



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Minutes Town Meeting February, 13, 2013

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 Chief of Police Antolik, President of the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department James Hurley, Clerk Harper, as well as representatives of the Prince George's County Public Safety Communications Center Associate Director Charlynn Flaherty, Operations Manager Bill McGown, Assistant Operations Manager Penny van Dyke, and Quality Assurance Supervisor Nicole Winters, and citizens. Town Administrator Murphy and Treasurer Lape had an excused absence.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Prince George's County Public Safety Communications (PSC) Presentation

Mayor Calvo welcomed the representatives from the Prince George's Call Center. Assistant Director Flaherty introduced her colleagues and said they are pleased to be here to explain how the Call Center works because it is important for the Call Center to have good relations with citizens, municipalities and agencies of Prince George's County that they serve. The call center operates under the auspices of the County's Homeland Security Office, where it was moved after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

A short video was played giving an overview of the Center's operations with a focus on 911 calls. When a 911 call comes in a call taker tries to obtain as much information as possible by asking a series of questions. While remaining on the phone with the caller, they enter the information into a computer. The information entered into computers is used to dispatch the appropriate help (Computer Aided Dispatch, or CAD). The dispatchers use the information in the computer to give responders a picture of what to expect at the scene while they are on their way. In addition to taking information, the call takers often remain on the line to provide life-saving instructions until help arrives. The call center also answers calls to the non-emergency number: 301-352-1200. This number is intended to serve residents who require police or emergency service of a less urgent nature.

Ms. Flaherty said she understands that the Town has concerns about getting a recording when trying to get police help on the non-emergency line. She explained that the Call Center switched to a new system for non-emergency calls because too many calls were received that did not require a police or EMS response. This resulted in a less effective 911 service. A phone tree was

established to direct calls, which do not require public safety personnel to respond, to the appropriate agency or service with a designated “311” number. This allows call takers to focus on the top priority of handling 911 calls, which involve an immediate threat to life and property. Less urgent calls are sometimes held in queue until an officer or fire fighter becomes available.

Ms. Winters described the quality assurance program, which has been put in place to remain accredited at a national and international level. Quality assurance requires that a supervisor is present around the clock monitoring incoming calls to make sure that call takers follow the correct protocol, and to assist when additional help is needed, as for example when a situation requiring CPR occurs. Quality assurance also means listening in on a certain number of randomly selected calls over a month to ensure that call takers ask the right questions to correctly prioritize calls. This procedure is a rating as well as training tool. Call taker trainees undergo 240 hours of classroom training and 540 hours of practical training under certified instructors before they take their first live 911 call.

Mr. McGown explained that the Call Center's procedures and protocol of questions keep evolving as technology becomes more complex. For example, call takers now ask first whether a person is calling from Prince George's County. Often a caller's location cannot be sufficiently identified from their telephone number when they use Voice over Internet Phone (VOIP). While the Call Center tries to stay on top of new developments, sending the right help is a science.

Mayor Calvo asked a number of questions to determine how the non-emergency response system could be improved. He said that the 911 number seems to work pretty well, but he has received many complaints from residents about the non-emergency number. He has the impression that the non-emergency number gets short-changed because the focus is on the 911 operation. Ms. Flaherty explained that the non-emergency calls are answered by the same people as the 911 calls, and call takers must prioritize the calls according to urgency. First priority goes to 911 calls. Alarm calls, which are considered an “in progress” threat to life and property, are second. Non-emergency calls are ranked third in priority because the threat is not immediate.

In response to further questions, it was explained that the majority of calls, or approximately 60% are 911 calls, and even a portion of the 40% of calls made to the non-emergency number qualify as 911 calls. It would be difficult to determine the proportion of 911 calls to non-emergency calls by municipality. A call is identified by the telephone number, which in the case of cell phones is no longer tied to a particular location or jurisdiction. The Call Center has the equipment but not the staff to analyze the calls and break them down by location.

Mayor Calvo said that Berwyn Heights probably generates a higher proportion of non-emergency calls to 911 calls than most other places in the county. The Town trains its residents to call the non-emergency number when there is a public safety concern, and to ask for an on-duty Berwyn Heights officer to respond. From Berwyn Heights' perspective, there is no point for a County officer to respond, for example, when teens troll around at night, students have noisy parties or barking dogs keep the neighbors up. He asked if asking for a Berwyn Heights officer conforms to the protocol.

Ms. van Dyke, Assistant Operations Manager and veteran dispatcher, replied that requesting a Berwyn Heights officer may not mean anything to the call taker. They enter an address into the computer, which then generates a municipal code and classifies the level of emergency.

Dispatchers identify the municipality and dispatch available officers to respond. Call taking and dispatching are handled by a different set of people with a different set of responsibilities and information. However, experienced call takers or dispatchers like herself know that Berwyn Heights is a municipality with its own police force and will hold a call for a Berwyn Heights officer.

Mayor Calvo said that some residents have reached a point where they have written off the non-emergency number because they are put on hold for long periods of time and are not able to get a Berwyn Heights officer to come out. He would like to find a way for Berwyn Heights to fit into the Call Center system and get a better service on the non-emergency number. Perhaps the role of municipal police could be incorporated into call takers' training or the computer program might be tweaked to provide a field to request local police officers.

Mr. McGown replied that Berwyn Heights' problem is not unique. There are many neighborhood watch associations and other organizations that cannot always get the service they want. The Call Center is attempting to address that. County police are in the process of setting up a website where neighborhood organizations can get non-emergency police assistance without having to go through the Call Center. Citizens can help by providing detailed feedback on the particular problem they encountered. If there is a problem with getting a response, the Call Center can usually retrieve a call because every call and key stroke on the computer is recorded.

Mr. McGown asked how long is considered too long a wait by callers seeking non-emergency assistance. Mayor Calvo said he thinks most callers may wait up to 5 minutes, although he has sometimes stayed on the line for 20 minutes to see how long it takes to be served. MPT Wilkinson said when he needs help as a Boys & Girls Club coach he waits between 2-3 minutes. Mr. McGown said on-hold times vary depending on the time of day. During the evening rush hours and weekend nights it can take longer to get through.

CM Kulpa-Eddy asked if the Call Center can give clearer guidelines as to when to call 911 as opposed to the non-emergency number. Ms. van Dyke replied that beyond the obvious emergencies, a situation in progress that could become an emergency qualifies for a 911 call. For example, a suspicious person walking around at night looking at homes deserves a call. Similarly, when one is scared or feels threatened by someone one should call 911. However, to report a crime, such as a break-in that has already happened, one should call the non-emergency number. CM Kulpa-Eddy asked whether one should call 911 to report a traffic accident that is likely to have already been reported by other callers with a cell phone. Ms. van Dyke said one should call if one believes to have unique information about the incident that is helpful to first responders.

Mark Anderson, Paxton Court, asked how well call takers know the County. Last summer he called 911 to report a fire in Greenbelt Park driving past Parkdale High School on Good Luck Road. The call taker did not seem to have any idea of where that was. He ended up driving to the Greenbelt Fire Station and reporting the fire in person. Mr. McGown said that call takers get training in the geography of the County and will be familiar with "common places." This includes schools and other landmarks. However, sometimes call takers do not know a particular address or know it by a different name, such as the Baltimore-Washington Parkway also known as 295.

Mr. Anderson continued that he sometimes gets a faster response when he contacts the area police department directly. When the traffic light was out at the busy intersection of Greenbelt Road and 60th Avenue he could not get help by calling 911. Again, he called the Greenbelt Police Department, which sent out an officer in short order. Mr. McGown said that any 911 call will come into the Call Center first. If the caller phones from a municipality with its own dispatch, such as Greenbelt, the call will be forwarded to them.

Ray Smith, Seminole Place, asked if the Call Center would be willing to talk to the Seniors Club about their operations. Ms. Flaherty said they would, adding that they can also give a tour of the Call Center.

Mayor Calvo thanked the Call Center representatives for the informative dialogue.

2. Minutes

Clerk Harper read a summary of the January 9 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Wilkinson, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

3. Treasurer's Report

CM Almoguera gave the Treasurer's report for the month of January as Treasurer Lape was absent.

4. Mayor's Report

Mayor Calvo reported that the Council has started to focus on the FY 2014 budget with the directors of the Police and Code Department having presented their budget requests at the last worksession. This year, the directors have been asked to present their budgets with options for a 5% and 10% reduction. The Public Works and Parks & Recreation Departments, as well as the Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness Committee will present their budgets at the next worksession and the Town Administrator will present the proposed budget on March 4.

In other news, the Town Council voted to send a letter to its elected representatives supporting the relocation of the FBI Headquarters to Greenbelt Station. Greenbelt Station offers many advantages but there is competition from other jurisdictions. Residents are encouraged to contact State and U.S. representatives to urge them to support the relocation. The Town also gave input on the Greenbelt sector plan. Thanks to CM Kulpa-Eddy closely monitoring the process, Berwyn Heights' input has for the most part been incorporated. However, the Council is continuing to press for a median strip on Greenbelt Road at 63rd Avenue to be included, which would provide a safe landing for Greenbelt Middle School students and other pedestrians, who cross there. Councilmember Olson's office has also helped in advocating for the pedestrian landing at the County level. Further, the Council has signed on to a Four Cities letter, which opposes the proposed cuts of career fire fighters at the Branchville Fire Department. Berwyn Heights will be negatively affected by a closure of the Branchville station because the Berwyn Heights Fire Department would have to respond to more calls from areas currently served by Branchville and would no longer have access to a pumper truck.

5. Department Reports

Administration: CM Almoguera had no report.

Code Compliance: CM Kulpa-Eddy reported the Code Department now has a new code car, a white Ford Explorer. It still has the old Saturn as a backup, as well as the old, surplused Crown Victoria it received from the Police Department. This brings up this month's tip about how to avoid receiving a citation for keeping junked, wrecked or abandoned vehicles. A fine may be issued for parking a vehicle on the street without moving for more than 72 hours. It is also a violation to keep a car, which is inoperable or has no valid Maryland tags, on one's property. The Code Department prefers to work with residents to resolve this type of problem and asks residents to contact the Department if they need an extension to repair a vehicle or get it registered.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Dennison announced that the Historical Committee will hold its Presidents Day reception on February 16, at which the great grandson of President Taft and his wife will make a presentation. Berwyn Heights Day will be held on May 4.

