



Town of Berwyn Heights

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Minutes Town Meeting September 9, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Chris Rasmussen, Councilmembers Patricia Dennison, Maria Robles, and Lynn White. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Clerk Kerstin Harper and citizens.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Swearing-in of Councilmember Lynn White

Rita Robinson representing the Clerk of the Circuit Court swore in Councilmember Lynn White.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy explained that CM Schreiber resigned unexpectedly on August 21, which started the clock on selecting a new councilmember within 45 days as mandated by the Town Charter. The Council discussed the vacancy at the August 24 worksession and went into executive session to make a selection. Lynn White was appointed from a pool of well qualified candidates who applied 2 months earlier for the vacancy left by Mayor Calvo's resignation. This allowed the swearing-in to take place at today's Town meeting prior to the 45-day deadline. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy welcomed Ms. White on the Town Council.

2. Minutes

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

3. Treasurer's Report

TA Cowles gave the Treasurer's report for the month of August.

4. Mayor's Report

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reported that the Town is currently looking for a new Town Treasurer and is in the process of accepting applications. It expects to have a new treasurer in place within two months. With CM White on board, she will take on the Public Works Department. The other Councilmembers will continue to head the departments they were assigned after Ms. Robles was appointed to fill former Mayor Calvo's seat. The *Safe Routes to School* sidewalks project, which is funded with a grant from SHA, has been delayed by inadequate qualifications of a

subcontractor. TA Cowles pushed to find out what the reasons for the delay were and helped get the project back on track. The Town expects to have this project finished before winter.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy announced that WMATA is planning to make changes to some of the local bus routes. No changes are proposed for the R12/ R11, which comes through Town on Edmonston Road. However, several Greenbelt routes that serve Beltway Plaza are affected. Residents can weigh in at a September 17 hearing. Christmas in April applications are now available. This charitable organization helps low income residents make minor repairs to their homes. Applications are due on November 1.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy then asked to commence the showing of the Four Cities video produced to promote Greenbelt Station as the site of the future FBI headquarters. The video will be shared with the developers and the General Services Administration (GSA), the federal agency charged with selecting the site.

5. Department Reports

Administration: MPT Rasmussen said he is pleased to be the new head of the Administration Department. He noted that he was accidentally recorded signing checks, which was broadcast on the Town's cable access channel. Several residents commented on it. In other news, the emergency generators project is moving forward after the Town renewed County building permits that had expired while the project went through another round of bidding. Construction is expected to begin at the end of September. The Town is still recruiting for a new Treasurer but the position is filled by capable temporary staff. TA Cowles was able to renegotiate the printing and delivery of the Town Bulletin which will result in annual savings of \$10,000. The demolition of condemned properties on 58th Avenue and Cunningham Drive is approaching. The property owners have been served final notice and utilities have to be completely shut off.

MPT Rasmussen welcomed CM White and commented on the appointment process. He said that the Town Charter gives minimal guidance on how a Council vacancy is to be filled, saying only that the Council shall appoint a qualified candidate within 45 days of a resignation. As Mayor Kulpa-Eddy explained, CM Schreiber's resignation was sudden and did not leave the Council much time to fill the vacancy. Therefore, it was decided to fill the vacancy from the previous pool applicants rather than restarting the recruitment process. Last night, the Council heard from a resident who expressed concern that the public was not given the opportunity to apply for this opening. While the Council respects his opinion, it believes that its decision was sound and that it was not practical, under the circumstances, to renew the search.

Code Compliance: CM Robles welcomed Ms. White on the Council. She then reported that the Council recently revised the Clean Lot Ordinances. New provisions aim to curb invasive species, particularly bamboo, clarify how inoperable vehicles may be stored, and ensure proper maintenance of accessory structures. In addition, there are changes in the enforcement process, which resulted in a new notification and fine schedule for violations. The Code Department is planning an educational campaign to familiarize residents with the new regulations.

CM Robles gave an overview of Code Department activities, including clean lot fines applied, rental properties licensed, and dumpster and POD permits approved. Further, the Council heard 3 code appeals at the last worksession, which resulted in fines being reduced in all cases.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Dennison reported that several Councilmembers, including herself, attended last night's Hello Huskies back to school event. She then announced upcoming Town events.

Public Health and Safety: Chief Antolik reported that the first day of school went smoothly but he cautioned residents to obey the speed limits and stop signs. He then gave the police activities report for August. There were 10 Part I offenses, all of them larcenies. This is higher than the 5 year average of 5.6. Year-to-date, there were 51 Part I offenses, also more than the 5 year average of 46.6. In addition, the officers issued 180 citations and 210 speed camera tickets, all on Greenbelt Road. In response to Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, Chief Antolik said that larceny is defined as theft from a vehicle. He urged residents to lock their cars and not leave valuables inside.

Public Works: CM White thanked the Council for appointing her to the Council and said that she will give her best to help govern the Town. She continued with the Public Works report, saying that a new bike rack was installed and landscaping done at the school for reopening. Marvin Plummer was named employee of the month for his work on the school grounds. DPW staff also installed more durable crosswalk markers at the school and took online training through the LGIT academy. An old trash truck was listed for sale at a surplus auction website and other assets were identified for auctions. Staff will continue to work on the installation of bicycle infrastructure and signage related to an ATHA bikeway project, and solicit bids for energy efficiency projects related to the Maryland Smart Energy Communities grant.

6. Committee Reports

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: Co-chair Ron Shane reminded residents that NW/EP will host the first ever nighttime mass casualty drill this Saturday at Berwyn Heights Elementary School. The event is co-hosted with the cities of Greenbelt and Laurel who will bring in their own equipment. The drill will practice emergency protocols and coordination with other first responders. Residents are invited to participate or just come out to watch. Beyond that, NW/EP will help the police patrol on Halloween. The next meeting is on October 7.

In response to questions, Mr. Shane said residents have been informed of the event through the Bulletin and that a light tower will be brought in by the City of Laurel. Residents should not be alarmed by flashing red and blue lights which are part of the drill.

7. Unfinished Business

There was none.

8. New Business

Ordinance 109, Town Council Elections - 1st Reading & Introduction of Amendments: Mayor Kulpa-Eddy explained that the revision of this Ordinance was triggered by write-in candidacies that occurred in the last election due to a shortage of candidates running for Town Council. In the absence of a formal protocol for write-in candidacies, the Council adopted several rules that will now be incorporated as Ordinance amendments. The amendments also incorporate new State election laws, spell out the pre-election process and clarify the duties of the Board of Election Supervisors and Town Clerk. In response to citizen concerns another section on filling mid-term vacancies may also be added, depending on the recommendations of the Town Attorney. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy announced that a hearing on the Ordinance will be held at the

October Town meeting with the hope of enacting the revised Ordinance prior to the start of the 2016 election season. Residents are invited to comment.

Clerk Harper read the introductory language for the amended Ordinance 109. MPT Rasmussen moved to introduce it and CM Dennison seconded. The motion passed in a 5 to 0 vote.

9. Citizens Discussion

Ron Shane, 57th Avenue, said he thinks the revising and refining of the Clean Lot Ordinance was unnecessary because Prince George's County code already has property maintenance standards (Sections 13, 27 of County zoning code) that could be applied to the Town.

Regardless, property maintenance codes are the primary tools for ensuring quality of life in the community. One important standard, as far as he is concerned, is preventing commercial vehicles from being parked in the Town because they don't belong in a residential neighborhood and bring down property values. He distributed photos of examples of commercial vehicles parked in driveways.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy thanked Mr. Shane for the input but noted that the Town has a different approach to regulating commercial vehicles than the County. She also noted that Councilmembers are participating in the zoning rewrite effort the County is undertaking at this time. The Town wants make sure the future zoning code will produce standards that are compatible with how the Town wants the community to look.

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, said that the Volunteer Fire Department and the NW/EP might like to stage emergency drills in the condemned houses when they will be torn down. He hopes the Town might consider the request, or forward it to the proper authority. Further, Mr. Attick expressed reservations about the way CM White was selected. Some residents feel slighted that they learned about the appointment of a new Councilmember in the Bulletin after all was done. He asked if any of the candidates who had applied for the first vacancy were informed of the second vacancy and given a chance to express their interest.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said she believes they were not notified. The Council made the selection quickly because of time constraints and followed precedent when filling the second vacancy from the same candidate pool as the first vacancy. The Council is planning to formalize the process in an Ordinance, Council Rule or the Charter, so that all will know what to expect should another vacancy occur.

Mr. Attick also commented on the painting of a crosswalk at 62nd Avenue and Quebec Street, commended officers for enforcing the stop sign violations at the same location, and asked where the future emergency generators will be installed. NW/EP is contemplating placing another shed in the rear of the Town Center to store supplies. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said that the two generators will be placed on a pad behind the Town office. She does not know if there is enough room to accommodate another shed in the back.

Mr. Attick asked if the police would consider having an officer participate in dog walker training program, which aims to establish a line of communication with residents who regularly walk their dogs and may notice suspicious activities. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said she has discussed the program with the Chief.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*