



Town of Berwyn Heights

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

Worksession Minutes

July 15, 2019

7:00 pm

Present were Mayor Stephen Isler, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jason Papanikolas, Councilmembers (CMs) Amanda Dewey, Ethan Sweep, and Jeffrey Jay Osmond. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent, Clerk Kerstin Harper and citizens.

1. Announcements

Discussion of a variance for 5805 Berwyn Road was postponed because the owner is revising his application.

2. Discussion Items

Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force (WBBH): CM Dewey explained that the Council was approached by a resident last month who wanted to develop a plan to make Berwyn Heights more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. The impetus comes in part from the impending redevelopment of Beltway Plaza which is likely to bring changes to the adjacent neighborhoods. Five people have expressed an interest in participating in the project.

CM Dewey proposed to establish a task force based on the Quality of Life Commission model. The task force would comprise 10-12 residents to meet for a period of several months to study the issues and options before making recommendations to the Council. Task force meetings might proceed as follows:
Meeting 1: identification of issues related to the WBBH, requests for data, information and best practices.
Meeting 2: Presentation of research conducted by members and potentially outside experts; an opportunity for residents to offer comments, including written testimony.
Meeting 3: deliberation on the issues presented and development of recommendations.

CM Dewey said, as part of its charge, the task force should obtain a broad sampling of opinions that reflect the diversity of the community, to research existing transportation plans, and to involve all stakeholders in formulating a plan. The Council briefly discussed the parameters of the task force and agreed to formally establish it when a sufficient number of volunteers have signed up.

Resident survey: CM Dewey proposed to conduct a methodologically rigorous and representative survey of all residents by randomly sampling 100 households and ask a range of issues of interest to the Town. For example, currently the Council is interested in improving community outreach with respect to the 2020 Census and having information on how to best communicate with residents would help. The Council often hears from one group or several groups about a particular topic but can't be sure that their opinion is representative of the entire community.

A survey might probe opinions and preferences on topics such as:

- How residents prefer to get information from the Town;
- What activities and programs should be offered;
- Safety of walking and biking in Town;
- Schools and educational programs.

CM Dewey further proposed to offer incentives to the selected 100 households to improve response rates, either in the form of a \$5-\$10 reward for each participant or by entry into a raffle for a larger cash prize. The sample size of 100 households seems to her to be a good balance between a cost effective yet representative survey. She estimates the cost of the incentives to be around \$200 and the cost of mailing the survey around \$500. As a first step, the Council would draft a list of questions about topics in which it is interested, which could be supplemented by questions from department directors and Town organizations.

There ensued a discussion about survey methodology and how best to ensure that the survey is representative and valid. Citizens who were present asked a number of questions about sample size, survey questions, language barriers and alternative ways to conduct the survey.

CM Sweep said he supports doing a survey but would insist on a protocol that spells out how the survey is done and a time frame. The other Councilmembers agreed and proposed to start working out the procedural details and set a budget at the 2nd worksession in August. A set of questions would be compiled at a later worksession. TM Broadbent said the Council also needs to find a good data set from which to select respondents, which could be a list of taxpayers.

Dog park: CM Sweep explained that the Town reached out to Park & Planning (M-NCPPC) about constructing a dog park in Berwyn Heights. Park & Planning responded that it could probably build the dog park but that the Town would have to maintain it. Park & Planning also provided a packet of information that spells out what the agency would provide and what the Town would provide, as well as a sample agreement, dog park rules and provisions for establishing a volunteer group to manage the dog park. The M-NCPPC framework calls for the volunteer group to have at least 20 adult members, a written constitution and bylaws, a list of officers with contact information, meetings in public places and a certificate of insurance to be submitted annually.

CM Dewey said the structure of the volunteer group is probably flexible. She thinks the first question to be answered about a dog park should be ‘what needs to happen to make it safe.’ This would require there be enough volunteers to ensure proper oversight, including keeping track of those who are frequenting the park and enforcing the rules. A large share of the maintenance would likely be done by Town staff because the pool of Town volunteers is limited. TM Broadbent clarified that staff could help with maintenance but not with monitoring users.

Leslie Wolfinger, Ruatan Street, commented she thinks the proposed location of the dog park next to Indian Creek playground is problematic because children using the playground may want to play with the dogs which may or may not have their latest shots. It is asking a lot of volunteers to make sure a dog park is safe. Councilmembers replied a dog registration requirement could help ensure that dogs using the park are licensed and vaccinated. There ensued discussion of what it would take to run a safe and orderly park as well as the support a dog park has among the residents.

The Council agreed on the following next steps:

- A question about support for a dog park should be included in the opinion survey.
- Supporters of the dog park are encouraged to join the Facebook group 'Friends of the Dog Park.'
- Pet owners could be polled about the dog park at an October 5 Green Team event;
- An agreement with M-NCPPC clearly delineating responsibilities should be drafted;
- Dog park funding through Program Open Space should be explored.

Four Cities agenda items: Mayor Isler said a draft agenda is provided in the packet and asked if the Council has any additional items. He added a presentation by District 2 School Board Representative Joshua Thomas and gave an update on a recent meeting he had with Mr. Thomas. CM Osmond suggested adding a discussion of volunteerism and citizen engagement strategies. The Council discussed whether the Four Cities meeting is the right venue to discuss this topic as well as the format of Four Cities meetings generally. The volunteerism item was not added to the agenda.

Mid-month e-newsletter: Mayor Isler said the Council agreed to suspend publication of the e-newsletter during the summer months.

3. Minutes

CM Osmond moved and CM Dewey seconded to approve the June 17 worksession minutes. The motion passed 4-0-1, with CM Sweep abstaining. CM Osmond moved and CM Dewey seconded to approve the July 1 worksession minutes. The motion passed 4-0-1, with Mayor Isler abstaining.

4. Department Reports

Mayor Isler said he met with the Chief after returning from his vacation and has caught up on public safety news. MPT Papanikolas had no report. CM Sweep reported that the street sweeper will be in Town the week of July 29; residents are requested to park in their driveways where possible.

CM Dewey announced that the Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force needs 4-5 more members. All residents regardless of perspective are welcome to join. Residents are reminded they need to obtain a permit when placing storage containers (PODs) on a property. Town organizations must submit any reimbursement requests by the end of July to be reimbursed. The Town is now active on various social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. It is a great way for residents to be informed about all things Berwyn Heights.

TM Broadbent reported that she is working on legislation pertaining to an investment policy mandated by the State of Maryland, as well as several resolutions authorizing purchases of capital items approved in the FY 2020 budget. She plans to bring these before the Council at the next worksession.

6. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the Council calendar. No changes were made.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, requested a clarification on the origins of an Administration Department take-home car program, which heretofore was limited to police officers. He was informed that the Council approved a take-home vehicle for the Town Manager as part of her contract. This policy applies to all senior staff who are on call 24 hours, 7 days a week. The Council determined that a take-home vehicle would be less expensive than providing a travel allowance for TM Broadbent's commute.

CM Osmond said a more generous compensation packet for the Town Manager was instituted with the adoption of a Town Manager form of government, which he thinks provides better services for residents.

In this case, it enables the Town to employ a manager with 30 years of experience in local government who is available after hours.

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, commented that many things are being done now without the citizens being told and that Councilmembers seem to prefer to deal with a favorite group rather than the entire Town. Mayor Isler begged to differ. He said this Council has made a concerted effort to be transparent and will talk to anyone who reaches out to them. This has been confirmed by many residents who have said this Council is more open and transparent than previous Councils. This Council has also responded to residents' requests to provide more opportunities for comment at worksessions and at Town meetings. Legislation has been amended in response to citizen concerns, and citizens can request to be added to a worksession agenda for an in-depth discussion of a topic of concern.

7. Citizens Discussion

Phil Ventura said he hopes the Council understands that his questions were intended to learn how the Administration Department's vehicle is used because it was not publicly explained before. He also commented that the shrubbery at the Town Center parking lot entrance has needed pruning for a while.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk