



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Minutes Worksession December 7, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. Present were Mayor Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Chris Rasmussen, Councilmembers (CMs) Patricia Dennison, Maria Robles and Lynn White. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles and Clerk Kerstin Harper.

### 1. Mayor

**Announcements:** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that the meeting started late because the Councilmembers were receiving training on the Town's new email system. All emails to the official Town address can now be accessed remotely, obviating the need to forward them to a private email account.

**Calendar:** Stuart Eisenberg with the Hyattsville Community Development Corporation was scheduled for the December 21 worksession; County representatives for the January 4 worksession; and Maryland Milestones/ATHA's Executive Director Aaron Marcavitch for the February 10 Town Meeting.

**Minutes:** On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Rasmussen, November 16 worksession minutes were approved 5 to 0. The November 18 Town meeting minutes were distributed.

**Department reports:** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reported that she met with Chief Antolik to discuss starting a dog walkers program. Other neighboring communities have adopted such programs to establish a line of communication between dog walkers, who are in a position to report unusual or suspicious things, and the police. Any interested dog-walking residents may want to attend a meeting planned for early spring. MPT Rasmussen expressed reservations about the program, which he thought could be interpreted as encouraging neighbors to spy on each other. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said that a framework needs to be formulated that establishes guidelines on what should, and should not be reported. She sees it as a mobile extension of the Neighborhood Watch program.

CM White reported that the Public Works crew is making headway on collecting the leaf piles. MPT Rasmussen reported that all councilmembers have now created online email accounts with a town address, to which official correspondence will be directed. This enables the Town to respond to any Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, one of the components of an open government. CM Robles reported that the Code Department has dealt with residents placing their leaf piles into the street and with parking cars on unpaved surfaces. In response to MPT Rasmussen, CM Robles said she

believes that cars may not park on apron part of a driveway that is also part of a sidewalk. CM Dennison announced that she will be judging the residents' holiday decorations for best house, best yard and best overall. Anyone inclined to help with judging should contact her.

**Citizen comments:** Mayor Kulpa-Eddy received comments about getting notices for placing leaves into the street and a pothole on 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue. She noted that WSSC has provided asphalt for DPW to apply a temporary patch.

At 8:25 p.m., the Council took a 5 minute break.

Nothing was discussed under **2. Public Safety**, and **3. Public Works**.

## **5. Administration**

**Budget calendar:** TA Cowles distributed and discussed a draft calendar for the upcoming budget season. She said that the calendar closely follows the previous year's budget schedule. Budget goals, priorities and challenges will begin to be discussed at the December 21 worksession. She expects that the revenue picture will improve in the next budget cycle with the completion of the real property re-assessment in late December. On December 22, she will distribute the budget guidelines to department directors, who will then formulate their budget requests. The departments will submit budget requests in February and the Town Administrator will present her proposed FY 2017 budget on March 7. Thereafter the Council will discuss and modify the budget, which will be introduced at the April Town meeting and adopted at the May Town meeting. The budget process concludes with the adoption of amendments to the FY 2016 budget at the June Town meeting.

In response to councilmembers' questions, TA Cowles explained that she plans to use the budget format that has been existence for the last 5-10 years, but modify the process for the FY 2018 budget. Currently, the Town's budget is line-item based. She proposes to refocus the budget on long-term programs, goals and outcomes, which is becoming standard best practice among larger municipalities that are using advanced budgeting practices. If the Council wants to go in this direction, they may want to take time to formulate a strategic plan, which is an important component of creating a program-based budget. MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted that the Council has some familiarity with program-based budgeting from administering the vehicle replacement reserve funds.

**Urban Forest initiative:** MPT Rasmussen said TA Cowles has drafted a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit bids for developing an urban forest management plan for Berwyn Heights. The principle piece is an assessment of the tree canopy. The assessment can largely be accomplished with satellite imagery and additional spot checking on the ground to inventory existing tree species and determine the overall health of the urban forest. The study will also comprise policy recommendations on establishing a Shade Tree Board and its role in approving tree removals in Town.

In response to questions, TA Cowles said that the RFP includes an option to make an inventory of trees only on public property or the entire Town. Prospective vendors are predominantly larger arborist firms that have a separate tree consultancy wing. There are very few firms that only do consultant work. There are also some foundations that offer resources for tree management. In terms of the timeline, she plans to publish the RFP once the Council approves it with a submission date of January 8. After review, she would present the proposals to the Council at the January 19 worksession so the Council can select the consultant. The work could begin as early as February. The Council agreed to go forward

with publishing the RFP.

**IT upgrades:** MPT Rasmussen explained that the Town's computer network was a patchwork of different computers with different operating systems and software applications that did not allow for an efficient exchange of information. To correct this problem, as well as make it possible to remotely access workstations, easily retrieve records and make the system more secure, additional funds are required. TA Cowles provided information about implementing the upgrades and how to fund them.

TA Cowles said that most of the workstations have fairly new computers but there is lack of connectivity among them and the servers. This makes it difficult to exercise proper oversight over the departments and freely exchange information. In addition, there was a need to improve the backup of data to handle the storage of video from body cameras, among other things. The IT vendor rolled out the cloud-based MS Office 365 a couple of weeks ago. The additional cost of using this platform could be in part offset by the possibility of using VOIP telephony now. Another source of funding may be the cable reserve to cover, for example, the cost of creating a secure public hotspot that does not use I-Net fiber and other internet services that have a public educational benefit. Lastly, the Administration Department's capital budget and the General Fund balance are other sources for funding the needed IT upgrades.

In response to Mayor Kulpa-Eddy, TA Cowles said that the VOIP telephones would work pretty much as the current telephones, and designated staff would keep the cell phones they are now using. The Town would maintain a copper line in each building for fax service and emergencies. Once the emergency generators are operational, the VOIP phones will continue to work during a power outage. But the police and public works buildings would rely on the land lines. TA Cowles said she will also inquire how much of the cost associated with the IT upgrades are annual maintenance and if some aspects of the IT upgrades can be postponed.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy said it is a priority to get the network upgraded and have full functionality as soon as possible. She proposed to use some of the funds set aside for an economic development study this year for IT upgrades if needed. The economic development study could be postponed to the next fiscal year. CM Dennison moved to make the IT upgrades a funding priority. MPT Rasmussen seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0. TA Cowles will present a detailed funding proposal once she has confirmed what upgrades can be funded from the cable reserve.

**Priority 1 sidewalks closeout:** MPT Rasmussen said that the priority 1 sidewalks projects came in 2.5% over budget at a total cost of \$553,278 for reasons TA Cowles will explain further. TA Cowles said, to begin with, the timing of the project, which started in November 2014, caused it to last twice as long as initially planned. This resulted in an increase of engineering costs, charged by the hour, of around \$10,000. The bulk of the overage of \$13,000, however, comes from underestimating the cost of tying in driveways to the sidewalks on the 8800 and 8900 block of 60<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which has steeply sloping front yards.

TA Cowles suggested the Council consider reallocating the funding for the sidewalks project to take a larger share from the Public Safety Reserve fund, which is restricted to public safety projects, and less from the General Fund Balance and the Greenbelt Station Reserve, which are unrestricted in use. The repair of curbs and gutters the Council added onto the project cannot be financed with Public Safety Reserve funds and will probably need to be financed from the Infrastructure reserve.

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy agreed that as much money as possible should be taken from the Public Safety Reserve to pay for the priority 1 sidewalks. MPT Rasmussen moved to reallocate funding to take \$285,000 from the Public Safety Reserve, \$148,228 from the General Fund Balance and \$120,000 from the Greenbelt Station Reserve. CM Dennison seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Nothing was discussed under **5. Code Compliance** and **6. Parks and Recreation**.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

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Kerstin Harper