



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Minutes Town Meeting April 12, 2017

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Cheryl Jewitt, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Patricia Dennison, Chris Rasmussen, and Gerald Shields. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Cpl. Roberson, Code Compliance Supervisor Freddie Glass, Public Works Director Stevie Cox, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Clerk Kerstin Harper, and citizens.

Mayor Jewitt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Budget Hearings

Mayor Jewitt said that the Council reviewed the entire FY 2018 budget at a special March 25 budget worksession. All department directors were present to give an overview of their budgets and answer questions from Councilmembers. The input given and changes made to the Town Administrator's proposed budget during the meeting form the basis of the budget that will be introduced tonight. The FY 2018 budget is the second in a 3-year property tax assessment cycle and funds the Town's operating budget from annual revenue streams without using the surplus. The real residential property tax rate remains unchanged from FY 2017 at \$0.53 per \$100 of assessed valuation, which includes a 3 cents road tax. It is expected to yield \$1,529,000 in revenues.

At 7:03 p.m., Mayor Jewitt opened the public hearing on the General Fund budget. Mike Attick, Co-Chair of the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee (NW/EP), said the NW/EP would like to donate \$1,000 to the Greenbelt Community Animal Response Team (CART) and is requesting \$4,000 in funding from the Town. He also asked if the Council plans to continue the emergency trailer reserve. Mayor Jewitt asked Mr. Attick to hold these questions for the Citizen Comments portion of the meeting. With no further comments, Mayor Jewitt closed the hearing at 7:05 p.m.

At 7:09 p.m., Mayor Jewitt opened the public hearing on the Public Safety Taxing District (PSTD) budget. This budget levies a special tax on Town businesses to fund one police officer. It is proposed to set the PSTD real commercial property tax rate at \$0.65 per \$100 of assessed valuation to offset a decline in receipts. A meeting of the Commercial District Management

Authority (CDMA) to review the PSTD budget is set for April 18. There were no comments. Mayor Jewitt closed the hearing at 7:10 p.m.

2. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the March 8 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Rasmussen, the minutes were approved 5 to 0 with corrections.

3. Mayor's Report

Mayor Jewitt reported on a temporary closing of Metro's Green Line to make repairs to the tracks. Public Works is monitoring WSSC's repaving of Town streets where water mains were replaced last year. Residents are requested to drive carefully through these construction areas. A CDMA meeting with the Town Council on April 18 at 10:00 a.m. is open to the public. The death of a former UMD professor who resided in Westchester Park and whose body was found in Indian Creek during the Good Neighbor Day cleanup is attributed to natural causes.

An Executive Session was held on April 3 to discuss personnel issues.

Citizens of the Year: Mayor Jewitt said that the Council selected two citizens-of-the-year and is making the announcement early to give those citizens a chance to invite family and friends to celebrate with them at Berwyn Heights Day. Theresa Beck is a founder of the Karate Club, coordinates "Toys for Tots," and helps organize other Town events as a member of the Recreation Council. Diana Agonoy is a member of the Green Team, the Historical Committee and the Recreation Council and helps out at many Town events.

4. Department Reports

Administration: MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that she attended an April 8 Dog Meet & Greet. There was good attendance and dog-owners were provided useful information on dog waste management, as well as keeping dogs healthy and safe during emergencies. "Mulch Madness", when free mulch is made available to County residents at the Prince George's County landfill is scheduled for April 22, and Maryland Day for April 29.

Treasurer Rodriguez gave the Treasurer's report for March.

TA Cowles reported that during the last month the Administration Department implemented live streaming of Council meetings and installed a voice-over-internet-based telephone (VOIP) system, which includes conference phones for the Council chamber and the Geraldine Love Room. The FY 2018 General Fund and PSTD budgets were finalized for introduction tonight following an all-day budget workshop on March 25. Staff also prepared the FY 2017 budget amendment and lent assistance in planning Berwyn Heights Day.

Code Compliance: CM Rasmussen thanked Public Works for putting up new signage on Osage Street to prevent speeding. He reported that the Code Department has stepped up enforcement of an invasive species regulation adopted with amended Ordinance 107 – *Clean Lot*, which requires property owners to confine bamboo to within 2 feet of their property line. Five residents have volunteered to serve on the Shade Tree Board, which can now commence advising the Town on maintenance of trees in the public right of way. He reminded residents that the recently revised Ordinance 120 – *Licensing of Rental Units* goes into effect on May 8.

Code Supervisor Glass gave the code report for March. The Code Department continues to focus on enforcing bamboo and tall grass violations. Per a Council request, he determined that the Town is due approximately \$32,300 in outstanding liens. A house recently damaged by fire has been boarded up and debris removed. The owner is considering selling the property.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Shields reported that good progress was made on the removal of invasive species at Lake Artemesia during UMD's Good Neighbor Day. Berwyn Heights' accreditation as an MML Banner City is steadily moving forward. Residents are encouraged to volunteer and participate in Berwyn Heights Day on May 6.

Public Safety: Officer Paul Roberson gave the police activities report for March. There were 3 Part I offenses, down from the 5-year average of 4.2. The police issued 245 municipal and state citations and 73 speed camera citations, all on Greenbelt Road. Residents are advised to lock their cars as thefts from vehicles have gone up. Prince George's County police are investigating the death of a man, whose body was discovered in Indian Creek during Good Neighbor Day. He is believed to have died of natural causes.

Officer Roberson responded to questions about the number of stop signs in Town, and traffic safety at the Kenilworth Avenue/ Pontiac Street intersection.

Mayor Jewitt reported that the Council appropriated \$19,000 from the unrestricted fund balance to replace a police vehicle that was totaled in a recent accident. This sum represents that portion of the replacement cost not covered by the Town's insurance.

Public Works: CM Dennison announced that the Public Works Department will display 3 different-sized recycling bins on Berwyn Heights Day for residents to try out.

Public Works Director Cox reported that WSSC will complete the resurfacing of Town streets by May 1. The street repairs have disrupted DPW's trash collection, and some homes may have been missed. Those affected can call Public Works to request a pickup. From May 29 to September 4, DPW will move to a summer schedule and begin the day at 6:30 a.m. so that employees will be able to complete trash collection in the cooler hours of the day. On April 10, new hires Aneyka Benjamin and Santos Guzman will start to work at DPW.

Director Cox replied to questions about the time for setting out the trash when the summer schedule is in effect; about the reasons for a higher landfill diversion rate in March; and about ways to increase recycling rates. TA Cowles added information about the cost of switching to new recycling bins.

5. Committee Reports

Green Team: Green Team members Diana Agonoy, Kayla Agonoy and Amanda Dewey reported. The dog meet & greet went well and counts towards recertification as a Sustainable Maryland community. There are plans to form a dog club and make the meet and greet an annual event. A town-wide cleanup is scheduled for May 13. The monthly meeting has been moved to the 2nd Thursday of the month.

Historical Committee: Clerk Harper reported that the BHHC will participate in Berwyn Heights Day with history exhibits and a tour of the Town museum.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: Co-Chair Mike Attick reported that the NW/EP will hold a semi-annual inventory and cleanup of the emergency trailer on April 22, which will be displayed on Berwyn Heights Day. The Committee continues to seek vendors for another wine festival.

Recreation Council: Diana Agonoy reported that the Recreation Council is busy planning Berwyn Heights Day and still needs volunteers to run all activities. Residents should watch for a date of the Town-wide yard sale in the next Bulletin. Outdoor concerts are scheduled for June 4 and July 6.

6. Unfinished Business

Resolution 01-2017 - 2nd Reading & Adoption of Charter Amendment on Town Boundaries: Clerk Harper read the Resolution. MPT Kulpa-Eddy explained that this amendment to the Town Charter was undertaken to update the section on boundaries, to include the 2005 annexations of industrial properties on the north side of Branchville Road and to cede a small boundary overlap area in the north-east corner of the Town to the City of Greenbelt. The Council wanted to settle all boundary issues in view of the possible relocation of the FBI headquarters to Greenbelt Station. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Shields, the Resolution was adopted in a 5 to 0 vote.

7. New Business

Ordinance No. 173 – 1st Reading & Introduction of FY 2018 General Fund Budget: Clerk Harper read a summary of the Ordinance. Councilmembers gave overviews of their departmental budgets.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said there were no changes to the *Mayor & Council* budget. The *Administration Department* budget had small increases: in the salary line due to COLAs, merit pay and pay plan adjustments; and in the election supplies line in preparation for May 2018. Decreases are budgeted for telephone service following the installation of a new VOIP telephone system. In addition, several capital projects are funded, including an architectural and engineering study for the Town Center; the replacement of a 2000 Saturn with a hybrid or electric vehicle; an economic development study of the Rt. 193 commercial corridor; and security improvements at Town buildings. In the *Town Center* budget, the rental fee for the second floor has been increased from \$250 to \$300 to cover higher maintenance and repair costs. The FY 2018 budget holds real property tax rates constant but residents can expect to see an increase in their property tax bills due to a 9% - 10% increase in the assessed value of real property.

CM Rasmussen said most of the increase in the *Code Compliance* budget is due to salary adjustments resulting from the adoption of a new pay plan. In addition, increases are budgeted for the code tracking software, and for training and seminars. Code fees and fines are proposed to decrease by \$5,000 because the Department is making an effort to reduce violations through educating residents instead of fines. The rental license fee will remain at \$300 per year, but the adoption of new rental licensing regulations may impact the volume of rental licenses issued. Residents can expect an increase of \$100 to \$150 in their property tax bills for a house assessed between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

CM Shields encouraged residents to review the *Parks, Recreation & Civic Affairs* budget on the website and give the Council feedback.

Mayor Jewitt said that the *Public Health & Safety* budget is proposed to go up by 5%, which includes the Town-wide salary increases for COLAs and merit pay, and new tablets for the police vehicles. The Council asked the Police Department to check into using green ammunition and was informed that it is more expensive than standard lead ammunition while having a fairly high failure rate. Mayor Jewitt said that a rumor about moving the police station into the Senior Center is untrue, but the Council is trying to find a permanent location for the station.

Mayor Jewitt reported for CM Dennison that the Public Works budget is proposed to increase by 4% mainly due increases in the salary line items, as well minor increases in the vehicle repair and maintenance, training and seminars and solid waste disposal fee line items. The capital budget also funds a new fence and security gate at the yard, a road repair analysis and implementation of a tree maintenance plan.

CM Dennison moved and MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded to introduce the FY 2018 General Fund budget. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Ordinance No. 174 – 1st Reading & Introduction of the FY 2018 Public Safety Taxing District budget: Clerk Harper read a summary of the Ordinance. Mayor Jewitt said that a meeting with the Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) to review this budget has been set for April 18. CM Rasmussen suggested adding language to the Ordinance that identifies the PSTD tax as a tax on businesses. MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted that the PSTD commercial real property tax rate was increased by 2 cents per \$100 of assessed value to achieve the same yield as this year. CM Dennison moved, and CM Rasmussen seconded, to introduce the Ordinance. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Resolution 03-2017 – 1st Reading & Adoption of Green Purchasing Policy: Clerk Harper read the Resolution. CM Shields thanked the Green Team for drafting the policy, which is intended to complement existing purchasing policies. He noted several changes made to the draft and encouraged the Council to adopt the policy. MPT Kulpa-Eddy suggested changing the title of the Resolution to “Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy” to match the updated title of the policy. CM Rasmussen proposed to change a “Whereas” clause to stress the Council worked collaboratively with the Green Team to refine the policy. CM Rasmussen moved to adopt the Policy as amended. CM Dennison seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that it is the Resolution that was proposed to be amended. CM Rasmussen moved to rescind his motion. Mayor Jewitt asked for a motion to adopt Resolution 03-2017 as amended. CM Rasmussen so moved, and CM Dennison seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

8. Citizens Discussion

Ron Luftman, Seminole Street, announced Senior’s Club activities and invited residents over 50 years of age to join.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, commented on things he appreciates, including TA Cowles checking on projects while walking the Town; the Police being pro-active and considerate; new security

arrangements for Town buildings, on which he could give advice; and things he considers detrimental, including an expensive architectural study of the Town Center, a cheap resurfacing job WSSC did on Town streets, delays on striping stop lines and moving stop signs after resurfacing of streets, and new 'unfriendly' restrictions on access to the Council chamber and Public Works yard.

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, informed that MARC has added trains during rush hour to offer alternative transportation while Metro's Green Line is closed for repairs, and that the traffic backups have become worse at the Kenilworth Avenue/ Pontiac Street intersection since the traffic light schedule was changed to accommodate the Friend's Community School traffic. He also commented on money spent on studies; the security gate at the Public Works yard and proposed card security to enter the Town office; Councilmembers and staff not volunteering enough during events; and trees planted by Pepco on Quebec Street that have died.

Joan Hayden commented by telephone commending the Town for adding a call-in capability to the Town meeting, and plans to provide recycling bins on wheels. She also expressed her opinion that too much money was spent on studies in recent years. CM Rasmussen suggested TA Cowles take account of studies over the last 5 years, the total cost incurred, and any improvements or benefits resulting from the studies.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk