



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Jodie Kulpa-Eddy

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Christopher Brittan-Powell (Mayor Pro Tem)
Shinita Hemby
Faustino Menjivar
Jason W. Papanikolas

Work Session Agenda December 18, 2023 | 7:00 p.m. Council Chambers

Call to Order

Mayor Jodie Kulpa-Eddy called the meeting to order at 7:19PM. Present were Mayor Pro Tem Chris Brittan-Powell, Councilmember Shinita Hemby, and Councilmember Faustino Menjivar. Also present were Town Manager Kyle Snyder, Town Clerk Melanie Friesen and residents of the Town of Berwyn Heights. Students from the University of Maryland joined for their presentation.

Approval of the Agenda

MPT Brittan-Powell moved to approve the agenda. CM Menjivar seconded. With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously (4:0).

1. Mayor

a. Announcements

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that CM Papanikolas had an excused absence for the worksession, although he was present for the closed meeting. She reported on the closed meeting that happened immediately prior to the meeting, from 6:38PM to 7:09PM in Council Chambers. The purpose was to consider the acquisition of real property. Those in favor of entering closed session were Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, CM Papanikolas, and CM Menjivar with MPT Brittan-Powell abstaining. CM Hemby arrived at 6:48PM and affirmed her vote for the closed session. Also present in the closed meeting was TM Snyder and Town Attorney Suellen Ferguson. The meeting discussed the feasibility of acquiring a commercial property to host public activities as well as the Police Department and other Town services. Council voted 4:1 to direct TM Snyder to obtain an appraisal of a property.

b. Calendar

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that the first worksession of 2024 is on a Tuesday and to look for schedule updates on yard waste pickup.

c. Presentation from UMD Stormwater Students

UMD Students John Luke Iglesias, Aelina Pogolian, Saloni Gupta, and Jasmi Kevadia reviewed the project which resulted in a brochure, available in both English and Spanish, highlighting the stormwater drainage infrastructure in Town while also covering ways to reduce stormwater runoff. The brochure contains QR codes to connect to the County Raincheck Rebate program and to request services for the storm drains. Each of the students reviewed the case studies which informed their recommendations within the brochure.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy thanked the students for all their work and asked for an editable

version of the brochure, so minor changes might be made, as well as to include credit for the students' efforts. MPT Brittan-Powell asked the students if they were surprised by how well low impact interventions can work. Ms. Gupta replied that it was interesting to note how much impact private rain gardens can have and noted their reasonable cost. CM Hemby expressed that the map is informative but wished that it were easier to read. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that the electronic version, available online as a supporting document to this agenda item is quite clear. MPT Brittan-Powell noted how well the green interventions on his property worked during the heavy rains over the past weekend.

d. M-NCPPC WBBH PAMC Action Plan Discussion

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that the action plan is still not to be made public at this point because it does not yet comply with the County publication standards, but that the County is looking for feedback by January 5th. She asked that everyone make sure to take time to look at the draft action plan and be ready with specific feedback to discuss during the January 2nd worksession.

e. Architecture/Placemaking Proposal Reviews

TM Snyder reviewed that the Town had an excellent response from the RFP. Staff will be evaluating these and bring the top three candidates to Council for their review. He did affirm that Council will have all responses to review, not just the three staff choices. He recommended Council allow time for each recommended candidate to give a presentation to Council, as this will be a public-facing role and how the contractor interacts with residents will be important. Council offered their feedback on criteria staff should consider when deciding which candidates will be chosen to present to the Council. CM Hemby thanked TM Snyder for making this a smooth process.

f. Resident Comments

Resident Paul Kavanaugh thanked TM Snyder and MPT Brittan-Powell for their assistance with a neighbor applying for grants to pay PEPCO bills. He also expressed concerns about the deaths of students walking to elementary school in Riverdale and would like to have had a public response from the Town. He commented on the importance of the Shade Tree Board. He also shared his concerns about the risks of the walkability and drivability of the Edmonston/Pontiac intersection which can be chaotic at times.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy responded that grant assistance is available through the ARPA residential relief program. She referred Mr. Kavanaugh to the December 4th Worksession during which Council had a productive discussion about the Town's ongoing efforts to maintain and improve school pedestrian safety in light of what happened in Riverdale. At MPT Brittan-Powell's request, she also spoke briefly about the Emergency Assistance Fund available to residents experiencing a natural or man-made disaster.

2. Public Works

CM Menjivar reminded residents that the last day for vacuum leaf collection will be January 5th. He shared compliments to the Department of Public Works on keeping the Town clean. He encouraged residents to check the calendar in the Bulletin for the pick-up schedule through the holidays. MPT Brittan-Powell added compliments to Public Works for delivering sandbags to

high risk areas during the storm over the weekend.

3. Administration

MPT Brittan-Powell expressed gratitude to all who have given support to his family in recent days. He requested that residents consider making a New Years Resolution to be more civically engaged and involved and consider running for Council or volunteering as an election judge. He shared his experience with an interfaith event. He recounted that many residents have shared their frustration with the Council with him. He thanked temporary staff who filled in at Town Hall and welcomed new office coordinator Janèe Williams who started today. He noted staff is working on catching up on the Town audits. He reiterated that ARPA assistance is still available. He asked for residents to keep nudging the Council and highlighted a desire to continue to work toward empowerment and inclusion of minority groups in Town.

a. Election Calendar Review

TC Friesen reviewed the calendar noting that most of the dates are determined by the ordinance. There was brief discussion regarding a date that is defined as “30 days before the election” which falls on a weekend; the County recommends making the deadline the day following the weekend. The calendar will also include the updated swearing-in date for the new Council.

b. Leadership Compliance with Berwyn Heights’ Town Charter and the Open Meetings Act- in Spirit and Specifics

MPT Brittan-Powell shared there was a closed meeting held several months ago that he found problematic. He highlighted that his concern is that as much Town business that can be conducted in open meetings should be done so. He expressed that it is not that his concern is not about what is being decided, but rather with how issues are decided and that he does not want even the perception of something being done in secret. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy responded that the Open Meetings Compliance Board found no issues with the purpose for the closed meeting, or the way it was conducted, only with how the meeting had been noticed, which is an issue that has been corrected. She noted that Council briefly discussed holding a closed session for reviewing placemaking contractors earlier this evening, but determined that an open session for this task was in line with the way these decisions have been made in the past.

4. Code Compliance

CM Hemby asked about using the Code Compliance report to discuss any issue. She wanted to note and highlight all the positive reports from residents on Code Compliance and Public Works. She noted that all the departments are working for the good of the Town. She has not heard any of the complaints and negativity. She requested a document that noted all the accomplishments of the Council. She expressed frustration with the focus being made on the negative and would like to focus on the accomplishments of Council. CM Menjivar expressed his agreement to focus on positive items. CM Hemby also thanked resident Michael Bloom for his help on the welcome packet.

5. Parks, Recreation, Education, and Civic Affairs

There was no PRECA report.

a. Re-establish the Shade Tree Board

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that the Town has been advertising for volunteers to be appointed to the Shade Tree Board. She reviewed the Urban Forest Ordinance which

establishes the board. There was brief discussion on the ordinance, with the proposal to lower the number of members needed. TC Friesen noted that a Tree Board is part of the requirements for Tree City Certification. MPT Brittan-Powell suggested Council attempt to recruit members for the board.

b. PRECA/Outreach position split

TM Snyder reviewed the position as was established in July but is suggesting that the role be split into two positions, one focusing on a PRECA aide, and the other focused on an Outreach worker. He expressed his belief that the positions could be filled quickly if they were separate. CM Hemby noted a strong preference for the Outreach person to speak Spanish. Council consensus was to split the original role into two separate part-time positions.

6. Public Safety

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy shared community concerns over a potential anti-Semitic poster that was seen on a utility box outside of the new Aldi. She noted it was already gone before the police and TM Snyder went to remove it. Staff is exploring possible solutions to make the surfaces of these SHA traffic control boxes less convenient for posters.

7. Adjournment

MPT Brittan-Powell moved to adjourn the meeting. CM Menjivar seconded the motion. With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 8:37PM.