



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Minutes Town Meeting January 8, 2014

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

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 1. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the December 11 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by MPT Wilkinson and second by CM Kulpa-Eddy, the December 11 Town meeting minutes were approved 4 to 0.

### 2. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of December. MPT Wilkinson noted that year-to-date revenues are substantially below last year's. Treasurer Lape said that this likely is a mistake where a "0" was accidentally omitted from the figure. She will check and make a correction to the report.

### 3. Mayor's Report

Mayor Calvo reported on the state of the Town. He said that the Town came out of its first year of the triennial reassessment in good financial shape. While residents saw a reduction in real property taxes due to the lower real estate values, the Town had to cope with a decline of around \$300,000 in property tax revenues. Unlike most neighboring municipalities, Berwyn Heights did not raise its tax rate, but chose to cut spending, while protecting its priorities, and draw from the surplus. The Town was able to do this because 1) income tax receipts continued to go up and made up part of the shortfall; and 2) the Town did not overspend during the good times of rising revenue but managed its finances responsibly.

Mayor Calvo said he has high hopes that the Town will weather the years to the next reassessment. He now wants to focus on how to make property values go back up, and what the Town can do to make Berwyn Heights a more attractive place to live. He thinks that there are four important ways to go about it.

1. Continue to provide the core services of police protection, trash pickup, code enforcement and friendly customer service at the Town office in a financially responsible way;
2. Continue to improve quality of life in Berwyn Heights by upgrading parks, adding sidewalks, promoting economic development, and supporting the initiatives of the Green Team as well as the activities of other community organizations;
3. Restructuring Town government to give more operational control to a new Town administrator, as TA Murphy is getting ready to retire and new leadership is taking the reins in the other departments. He believes that it is time to phase out the old commissioner style of government, which relies extensively on informal cooperation, and does not work so well anymore; and
4. Planning for a wholesale renovation of Town streets, many of which are in bad shape despite the crack-sealing and patching by the Public Works Department. The Town's 3 cent road tax and the reduced Highway User Revenues from the State of Maryland are not sufficient to maintain the infrastructure at an acceptable level. In addition, the Town's facilities need upgrades beyond the improvements made over the last couple of years. The Town may also want to consider building a permanent police station instead of renting space that gets more expensive every year. This Council may give consideration to putting together a capital improvement plan that funds these long term infrastructure needs.

He is hopeful this can be accomplished. This Council has been the most productive of the Councils he has served with, with each councilmember making important contributions.

#### **4. Department Reports**

**Administration:** CM Almoguera reported that the FY 2013 audit is complete and has been published. In the new "Geraldine Love" meeting room the heating ducts have been installed but additional work is needed to install a cold air return duct.

**Code Compliance:** CM Kulpa-Eddy reported on the state of the Code Compliance Department. The last year saw both plusses and minuses involving personnel, vehicles and an ordinance. The department lost its long-time director, when Sonjia Solomon resigned in September. Two part-time code officers, Charles Hall and Kyle Snyder, and a part-time code clerk, Zelda Bell are working hard to keep the department running, with TA Murphy acting as a temporary director. Residents are requested to be patient if inquiries are not answered right away, as the code office is not staffed on an ongoing basis.

On the plus side, the Code Department has one brand-new code vehicle and one new, used vehicle, obtained from the Police Department's stock of decommissioned police cars. Another accomplishment is the revision of Ordinance 118 - Roads and Public Right-of-Ways to establish standards and a permit requirement for any work done on Town property. Residents need to make sure that any work done on their property does not result in muddy streets or sidewalks, and that shrubs and trees are trimmed so as not to interfere with traffic signs, fire hydrants or utility meters.

In the new year, CM Kulpa-Eddy is looking forward to re-staffing the department and hiring a new code director. The Council may also want to revisit Ordinance 120 - Rental Housing and

review the working relationship with the County. But with elections coming up in May, these will be decisions for the new Council.

***Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:*** Mayor Calvo said that the winners of the holiday decorating contest will be announced when CM Dennison returns.

***Public Health and Safety:*** Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for December. There were 5 Part I offenses, better than the 5-year average of 8. The 2013 total was 63, as opposed to the 5-year average of 90. The police also issued 30 State and 55 Town citations, as well as a total of 381 speed camera citations. Chief Antolik further noted that there has been a steady and significant decline in serious crimes over the last 10 years. Total Part I offenses came to 1067, with a yearly average of 106, whereas this year's total is only 63. There also was a shift in the balance of crimes, with violent crimes down compared to property crimes. Chief Antolik attributed these outcomes to proactive policing and community partnerships, such as the cooperation with the Neighborhood Watch and private residents.

In response to Mayor Calvo's question about the level of engagement of new residents, Chief Antolik replied that the police, including himself, will often introduce themselves when they see new people move into Town. They will briefly explain how to avoid getting ticketed and let them know where the Town offices and police department are located and some of the services provided. Usually, the reaction is one of surprise. There has been a significant increase in requests for house checks over previous years, especially over the holidays. The demand for BH vehicle stickers is also up, as the Police continue to advertise them.

***Public Works:*** MPT Wilkinson reported that he attended a meeting of Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) at Parkdale High School last night. Officers of the Capital Programs Office were present and informed him that engineering specifications for the sidewalks through the Greenbelt bus depot have been completed and sent to bid. He is hopeful that the sidewalks will be built this year and provide a safe route to school for Greenbelt Middle School students.

In Public Works news, the crew plowed and salted the streets during recent snow events. The roads were still slippery in the morning because the salt the Town gets from SHA is environmentally-friendly and works better during mild frosts. In addition to snow removal, the crew collected trash and removed a downed tree on Quebec Place, getting help from the Police and Code in blocking off the street. Loose leaf collection concluded and all yard waste must now be bagged in brown paper bags or a designated yard waste container.

In the coming year, the focus will be on obtaining more training for Public Works employees to comply with the latest safety procedures. The Department also joined the State Recycling Network, which will give it access to discounted recycling equipment and to educational resources. Residents were reminded to break down big boxes if they put them out for recycling, and to take care not to drive over any trash can lids that may have been blown into the street on windy days.

CM Almoguera left early for family reasons.

## **5. Committee Reports**

**Green Team:** Mayor Calvo said in December the Green Team was able to spread the mulch in the future community garden, despite being delayed by bad weather.

**Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:** CM Kulpa-Eddy reported that the NW/EP held its first meeting of the new year in the recently remodeled meeting room. The room was nice but very cold. The committee worked on its FY 2015 budget and discussed holding a fund-raising event in April. The next meeting is on February 5.

**6. Unfinished Business**

There was none.

**7. New Business**

There was none.

**8. Citizens Discussion**

There was none.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*