



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Worksession Minutes March 21, 2016

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Chris Rasmussen, Councilmembers (CMs) Patricia Dennison, Maria Robles and Lynn White.

Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Clerk Kerstin Harper and Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) Representatives Lupi Grady, School Board Member, and Raymond Brown, Chief Financial Officer.

1. Mayor

Announcements: Supplemental registration of voters in the upcoming Town election will continue through March.

Calendar: No changes were made.

Minutes: On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Robles, the March 7 worksession minutes were approved 5 to 0.

School Board Member Visit: Mayor Kulpa-Eddy welcomed Lupi Grady, School Board Representative for District 2 and Raymond Brown, PGCPS Chief Financial Officer. Ms. Grady said that she and Mr. Brown will speak mainly about the proposed FY 2017 PGCPS budget and capital improvements pertaining to Berwyn Heights Elementary School, topics in which the Council had expressed interest.

Mr. Brown gave a high-level overview of the proposed FY 2017 PGCPS budget. The school system's budget is formulated in the context of a strategic plan that covers 2016-2020 and is focused on "outstanding academic achievement for all students." To fulfill the promise of the strategic plan, the Board of Education requested \$2,023,795,000 for FY 2017, a 9% increase over FY 2016. The County Executive's proposed FY 2017 budget reduced the funding increase to \$84.8 million or 4.6% for a total PGCPS budget of \$1.926 billion. The largest share of funding, 56.7% comes from the State based on a per pupil funding formula, 36.4% comes from County tax revenues, and 4.8% comes from federal sources.

The main cost driver in the PGCPS budget is the mandatory cost of doing business, topped by \$80.7 million for staff salaries, pensions and health insurance, technology infrastructure and transportation. Also mandated is charter school funding at the level of \$6.6 million, and \$12.5 million for the continuation of programs initiated in the FY 2016 budget. The total mandatory costs are estimated to be \$99.8 million, which is \$15 million over projected PGCPS revenues. This funding gap will entail difficult decisions about what should be cut.

Ms. Grady elaborated that the strategic plan implemented after she was elected in November 2014, focuses on improving academic literacy, teacher recruitment and retention - one of her priorities - family engagement, organizational effectiveness, and modernization of facilities and technology. The implementation of these priorities depends on funding levels and is difficult to accomplish in a large school system with diverse interests. It is important that the Town Council and residents communicate to her what are their principal educational concerns.

In response to Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, Ms. Grady and Mr. Brown replied that many of the schools in northern Prince George's County are over capacity. The PGCPS capital improvement plan proposes to open 1 new elementary school, 2 new middle schools, and 2 new high schools to address the overcrowding in this area. The final location for these schools has not yet been decided, but there are 16 sites that are being studied. She is not sure which particular capital projects are planned for BHES but she will look them up and inform TA Cowles. An audit of the County budget that was promised last year has just begun and will not be completed before August this year.

In discussions the following questions and concerns were raised:

- How does PGCPS support the expansion of popular charter schools;
- Too large a percentage of the proposed PGCPS budget increase is programmed for personnel costs;
- Main concerns of the re-constituted Berwyn Heights Education Advisory Committee (BH EAC) are inadequate classrooms at BHES, and quality of school lunches;
- Students from the new Greenbelt Metro Station slated to go to Berwyn Heights are likely to overcrowd BHES;
- What amount of casino revenue is allocated toward school improvements;
- Best way to improve student achievement is to treat teachers well and make sure that they remain in this County;
- Prince George's County and State of Maryland taxes are already too high and should not be raised to construct more schools;
- Capacity issues should be addressed by attracting students to under-utilized schools, by incentivizing home-schooling, providing vouchers for private schools, and subsidizing charter school entrepreneurs;
- What processes does PGCPS follow to correct problems with school-level leadership and culture to ensure the academic success of students.

Ms. Grady and Mr. Brown responded to the comments. They said that charter schools wanting to expand may use a small portion of charter schools funds for construction, but must seek most of the funding from external sources. Regardless of Prince George's County budget shortfalls, the Board of Education will continue to advocate for what it believes are necessary investments, with the understanding that not all of their requests will be funded.

Attracting students to underutilized schools is no easy task and may require changing the culture that prevails at some schools. Parent engagement is pivotal in identifying additional academic resources and building support systems at individual schools. A new "Parent University" program has been set up to train parents to become more engaged in the education of their children and support the teaching communities at Title 1 schools. These are schools with a high percentage of poor children that receive federal funding. PGCPS has a process of moving a complaint about a particular principal or teacher up the chain of command, but also relies on school board members to rectify school-specific leadership issues.

In conclusion, Ms. Grady promised to follow up on the questions asked tonight and invited councilmembers to attend school board and County Council hearings to make their voices heard.

Department reports: MPT Rasmussen reported that the condemned 58th Avenue property was razed. The owner paid for the cost of the demolition and will rebuild. CM Robles reported that the Cunningham Drive property will be demolished very soon. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said that Officer Krouse and Hollowell were commended for the work they did in working with residents.

Citizen comments: Mayor Kulpa-Eddy had a comment about trash cans and a vehicle that has been parked in the street for more than 72 hours.

BHES funding request: TA Cowles explained that BHES submitted a request to help fund either of two science enrichment activities: hosting the Maryland Zoo or the Maryland Science Center. The fee for a visit at the school is between \$1,200 and \$1,500, depending on the type and length of the program offered. In years past, the Town Council has made donations to support educational programs from the *public relations* line item in the Mayor & Council budget, which is funded at the level of \$4,500.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made: The Council needs to develop a policy for responding to these types of funding requests and clarify which organizations and programs might be eligible, what type information should be included in funding requests, and how much money should be committed. The amount of money that would be spent on the proposed BHES event is within the realm of what has been spent before. CM Robles moved, and CM Dennison seconded to authorize spending up to \$1,500 for one of the proposed events. The motion passed 4 to 1. MPT Rasmussen voted against the motion because of the lack of a policy framework.

2. Administration

Candidates Night moderator: TA Cowles said that two of the candidates the Council considered for moderator, James Wilkinson and Eric Olson, are available on the date set for Candidates Night. She also reached out to the chair of the UMD political science department for a recommendation, but has not received a reply. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said she would prefer Eric Olson because he has no attachments to the Town government and therefore no perceived biases towards any of the candidates. CM Robles moved and MPT Rasmussen seconded to select Eric Olson. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Citizen of the year nominations: The Council was asked to start thinking about candidates for citizen of the year, who would be honored on Berwyn Heights Day. A selection will be made in executive session at the next worksession.

Nothing was discussed under **3. Code Compliance, 5. Parks and Recreation, and 5. Public Safety.**

6. Public Works

Permanent director recruitment: Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said that interim Public Works Director Kenneth Hall has made known his desire to retire this summer. TA Cowles said she has started to revise the job description for the Public Works director, which she will present at the next worksession for the Council's approval. She will then advertise the vacancy for a month. She has already put out the word to municipal and county agencies that Berwyn Heights will be hiring a permanent director soon. From May 15 to May 31, she will screen applicants to produce a shortlist of 2 to 3 candidates, from which the Council would make a selection at a June 6 executive session. Then a job offer will be extended and details finalized,

and with Director Hall's help the new director will be brought on-board and trained in early July.

In response to questions, TA Cowles said she does not anticipate the need for additional funding for the recruitment process and believes that there is a good supply of possible candidates working in neighboring municipalities and county agencies. The proposed FY 2017 budget includes sufficient funding for the position based on the prevailing range of public works director salaries in this area.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk