



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Minutes Town Meeting March 12, 2014

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

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 1. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the February 12 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by MPT Wilkinson and second by CM Dennison, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

### 2. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of February.

### 3. Election Update

Clerk Harper reported that the following residents have filed candidate petitions for the May 6, 2014 Town Council election: Mayor Cheye Calvo, CM Dennison, CM Kulpa-Eddy and Barbara Schreiber.

### 4. Mayor's Report

Mayor Calvo said that the Council has begun to deliberate on the FY 2015 budget. At the March 3 worksession, TA Murphy submitted his proposed budget, which includes an increase of the real property tax rate from 48.6 to 50.0 cents per \$100 of assessed value. The increase was proposed to cover the continued shortfall in real property tax revenues since the December 2012 reassessment. They declined from \$1.57 million in FY 2010 to a projected \$1.2 million in FY 2015.

The 1.4 cent tax increase raises about \$43,000 in additional revenues and helps cover modest increases in the Town's operating expenses. The biggest driver of governmental expenditures are employee salaries and benefits. Last year, the Council awarded both Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) and merit increases, which have roll-up costs in FY 2015. The proposed budget also funds a full-time Public Works Director, a full-time 8th police officer, and one promotion of a police officer to corporal. In addition, there is a small increase in the health insurance budget due

to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Apart from staffing costs, expenditures are almost flat.

One of the bright spots in next year's budget is a 10% increase in the income tax revenues. This year's receipts are expected exceed the \$400,000 mark. For the next fiscal year, income tax revenues are budgeted higher at \$380,000, as opposed to \$345,000 this year. Mayor Calvo thought the increase is due to an increase of young families purchasing homes in Town, as well as more young professionals renting rooms. However, even with this increase, revenues are not sufficient to cover projected expenditures, and another \$50,000 will be pulled from surplus.

Another bright spot are the Town's reserves. There is enough money in the vehicle replacement reserve to purchase two Public Works vehicles to purchase one new police car from the operating budget. On the other hand, the Town's roads have deteriorated during this long winter and are in bad shape. The loss in Highway User Revenues (HUR) over the last 5 years, due to State cuts, have made it difficult to finance needed repairs, even with the 3 cents road tax the Council adopted 2 years ago.

Mayor Calvo continued that the Council is also considering making a larger contribution to the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department (BHVFD) as their revenues from ambulance bills and voluntary contributions have declined. Further, there have been discussions on how the Town might help the BHVFD meet their long term needs in terms of location and space requirements. Mayor Calvo also thanked TA Murphy for putting together another difficult budget, and invited residents to give input.

Mayor Calvo also noted that the Town received \$47,000 from the Greenbelt Station developers, the first installment of \$1 million in compensation for the expected traffic and safety impacts from the development. The money will be coming in as more units are being built, and will help fund the construction of sidewalks. The Town should be ready to put the sidewalks project out to bid this fall.

Mayor Calvo said that the Council had a number of conversations about the organizational structure of the Town. The Town Charter designates the Town Council as the Chief Executive of the Town, with each individual Councilmember in charge of one of the Town's departments. But they serve on a part-time basis and are not here during the daytime. Only when the Council is in session is there a functioning CEO. This leads to a lot of things falling through the cracks. He has been pushing for a more unified organizational structure headed by a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who has more control over the daily operations of the Town government. The Council plans to introduce legislation to effect the change at the April Town meeting and adopt it in May.

Another aspect of the reorganization is to merge the Code Compliance with the Administration Department, at least in the short term, to take advantage of their co-location and staffing overlap. To lead the Code Department the Town is looking to hire a full time Code supervisor rather than a director, who will be reporting to the Town Administrator on daily operations and to the councilmember/ department head on policy matters. Mayor Calvo thinks this will make the Town government work better and more attractive to a future Town Administrator.

Lastly, Mayor Calvo commented that for the first time in his memory there are not enough candidates running to fill all Council seats. He speculated that the job may be too time consuming, and difficult for younger people with family to manage. Perhaps not by accident, the councilmembers resigning this year both have young children. Another reason may be that the Council is getting along and government is functioning well so that residents don't see a need to get involved. Whatever the reason, he encouraged residents to think about running and help govern their Town.

## **5. Department Reports**

**Administration:** CM Almoguera said it is with great regret she is announcing that she will not stand for re-election. She found serving on the Council very rewarding and a great fit for her. She hopes other residents will step up and consider serving on the Council.

Further, CM Almoguera reported that Playgroup will continue to hold their regular play dates on Mondays at 10:30 a.m. However, with the weather being unpredictable, parents may want to join the pgcountyconsignments Facebook page to find out where additional play dates will be held. On April 5, the playgroup will get a tour of the fire house. This turned out to be exciting and a great learning experience for kids the previous time it was done. She is also working with NW/EP to set up an infant and child CPR workshop. More details will be announced in the Bulletin and at upcoming meetings.

**Code Compliance:** CM Kulpa-Eddy announced that March 17 - 23 is fix-a-leak week, a time to check on household fixtures and irrigation systems and make repairs. Most problems occur with worn toilet flappers and worn seals and valves in faucets and shower heads. These can often be fixed by finding the right replacement part at a local hardware store. Outdoor pipes and hoses should also be checked each spring to make sure they were not damaged by freezing temperatures. Ordinance 120 requires plumbing fixtures in rental homes to be free from leaks and defects so as to minimize problems due to mold. Making those repairs can save up to 10% on the monthly water bill and prevent more serious water damage in the long run.

**Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:** CM Dennison announced that there will be a public hearing on changes to the Town's organizational structure at the April Town meeting. Comments are welcome. She also reported that last Saturday a game night was held at the Town Center. Many residents came out to play card and board games at this new event. Upcoming events include the annual Talent Show at Berwyn Heights Elementary School on March 21, a Town-wide cleanup on April 12, a wine tasting on April 25, hosted by the NW/EP, and Berwyn Heights Day on May 3. Volunteers are still needed.

**Public Health and Safety:** Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for February. It was a quiet month because cold and snow kept people inside. There were 5 Part I offenses, slightly less than the 5 year average of 5.8. The year-to-date total is 13, also less than the 5 year average of 13.8. The officers issued a total of 155 citations last month, plus 221 speed camera violations.

Chief Antolik warned residents about a robo call scam, in which people are told that their credit or ATM cards have been compromised and are asked to punch in identifying information and PIN number. The scammers will then use the information to steal money from their accounts. Anyone who receives such a call is asked to contact the Berwyn Heights Police Department, which will investigate. Detective Unger recently investigated a resident's stolen Target credit

card on which a number of fraudulent charges were made. With the help of Target investigators, a suspect was identified, and all items purchased with the credit card recovered. The suspect, a Target employee, was arrested and charged with theft.

Mayor Calvo commented that he received a number of compliments for Berwyn Heights police checking on elderly and disabled residents during the snow storm. Chief Antolik commended police aides Oscar Rodriguez and Paul Persinger for making those house calls.

***Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department:*** James Hurley, President of the BHVFD gave a report. He thanked the Council for considering an increase in the Town's annual contribution to the Fire Department. He then reported that Chief McCoy attended a worksession of the College Park City Council with the Chiefs of the College Park and Branchville fire departments to discuss staffing issues with the County's Fire Chief Bashoor. Chief McCoy made the important point that volunteer departments are affected by, but not represented in the contract negotiations between the County fire fighters' union and Prince George's County, where decisions are made about whether to place professional fire fighters at a particular fire station and how many. Even if no staffing changes are made at BHVFD, this station is affected by staffing changes at neighboring fire stations, like Branchville.

Mr. Hurley said that the BHVFD is the largest combination volunteer/professional fire station in the country and always welcomes new volunteers in any capacity. The more volunteers, the more services can be provided. Starting on March 19, a new volunteer paramedic unit No. 814 will make an 8-hour test run. After members receive additional training in advanced life support (ALS), the unit will be rotated in throughout the year. ALS equipment and medicines are provided by the County and placed in one of the BHVFD ambulances for this purpose.

In other news, the County Volunteer Fire Fighters Association applied for a \$50,000 grant to support recruitment and retention of volunteer fire fighters; BHVFD continues to make progress in straightening out ambulance billing after hiring a new billing vendor; BHVFD arranged to meet with community garden volunteers about filling the cistern that will be installed in the garden; and BHVFD requests donations of junk cars for training purposes, which can be written off on tax returns. BHVFD will arrange for them to be picked up and disposed. Lastly, Mr. Hurley thanked the Town for donating a surplus tractor to BHVFD, which came in handy during the snow storms.

Mayor Calvo commented that the Council discussed the issue of a tax differential for fire and rescue services at the last Four Cities meeting. Currently, the Town receives a 14 cents tax credit for providing police service, but nothing for fire and rescue. There was interest in pursuing the matter and it will again be on the agenda at the next Four Cities meeting. The BHVFD may want to send a representative to give input.

CM Almoguera said that for an April 5 tour of the fire station Playgroup parents would like to set up an appreciation buffet and asked how many fire fighters they should plan to serve. Mr. Hurley said that there are between 15 and 20 members at the station at any given time.

***Public Works:*** MPT Wilkinson reported that the Public Works Department's biggest job this month was the cleanup after the last snow storm. This always entails several days of catching up to get back to regular trash pickup. March is also a time to check on stray cables hanging down

from the utility poles. If residents report them to the Town, it will forward a service request to the respective utility. The Town gets a faster response if it can report multiple instances of loose wires.

Further, residents are reminded that all yard waste must now be placed in brown paper bags or in clearly identifiable yard waste containers. The Public Works Department has been asked to develop a door hanger to let home owners, who are still using plastic bags, know about the change. MPT Wilkinson has recently been informed by School Board Member Higgins that sidewalks at Greenbelt Middle School have at last gone out to bid. Finally, electronics recycling is scheduled to take place on May 3, postponed from April 26.

## **6. Committee Reports**

**Green Team:** Mayor Calvo reported that the Green Team advertised 20 plots for rent in the March Bulletin, and within a couple of days from publication received 22 requests. It is nice to see such a great response from the community after all the hard work the Green Team has invested in bringing a community garden to Berwyn Heights.

**Historical Committee:** CM Dennison reported that the Historical Committee is working on producing a plaque to honor Geraldine Love, who ran the former Town Library. The plaque will be hung in the new conference room recently opened on the same premises.

**Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:** CM Kulpa-Eddy reported that the County Office of Emergency Management will offer a Metro CERT training course on May 1 and May 8, focusing on emergencies related to the Metro system. The course is open to people who have completed basic CERT training. On April 25, NW/EP is holding a wine tasting fundraiser. Four Maryland wineries will be represented. Participants will be able to purchase bottles of wine and wine glasses. A \$5 donation is requested at the door. The next meeting is on April 2.

## **7. Unfinished Business**

There was none.

## **8. New Business**

**Resolution 2-2014 - Community Center Use Agreement:** Mayor Calvo said this resolution renews the agreement between the Town and Park & Planning for use of the Community Center gymnasium by the Men's League. Clerk Harper read the Resolution. MPT Wilkinson moved to adopt it. CM Dennison seconded. CM Dennison commented that the Men's League used to run both a soft ball and basketball drop-in league. It is good to see that this tradition continues. The Resolution passed 5 to 0.

**Ordinance No. 164 - Comcast Franchise Agreement extension:** Mayor Calvo explained that this emergency Ordinance extends the existing franchise agreement between Comcast and the Town which expires on March 30. Currently, a team representing Prince George's County and its municipalities is negotiating the renewal of the agreement, which is not expected to be completed before fall of 2014. An emergency ordinance can be adopted with one reading but expires after 90 days, unless replaced by adoption of a regular Ordinance. MPT Wilkinson moved to adopt the Ordinance. CM Dennison seconded.

Mayor Calvo said that the Town adopted a similar agreement with Verizon in 2006. Since then Verizon FiOS has outperformed Comcast Cable in subscriptions. The two franchises combined represent about \$75,000 in annual revenue to the Town, which now exceeds HUR. The recent upgrades to the Berwyn Heights public access channel were funded from these revenues. The Ordinance was adopted in a 5 to 0 vote.

#### **9. Citizens Discussion**

There were none.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*