Public Health and Safety: Chief Antolik reported he was recently notified by the Maryland Park Police that they have identified the man who 20 years ago murdered a university student jogging along the Indian Creek trail. Fifty-seven-year-old Thomas Lee Posey pled guilty to first-degree murder and two counts of first-degree rape dating to 1990 and was sentenced to life in prison.

Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for January. There were 3 Part I offenses, which is below the 5-year average of 7.2. Speed camera citations totaled 148. Forty-three tickets were issued on Pontiac Street, where only one camera is currently in operation, and 105 on Greenbelt Road.

Mayor Calvo invited James Hurley, President of the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department (BHVFD) to give an update. Mr. Hurley reported that the Fire Department on January 8 elected a new fire chief, president and vice president. Daniel McCoy replaces retiring Chief Fusco. The new leadership plans to be more involved and give a regular presentation at Town meetings. Mr. Hurley thanked the Council for writing a letter to oppose the staffing cuts at the Branchville Fire Department. If the station closes, it will negatively affect the operations of BHVFD, which will have to cover a larger area and wait longer for a pumper truck to put out fires.

In response to MPT Wilkinson, Mr. Hurley explained that the Fire Chief is in charge of the operational side of the Department, while the President is responsible for the administration of the Department. This includes responsibility for the budget, insurance, procurement, etc. With the change in leadership, the Department is again planning to have an open house, most likely in October, which is fire prevention month.

CM Kulpa-Eddy said that she would like to coordinate the newsletters submitted for publication in the Bulletin by the Neighborhood Watch and the BHVFD to avoid duplication of information. Mr. Hurley said he is happy to do that.

Public Works: MPT Wilkinson reported that he attended a productive meeting on the extension of the Little Paint Branch hiker-biker trail, which the Council voted to support. The proposed new section will connect the trail that currently ends at Cherry Hill Road across from the Home Depot to the Beltsville Community Center, where the trail picks up again. The principal concern

voiced was that the bridge over the Beltway will not be wide enough to separate the trail from traffic with a barrier.

MPT Wilkinson further noted that he met with the PGCPS project manager for Greenbelt Middle School to discuss construction of a sidewalk through the school bus depot. The manager agreed that the current situation is unsafe. He will recommend building a sidewalk and crosswalk to access the school. Next week, MPT Wilkinson will meet with SHA representatives, who will visit Berwyn Heights to evaluate the proposed locations for sidewalks in connection with the *safe routes to school* grant submitted in January. Public Works twice prepared the roads for another snow event that turned out to be minor. The new street sweeper was in Berwyn Heights the first time in January and did a thorough job cleaning streets. In spring, Public Works plans to do extensive crack-sealing and April 6 is the next date for residents to recycle old electronic equipment at the Greenbelt Public Works yard.

6. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: No report.

Historical Committee: No report.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness Committee: CM Kulpa-Eddy reported that the NW/EP held elections at its last meeting. Ron Shane and Joan Hayden were elected as co-chairs, Merrill Weinrich as Secretary and Shirley Attick as Treasurer. Terms are now 2 years. The Committee is finalizing its FY 2014 budget request, which will be presented at the next worksession. There will be no Committee meeting on March 6 as a number of members will take a CPR training course that night. A CERT training workshop will take place March 9 – 10 at the Town Center. So far 20 people are signed up but there is still space for a few more. Interested residents can contact the chairs.

Recreation Council: No report.

7. Unfinished Business

There was none.

8. New Business

There was none.

9. Citizens Discussion

Ray Smith, Seminole Place, had several comments and questions. He asked if there are any plans to move Branchville's pumper truck to Berwyn Heights on occasion. Mr. Hurley said that the Branchville Fire Department would make that decision because they own the equipment. Alternately, the County Fire Chief could move the equipment. Mr. Smith asked why the street sweeper spends a couple of weeks sweeping the Town and then does not come for back for an extended period. Mayor Calvo replied that the sweeping schedule is negotiated between the Four Cities Coalition members and tries to accommodate each Town's needs and preferences. Essentially, Berwyn Heights gets it 13 weeks out of the year.

Mr. Smith asked what can be done about having SHA construction signs removed that seem to be no longer needed. Mayor Calvo said that SHA strictly follows rules regarding the posting of

signs. Sometimes signs will remain in place when a project is delayed and will be resumed at a later time. Mr. Smith asked on which side of the street sidewalks are proposed in connection with the safe routes to school grant. MPT Wilkinson replied sidewalks are proposed for the west side of 8700 block of 62nd Avenue, and the east side of the 8900 block of 63rd Avenue. Mr. Smith asked if MPT Wilkinson had a chance to look into a potential pedestrian hazard posed by a cement footer of an old traffic light in front of the McDonalds restaurant at 63rd Avenue. MPT Wilkinson said he has not, but will do so.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*