



Town of Berwyn Heights

5700 Berwyn Road
Berwyn Heights, MD 20740
Tel. (301) 474-5000
Fax (301) 474-5002

Minutes Worksession September 19, 2016

Executive Session (5:55 p.m. – 6:41 p.m.)

Present were Mayor Cheryl Jewitt, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmember (CMs) Patricia Dennison, Chris Rasmussen and Town Administrator (TA) Cowles. On a motion by CM Rasmussen and second by CM Dennison, the Council went into executive session to interview and appoint a candidate for a vacant seat on the Town Council. The interview was held and the vacant seat offered to Gerald Shields. CM Rasmussen moved and CM Dennison seconded to end the executive session.

Regular Meeting

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm. Present were Mayor Cheryl Jewitt, MPT Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Patricia Dennison and Chris Rasmussen. Also present were TA Jessica Cowles, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Victoria McGrath of McGrath Resources Group and citizens.

1. Presentation – McGrath Human Resources Group

Mayor Jewitt welcomed Victoria McGrath, CEO of McGrath Human Resources Group. Ms. McGrath said her consulting company has provided both public safety and human resources consulting services to 260 municipalities around the country. TA Cowles noted that the consulting firm was hired in a competitive bidding process. To date, the firm has completed a compensation and benefits study, drafted a revised classification and compensation system, (complete with revised job descriptions and performance evaluation system), and has updated the Town's personnel manual. Ms. McGrath has met with Town staff on multiple occasions and has had productive discussions.

Ms. McGrath gave an overview of the compensation study. The study compares the Town's wages and salaries to the external market and also makes comparisons within the Town's organizational structure. As the starting point, the consultant looked at the Town's current compensation schedule and how it was developed. Then interviews were conducted with all department directors and senior staff to learn about the types of positions existing in the departments, the related responsibilities and pay rates. This data was used to calculate an average compensation rate for each Town position. An average market compensation rate, or "compensation point," was determined from salary data collected for similar positions in 37 other municipalities and counties in the region, as well as from the Maryland Municipal League (MML).

The study found that the Town's salaries and wages have not kept up with the average compensation

rates prevailing in the market. Only 2 out of 20, or 10%, of the Town's benchmark positions can be considered to be within the acceptable minimum/ maximum market compensation range, while 13 positions, or 65%, are below the average market range. When evaluating all positions within the Town's salary structure to surrounding comparable municipalities, the majority of the salaries are significantly below the average market rate. Without adjustment, the schedule will fall further behind the market and make it difficult for the Town to attract and retain qualified candidates.

The consultant recommends that the salary schedule be adjusted annually on the basis of acceptable performance evaluations. It is further recommended to focus on those employees who are paid below the average market rate for their position, as it is the goal of a viable schedule to get all employees to the "position point." In addition, the salary schedule should be adjusted in January of each year for economic reasons, i.e. employees should receive a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to keep up with inflation.

In response to questions, Ms. McGrath explained that the compensation study did not take into account non-salary criteria in determining whether the Town's employees are paid appropriately. The municipalities and counties used for comparison, while generally larger, provide a viable reference point. Even if Berwyn Heights cannot match their salaries, the Town is competing with those cities in the labor market. McGrath consultants is not recommending to match the salaries of larger cities but only to increase salaries to reach the minimum market range.

Ms. McGrath briefly discussed the Town's benefit package. Based on the limited comparison data obtained from surrounding municipalities, it was found that Berwyn Heights is on par with health insurance, dental and vision benefits. The health insurance plan recently adopted by the Town has a low co-pay, which may lead to excessive use. It is recommended that the Town monitor usage and educate employees about possible insurance premium increases due to excessive use. The Town's annual leave policy is not in alignment with the market. It is recommended to allow annual leave to accrue from the date of hiring, enhance the schedule of annual leave for general employees and add a separate schedule for directors. It is also recommended to provide annual leave and sick leave to regular part-time employees on a pro-rated basis, and to revise the pay-out policy.

Ms. McGrath continued that the Town's personnel handbook was updated to bring it into compliance with current state and federal law. The Town's senior staff gave extensive input on revising the handbook. In addition, the consultant produced updated job descriptions that better reflect the functions performed by each department.

In response to questions from the Council, TA Cowles said that the financial impact of the proposed compensation changes can be covered by \$30,000 budgeted for COLA and merit increases in FY 2017. She proposes to award a 3% COLA this fall, but omit merit increases. Instead the remaining funds would be used to bring all employees, who are not currently paid the minimum market rate, to that point on January 1, 2017. To sustain this compensation schedule, it should be reviewed every year to ensure that pay rates remain within the market range. Those on the lower end of the spectrum could be paid higher increases than those who are already paid at or above the market rate. A system of paying within a range around the market compensation point is recommended because it gives the Town flexibility to adjust salary increases to revenue fluctuations due to economic conditions.

An executive summary of the study is available at the Town office.

2. Minutes

On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Rasmussen, the August 15 worksession minutes were approved 4 to 0.

3. Department Reports/ Citizen Comments

Mayor Jewitt reported that a number of cars were broken into during the last week and valuables stolen. She cautioned residents to lock their cars overnight and remove all valuables. She attended the Green Team's garden party last Saturday and received a tour of the various plots residents are renting for \$30 a year.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said she emailed a draft letter to the Council commenting on the FY 2018-2023 capital improvement plan of the Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS). She hopes the Council could briefly review it and approve it for submission. The deadline for comments is September 22. The letter supports building two (2) new middle schools in northern Prince George's County which are proposed to be funded within the PGCPS Capital Improvement Plan. Currently, middle schools in the area are very overcrowded, which led to Berwyn Heights Elementary School (BHES) sixth graders being housed in temporary classrooms in the BHES parking lot. Mayor Jewitt replied that she has not had time to review the CIP and would prefer to schedule a special meeting to discuss and approve the letter. This would also allow the Education Advisory Committee time to give input. The Council agreed to hold a special meeting on September 20, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy continued that she attended an Inter-Municipal Bikeways Working Group meeting, which promotes expanding the network of hiker-biker trails into an alternative commuting option. The only issue that might be of concern to residents is the proposed addition of lights and call boxes along the trails to make them safe and useable around the clock. The Group plans to set up a special meeting with police chiefs and public works directors from member municipalities to discuss infrastructure and trails maintenance issues. Members are encouraged to promote and participate in "Car Free Day" on September 22.

CM Rasmussen noted that residents are allowed to plant corn in their front yards. CM Dennison reported that the Public Works Department continues to pick up trash and recycling. Mayor Jewitt said she received a comment expressing appreciation that their trash cans are returned to the curb in an upright position after pickup.

Mike Attick asked if the Town has a copy of the street light plan NW/EP drew up a few years ago. MPT Kulpa-Eddy will send him a copy. He also asked if the Council is looking into building a new police station. Mayor Jewitt said she has discussed space needs with the Chief and will continue to discuss the police station with TA Cowles.

4. Action Items

Town Center rental extension requests: Mayor Jewitt said that there are 2 requests to extend the hours for renting the Town Center for a private party. Julia Umanzor requested a 1-hour extension past the normal 10:00 pm deadline, plus breakdown time for a family party with no alcohol served. Salvadore Pineda requested a 2-hour extension for a sweet sixteen party with alcohol served, plus breakdown time.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy expressed concern that these applications, which were submitted in July, take too long to come before the Council. If the event is only two weeks away it is hard for the applicant to

change their plans should the extension request be denied. TA Cowles said that multiple extension requests came in around the same time and were broken into two groups based on the date of the events. They are on the agenda today because the September 6 worksession was cancelled.

Mayor Jewitt said she generally hesitates to grant extensions because it is an imposition on the neighbors, especially if a D.J. is present and alcohol is served. CM Rasmussen proposed to extend both parties by 1 hour, plus 1 hour for breakdown, with the same restrictions as were attached to the previous extension: music must be turned down and no alcohol served after 10 p.m. TA Cowles said that Administrative Assistant Odoi is working on revising the rental policy, which will come before the Council within the next couple of months. Mayor Jewitt moved and CM Dennison seconded to grant a 1-hour extension for both parties. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Legislative dinner date: Mayor Jewitt said that the Council is requested to set a preferred date, and a backup date for the Town's annual legislative dinner with its delegates, so staff can reach out to the delegates and coordinate the dinner. November 29 was set as the preferred date, with December 1 as a backup date.

PGCMA legislative priorities: Mayor Jewitt said she attended the last PGCMA meeting, at which Airbnbs, retaining a lawyer for the PGCMA, and the PGCMA budget were discussed. All member municipalities were requested to submit up to 3 topics as legislative priorities. The Council agreed to submit: 1) Airbnbs and other short-term rentals; 2) better communication between utility companies regarding their work plans; and 3) breaking up PGCPs into smaller districts.

NW/EP trailer: Mayor Jewitt asked Mike Attick, Co-Chair of the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee, to provide the background on the acquisition and use of the emergency trailer. She would like the Town to develop a written policy on how the trailer can be used.

Mr. Attick said the Neighborhood Watch was formed in 1995 following the murder of a student near Lake Artemesia. The September 11 attacks and a tornado touchdown in College Park led to the establishment of an emergency preparedness committee and purchase of the emergency trailer by the Town in early 2003. Since then the trailer has been used to help keep the Town government and Senior Center operating during power outages, as well as for storm cleanups and training purposes.

Originally, Public Works was charged with maintaining and moving the trailer, while the Committee was charged with acquiring and maintaining the equipment in the trailer. One recurring issue has been who may drive the trailer to an out-of-town event during the weekend, when DPW crews are not available. A former Councilmember researched the issue and found that NW/EP members could drive the trailer, if the Council approved the trip. NW/EP makes it a point to always inform the Town when the trailer leaves Berwyn Heights and to have a member go out with the trailer. The Berwyn Heights NW/EP is on the FEMA call list, and has been used as local backup during national emergencies.

In discussion, the Council made the following points: 1) confirm whether NW/EP's participation in a FEMA call list is governed by an MOU through Prince George's County; 2) clarify whether or how NW/EP members are covered by the Town's insurance when they take the trailer on the road; 3) define the purposes for which the trailer may be taken out of Berwyn Heights; and 4) clarify policies and agreements governing the movement of the trailer, for review and formal adoption by the Council.

Mr. Attick was requested to ask the NW/EP Committee to draft a set of the policies and procedures for

the use of the trailer. TA Cowles will check with LGIT about insuring NW/EP members.

Legislative calendar: Mayor Jewitt reviewed a proposed timeline for adopting impending legislation.

- Adopt new pay plan and employee handbook at October 12 Town meeting;
- Amend *Ordinance 120 – Rental Housing* at the December 14 Town meeting;
- Amend *Ordinance 122 – Urban Forest* by the March 8, 2017 Town meeting.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy asked to schedule the adoption of a Charter Amendment redefining the Town's boundaries before the end of this year. CM Rasmussen said in order to adopt the Urban Forest Ordinance, it must first be determined if a new Shade Tree Board will be established and how it would be staffed.

Strategic planning workshop – stakeholder interviews: TA Cowles explained that the consultants facilitating the Town Council's strategic planning workshop plan to conduct interviews with 5 community stakeholders prior to the workshop. These could include community leaders, business owners, County officials, and Town staff, who would be asked about the Town's strengths and weaknesses and emerging opportunities and threats. The Council selected the following interviewees and alternates: Beer Barn as business owners (X-Tra Fuels); Danielle Glaros as non-Town elected official (Judith Davis); Ache Corrillo (Katie Curtis); Maria Robles (Beth Brittan-Powell); Brad Jewitt (Dick Ahrens); and Sharmila Bhatia, if another backup is needed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*