for a few more weeks but is working from home to keep things moving and help with budget preparations. CM Almoguera is looking into finding a budget assistant to help TA Murphy with the budget. The budget process remains open to the public and residents are encouraged to attend. The January 22 worksession will feature a discussion of budget goals, followed by department directors presenting their budget requests on February 4 and 19.

4. Department Reports

Administration: CM Almoguera said that she has contacted several professors and department chairs at the University of Maryland to help her identify students that would be suitable budget assistants and are interested in learning about municipal budgeting. She also welcomed any recommendations from residents.

Code Compliance: CM Kulpa-Eddy wished everyone a Happy New Year on behalf of the Code Compliance Department. If residents made a resolution to de-clutter their homes, a Portable On-Demand Storage unit, or PODS, is a convenient way to store and transfer such belongings. The containers can be delivered to one's property and loaded at leisure, then transferred to another location for unloading, indefinite storage or disposal. However, PODS require a permit from the Town. The fee is \$50 for 30 days, with a \$15 late fee if the unit is on the property before a permit is obtained, and a \$25, penalty fee, if the unit is placed in a street or Town right-of-way. Applications are available at the Town office or can be downloaded from <http://www.berwynheightscodecompliance.com>.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Dennison announced the winners of the holiday decorating contest. The winner of the best house was 8905 58th Avenue; best yard 8601 Osage Street; and best overall 8711 58th Avenue. CM Dennison also announced upcoming events and noted that the Berwyn Heights Education Advisory Committee (BHEAC) is continuing to look for a new chair.

Public Health and Safety: Chief Antolik gave a power point presentation on police activity for 2012 in comparison with prior years. He said that serious crimes (Part I offenses), which have to be reported to the FBI continues to go down, making Berwyn Heights one of the safest communities in Prince George's County. Part I offenses for December 2012 numbered 3, considerably below the 5-year average of 8.8. Total Part I offenses for 2012 numbered 61, also far below the 5 year average of 98, representing a decline of 38%. The decline from the 10-year average of 116 is still more pronounced at 47%. The most prevalent crime in Berwyn Heights is theft, in particular theft from cars. Here too, the decline has been substantial.

Chief Antolik attributed the drop in the crime rate mainly to officers being visible. They patrol the Town on a 24-hour basis, and maintain good relations with residents, who freely report suspicious activity. Officers will also stop suspicious persons at all hours of the day and night and talk to them about what they are doing and if they need help. This helps discourage potential crime.

Chief Antolik continued, in 2012, a total of 2392 speed camera citations were issued, with 1847 paid, and 545 outstanding. Forty-five are being reviewed in court. Mayor Calvo pointed out that this statistic shows that 3/4 of all speed camera tickets get paid, a better result than monthly tabulations would indicate. Chief Antolik further reported that revenues from speed camera citations came to \$91,700. When late payment, flagging and fees for returned checks are added, the total comes to almost \$107,000. Another \$46,900 remains to be collected.

Chief Antolik said that Berwyn Heights police also made 2 arrests of men who were responsible for several burglaries in Town. He commended Detective Unger and Officer Krouse for canvassing the neighborhood to track them down. Mayor Calvo congratulated Chief Antolik on a banner year.

CM Kulpa-Eddy reminded everyone that representatives from the Prince George's County Call Center, which is the dispatch for emergency and non-emergency calls, will attend the February Town meeting. Residents with concerns about the police dispatch system should plan to attend.

Public Works: MPT Wilkinson reported that he was at a public safety meeting at BHES prior to this meeting, which was attended by Berwyn Heights police, PTA officers and a number of parents. Principal Singer and Vice Principal Cropper reviewed the school's safety policies in light of the recent shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. He was impressed by the strict procedures in place for controlling access to the school with locked doors and admitting visitors during school hours. Dr. Singer emphasized, however, that BHES is a community school. The admission procedures are designed to ensure a safe learning environment without having a full-time armed guard on staff.

MPT Wilkinson also spoke with school staff about the *Safe Routes to School* grant, which will be submitted tomorrow. If awarded, this federal grant administered by the State Highway Administration (SHA) would fully fund 3 infrastructure projects making the approaches to BHES and Greenbelt Middle safer for students. It includes a raised crosswalk at Pontiac Street and 60th Avenue, a sidewalk on the 8700 block of 62nd Avenue leading to the back entrance of

BHES, and a sidewalk on the busy 8900 block of 63rd Avenue leading to the Greenbelt Road traffic light that students use to get to Greenbelt Middle School.

MPT Wilkinson further reported that Public Works continues to pick up leaves, which must now be bagged. Christmas trees are picked up on regular yard waste collection days. If there is a snow event, residents are reminded not to shovel snow into the street or onto sidewalks. So far, Public Works only had one winter storm to prepare for, which turned out to be rain. Residents were reminded that they can recycle their old electronics and block Styrofoam on January 26 at the Greenbelt Public Works yard between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m.

5. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: Reported under Department Reports.

Green Team: Mayor Calvo reported that the Green Team held its first organizational meeting in December. Future meetings will be announced in the Bulletin. Interested residents can meet some of the members at the upcoming Traveling Garden awards reception.

Historical Committee: Reported under Department Reports.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: CM Kulpa-Eddy reported that the NW/EP is working on its FY 2014 budget, which will be presented to the Council at the February 19 worksession. Also, in February, a CPR training class will be held in Bowie. Interested residents should attend the February 6 NW/EP meeting. At that meeting, next year's officers will be elected, and March 9-10, a CERT training workshop will be held at the Town Center.

Recreation Council: Reported under Department Reports.

6. Unfinished Business

There was none.

7. New Business

There was none.

8. Citizens Discussion

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, commended Berwyn Heights police for the excellent service. He feels that the police now work closely with the community to provide protection where needed. However, he is not happy about the new "Stop for Pedestrians in Crosswalk" signs that have been installed at several intersections. He believes that they are hazards for drivers and reduce their ability to maneuver. On the Indian Creek Bridge, he can no longer give pedestrians a wide berth because of the sign posted in the middle of road. At the Pontiac Street and Edmonston Road intersection, the signs do little to improve safety, and prevent drivers from passing a waiting car to make a right turn onto Kenilworth Avenue. He thinks fixing the sink hole on Pontiac Street at 63rd Avenue is a more urgent problem.

MPT Wilkinson said that WSSC has been slow to address the problem because they already made major repairs after the water main broke last year. Unfortunately, the repairs were inadequate. The Town is aware of the problem and is pushing for further repairs.

MPT Wilkinson continued that he believes the pedestrian signs have improved traffic flow at the intersection of Pontiac Street and Edmonston Road. Pedestrians now cross where they should, and he finds the intersection more orderly. Edmonston Road also has a new sign alerting drivers that cross traffic on Pontiac Street does not stop and has the right of way.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Signed: *Kentin Harper*, Town Clerk