



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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**MAYOR**  
Amanda M. Dewey

**COUNCIL MEMBERS**  
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)  
Christopher S. Brittan Powell  
Jason W. Papanikolas  
Ethan D. Sweep

## Town Meeting Minutes May 14, 2021 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone, Zoom, and email.

### Call to Order 7:00 p.m.

Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Chris Brittan-Powell, Jason Papanikolas and Ethan Sweep. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Laura Allen, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Ethics Commission Appointees Diane Beckam, Taylor Hahn and Alex Lopatka, Historical Committee Chair Debby Steele-Snyder and Recreation Council President Susan Jones.

### Pledge of Allegiance

#### 1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey announced that the Greenbelt Metro vaccination site no longer administers 1<sup>st</sup> shots but continues to give 2<sup>nd</sup> shots for those who have received their 1<sup>st</sup> shot, as well as the Johnson & Johnson single shot vaccine. A vaccine-a-thon is scheduled for the coming weekend at the Sports & Learning Complex.

#### 2. Approval of the Agenda

CM Sweep moved, and MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved 5 to 0.

#### 3. Ceremonial Items

**Howard Johnson 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Proclamation:** Mayor Dewey said that the Town is very pleased to celebrate Howard Johnson's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, which was May 9th. She played a video produced by the Historical Committee of Mr. Johnson playing the harmonica and then read a proclamation honoring his milestone birthday.

**Ethics Commission Appointment:** Mayor Dewey asked the Ethics Commission appointees to introduce themselves.

Diane Beckam said she and her husband have resided in Berwyn Heights around 40 years and raised their children here. She returned to work when the children were grown. Having now retired she hopes to get back to volunteering for the Town.

Taylor Hahn said he and his partner moved to Berwyn Heights two years ago and have quickly fallen in love with the community. He is interested in getting more involved and the Ethics Commission seemed to be good opportunity to do so.

Alex Lopatka said he and his partner have lived in Berwyn Heights since 2016. As dog owners they regularly crisscross the Town on foot, which led him to get involved with the Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights (WBBH) Task Force. He enjoyed participating in the committee and was looking for another opportunity to contribute. The Ethics Commission seemed to fit the bill.

Mayor Dewey swore in the Ethics Commission members. She advised that the Town will be in touch about setting up an informational meeting. CM Sweep thanked the appointees for volunteering.

#### **4. Public Hearings**

***FY 2022 General Fund Budget & Tax Rate:*** Mayor Dewey said tonight the Council is holding the second portion of the public hearings on the FY 2022 General Fund and Public Safety Taxing District (PSTD) budgets. The hearings were kept open from budget introduction at the April Town meeting and residents are invited to offer further comments. Without any comments, CM Sweep moved and CM Papanikolas seconded to close the hearing.

***FY 2022 Public Safety Taxing District Budget & Tax Rate:*** Mayor Dewey said this budget funds one Berwyn Heights police officer and his vehicle to enhance public safety in the Town's commercial district. Residents were invited to offer comments.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted that the staff report on the PSTD budget adoption mistakenly references the reopening of the public hearing.

Mike Attick, 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, commented via telephone. He said he believes no one has commented so far because this budget was not discussed in as much detail as budgets in previous years. Further, the special tax rate for the commercial district should have been raised because the district takes up a large amount of the police officers' time.

CM Papanikolas moved and CM Sweep seconded to close the hearing. The motion passed 5 to 0.

#### **5. Consent Agenda**

CM Sweep moved and MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded to approve the consent agenda. MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted an incorrect date in the title of the April 14 Town meeting minutes. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Sweep seconded to adopt the consent agenda as amended. The motion passed 5 to 0.

#### **6. Mayor's Report**

Mayor Dewey reported that the MML Legislative Committee on which she served this year held its wrap-up meeting last week. On April 22, the Council attended a Four Cities meeting, at which the Greenbelt Road Task Force gave a presentation. This Monday, the Council received the long-awaited guidance document on how American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds may be spent. The Council has two years to spend the money and will take its time to make a careful decision.

On May 4, she, MPT Kulpa-Eddy and senior Town staff met with representatives of the Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) to discuss the budget and Town matters in general. Also on May 4, the mayors of Prince George's County and Montgomery County held a joint meeting to discuss inter-jurisdictional concerns, in particular transit related issues, such as the Maglev project, Beltway

widening and Purple Line. She and TM Allen attended an energy efficiency meeting with Pepco. Pepco agreed to share the recording with all attendees. TM Allen will have the recording posted to the website so it can be shared with Town residents and businesses.

Mayor Dewey continued that tomorrow, the Paint Branch Golf Course will hold a community outreach meeting to re-envision the future of the golf course. Stormwater management will be an important aspect of the discussion. She thanked TM Allen and Chief Antolik for preparing the Town for reopening, which will follow Prince George's County guidelines. Lastly, she noted that no Town residents signed up for shuttle rides to the Greenbelt Metro Station vaccine site which may mean that most residents already made provisions. Vaccinations are now taking place at various County facilities and commercial pharmacies. Free rides are available to vaccine clinics on The Bus, Lyft and Uber.

## **7. Councilmember Reports**

MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted she was impressed with the presentations Chief Antolik, Code Director Goodwin and TM Allen gave at the CDMA meeting. She was gratified to learn about the many ways in which the Town tries to support its businesses community. She said she also attended the Pepco energy efficiency seminar, which provided useful information about residential energy programs, such as free home energy checkups and free recycling of old appliances. Useful information for commercial customers was also provided.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said the Prince George's County cultural arts study has been extended to June 25 in the hope that more people will provide feedback. On May 18, Delegate Washington will host a virtual discussion on state of our schools, including summer schools, virtual learning, direct tutoring and use of Federal funds for County schools. PGCPs CEO Dr. Monica Goldson will be in attendance.

CM Papanikolas reported that the Administration Department is working diligently on reopening plans so that it can be done safely and efficiently. The first set of bills have been paid through the online bill pay system which works great. He can review, comment, and approve all bills online, which greatly streamlines the process. Vaccination of 12- to 15-year-olds is available at the Beltsville Senior Center.

In response to MPT Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Dewey and TM Allen said in planning for the reopening of Senior Center, the Town is waiting for guidance and procedures from Prince George's County. TM Allen met with a group of Seniors last week and informed them of some improvements that are being made to the Senior Center. Hand sanitizing stations and a mounted thermometer have been installed. Chairs and lounge furniture will be replaced due to mold issues.

CM Brittan Powell reported that the Code Department has worked on a number of residential issues and is currently focused on the issue of car repair shops being run out of a home. The City of Greenbelt will not hold its regular Memorial Day parade.

CM Sweep reported that the refuse schedule will be adjusted for the week following Memorial Day. He is happy to hear that stormwater management and climate change projects will be eligible for ARPA funds. Residents are encouraged to share ideas on possible projects. Lastly, residents are requested to walk their dog on the leash. Drivers have difficulty safely driving around dogs that are running free.

## 8. Committee Reports

**Education Advisory Committee:** MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that the BHEAC finalized the education grant application process, which is on the agenda for approval later tonight. The BHEAC is also sponsoring 3 students for an educational summer camp at the Community Center from June 28-July 30.

**Green Team:** Mayor Dewey reported that several Green Team members have attended Sustainable Maryland webinars to learn about new actions members' cities can complete for recertification. Members have also submitted comments on State environmental legislation and the Pepco filing. The Green Team participated in the Berwyn Heights Day parade and is discussing strengthening its litter adopt-a-block program by purchasing signage to indicate adopted areas. Also discussed were the Bee City USA program and the Thriving Earth Exchange initiative.

CM Brittan Powell said that residents have suggested the Green Team think about the need for bushes and thickets as bird habitat in addition to the tree canopy. Mayor Dewey replied she will pass it along and noted that the Green Team has a member interested in conducting naturalist walks and may be offering one in the near future.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that applications for the Maryland Sustainable Growth Award will be open until July 23. The grant is open to individuals, businesses, organizations, and local governments.

**Historical Committee:** BHHC Chair Debby Steele Snyder reported that the Historical Committee will next meet on May 26. The BHHC website features a new post "To be Known as Berwyn" about the naming of Berwyn Heights. The first 2 quiz questions about Berwyn Heights history have been published in the May Bulletin with answers to be given in the next issue. This year's magnet featuring a drawing of the historic Traver-Williams House by the current owner and former BHHC member M. David Williams is on order, and the touch screen computer in the History Museum has been upgraded with a keyboard. The BHHC continues to gather oral histories, from which the Howard Johnson clip has been produced.

**Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness:** NW/EP Co-chair Randy Fortwengler was present but had no report because he was unable to attend the last NW/EP meeting. Mayor Dewey reported that the Committee discussed its mission, how to engage residents, and the Police monthly reports. A topic discussed at length were cars with loud mufflers and speeding. MPT Kulpa-Eddy added that the Committee also discussed the police non-emergency phone number, which is increasingly difficult to reach. It was suggested to invite someone from the County's dispatch service to give an update.

Mr. Fortwengler commented on the elevator inspection process and the need to have the Town Center elevator inspected. As a third-party elevator inspector for the State of Maryland, he attended a recent meeting at which he learned that local governments have 30 days after the lifting of the State of Emergency on June 1 to become compliant. The certificate for Berwyn Heights' facility is listed as expired. Steep fines will be assessed for elevators found to be out of compliance.

TM Allen said that the Town Center elevator was inspected recently but the process is not complete because the County inspection could not be scheduled yet. The reopening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor may be delayed if the County cannot sign off on the inspections.

Mike Attick, 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, commented that he would like to restart CERT training after the reopening, but he believes CERT was suspended with the adoption of the new Town organizations policy and

subordination of NW/EP to the Police. He was told that CERT could not meet because it was not covered by the Town's insurance program. Mayor Dewey said she thinks CERT activities could be resumed under the new structure if members want to do it. She suggested a meeting of NW/EP with the Police to talk through the issues.

**Recreation Council:** Recreation Council President Susan Jones reported that the Berwyn Heights Day parade worked out well and she hopes many residents got to watch it. The scavenger hunt published in the Bulletin was conceived as a fun way to learn more about the Town, but no responses were turned in. Most of the Berwyn Heights Day T-shirts have been sold, but there are a few spares still available. Ms. Jones then announced the winners of the house decorating contest: 8422 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue – most creative, 8508 Cunningham – most festive; 5802 Swarthmore and 5804 Ruatan – most unique.

Ms. Jones further announced that the Town-wide Yard Sale will be held this year on June 19. Residents can register their yard sale to be placed on a list by sending her their address and contact information. Yard sellers will be asked to comply with any Covid guidelines in effect and hold the Town harmless. She is hoping that the summer concerts at Lake Artemesia can resume and is monitoring M-NCPPC's announcements.

## 9. Old Business

**Ordinance 183 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading & Adoption of FY 2022 General Fund Budget:** Mayor Dewey said this is a largely status quo budget that leaves the real property tax rate unchanged at 54.4 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation. One notable feature is inclusion of funding for large purchases and projects that were put on hold in FY 2021 because of the uncertain economic impact of the pandemic.

TM Allen added that the Council engaged the community through surveys and a Budget Town Hall to identify the following funding priorities: 1) condition of streets and sidewalks; 2) recreation and parks; 3) sustainability; and 4) effective communication. The FY 2022 budget is balanced at a little above \$4 million, or 3% more than the FY 2021 budget. This is mainly due to a \$205,000 bond bill obtained from the State to finance improvements to the Town Center. Although tax rates were kept the same, additional revenue of \$100,200 will be generated due to increasing real property values.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy commented that she remains concerned that residents' property tax bills will go up by approximately \$150 because of rising assessments. Surprisingly, she has not received any comments about this and assumes residents are fine with the Town using the additional revenues to improve services. She thanked TM Allen for publicizing programs that help eligible homeowners pay their tax bills.

CM Papanikolas said he believes the lack of comments today may be related to the open budget process that has solicited public feedback throughout on where tax dollars should be spent. CM Brittan Powell extended his thanks to all staff that have contributed to the budget process. Mayor Dewey said she too appreciated this year's process. It ties budget priorities into the budget and appears to have given residents satisfaction that their ideas were heard.

Clerk Harper read a summary of the Ordinance. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to adopt it. CM Sweep seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

**Ordinance 184 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading & Adoption of FY 2022 Public Safety Taxing District Budget:** Mayor Dewey said this is another status quo budget with an unchanged tax rate and a slight increase in revenue due to increased assessments. TM Allen added that the Town had a meeting with the

Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) to present the budget and give an overview of Town services. The CDMA approved the PSTD Budget at that meeting.

Clerk Harper read a summary of the Ordinance. CM Papanikolas moved and CM Sweep seconded to introduce the PSTD budget. The motion passed 5 to 0.

#### **10. New Business**

##### ***Ordinance 181-C – 1<sup>st</sup> Reading & Introduction of FY 2021 Budget Amendment re: CARES Act:***

Mayor Dewey said this Ordinance amends the FY 2021 budget to account for \$183,000 in funding the Town received from Prince George's County through the CARES Act. TM Allen said that whenever the Town receives or spends funds not approved as part of the budget, an amendment is needed to adjust the budget. The CARES Act reimbursed the Town for Police overtime and other expenses related to the pandemic in 2020.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Sweep seconded to introduce the budget amendment. The motion passed 5 to 0.

***Maglev Comment Letter:*** MPT Kulpa-Eddy explained the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Federal Railroad Administration earlier this year released an Environmental Impact Statement for a Superconducting Magnetic Levitation (SMAGLEV) train that would operate between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Comments are due by May 24. A trainset maintenance facility proposed to be built on Beltsville Agricultural Research Center land is most likely to impact Berwyn Heights, as the addition of 180 acres of impervious surface from this facility would affect streams that feed into Indian Creek. The letter also expresses concern about the effect of MAGLEV tunnels on neighboring Prince George's communities and the Green Team's stated preference for the use of existing railroad infrastructure. Only minor stylistic changes were made since the Council last reviewed the letter, and she hope it will be approved tonight.

Mayor Dewey said she agrees that preference should be given to improving existing railroad infrastructure that meets a broader demand for mass transit. CM Papanikolas asked about a survey that found 70% of Prince Georgians favor the project, which was sold as a highspeed train connecting D.C. to New York. Mayor Dewey said she could not confirm who performed the survey or the methodology employed. With no further comments, MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved and CM Papanikolas seconded to approve the comment letter. The motion passed 5 to 0.

***Education Grant Process:*** Mayor Dewey explained that the Council asked the Education Advisory Committee to devise a process that would allow a more rational distribution of Town education grants. The BHEAC drafted a process which was discussed at previous Council meetings. Heretofore education dollars were primarily awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. The new process would enable a more targeted award of these funds. CM Papanikolas added that when he was PTA president, he wished that there was a process that would make it easier to access the money. He thanked the BHEAC for coming up with the process.

On a motion by CM Papanikolas and second by CM Sweep, the grant process was approved 5 to 0.

#### **11. Resident and Community Comments**

There were none.

On a motion by CM Sweep and second by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, the meeting was adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk