



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Minutes Worksession July 10, 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, Christopher Rasmussen, and Gerald Shields. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief Kenneth Antolik, Clerk Kerstin Harper, BHHC member Lee Fuerst, and NW/EP member Mike Attick.

### 1. Action Items

**Maryland Milestones/ ATHA liaison appointment:** Mayor Jewitt welcomed Lee Fuerst, Berwyn Heights Historical Committee member and liaison to the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA). Ms. Fuerst said that she has served with the BHHC since September 2012 and has been the BHHC's ATHA liaison for the last couple of years. ATHA's executive director Aaron Marcavitch requested that all member cities and towns notify him of whom they appointed as their liaison to serve on ATHA's Governing Board.

In response to questions, Ms. Fuerst said she is unsure of the length of the term she would serve. Clerk Harper said she believes it might be 3 years. Ms. Fuerst also stated that she does not serve on the Inter-Municipal Bikeways Working Group affiliated with ATHA but is involved with preservation of historic homes and heritage tourism projects. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Shields, the Council voted 5 to 0 to appoint Ms. Fuerst as the Town's ATHA liaison.

**Humvee acquisition and risk management matrix:** Chief Antolik gave a presentation on the common risks faced by the Town, and measures taken to minimize those risks. Those risks include severe storms, flooding, excessive heat, snow and ice, tornados, and earthquakes, as well as rail accidents or other manmade risks. Berwyn Heights Police seeks to manage those risks by: 1) having a formal emergency preparedness plan; 2) having supplies and equipment ready to respond to emergencies; 3) training with other Town departments to be prepared; and 4) communicating with allied agencies in emergencies. The overall goal in managing risk and preparing for emergencies is to be able to respond very quickly once an event has occurred to minimize injuries and property damage.

Chief Antolik said that the acquisition of the Humvee would help his department respond to emergencies, which is its primary intended use. It would not be used for regular patrols. Berwyn Heights' Humvee application has been approved by US Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), and the vehicle has been brought to Berwyn Heights. It still requires tags, insurance, markings, lights and sirens to be road ready. TA Cowles added that the cost of insurance for the vehicle is not likely to exceed \$1,000. The BHPD FY 2017 expenses are expected to come in \$42,000 under budget, demonstrating BHPD's ability to control expenses.

The Council discussed the Humvee acquisition. MPT Kulpa-Eddy explained her objections, including failure to provide a comprehensive cost estimate and cost-benefit analysis. She believes the cost of operating the Humvee may be underestimated and an explanation of why this particular vehicle is needed to address risks the Town is likely to face has not been provided. She thinks the Town already has adequate equipment to respond to emergencies and money would be better spent on other police needs.

CM Rasmussen said he remains concerned about the perception that results from police driving a military-style vehicle around Town and the broader ‘search & rescue’ mission it implies for the BHPD. CM Shields said that a Humvee does not comport with Town’s image of neighborly charm but gives the police more flexibility in responding to emergencies. Mayor Jewitt said she remains in favor of keeping the Humvee to maximize the Town’s capacity to respond to emergencies when outside agencies are not able to come to the Town’s aid. Residents, whom she polled on the matter, supported the acquisition with one exception. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said the residents she spoke with thought it is a waste of money.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to only insure the Humvee and not expend any money on outfitting it until the Council has had a broader discussion on how this vehicle fits into the mission of the BHPD by October 1, 2017. CM Dennison seconded. The motion passed 3 to 2, with CM Rasmussen and Shields opposed.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy further moved that, in the future, such equipment not be acquired without the Council having first made a decision on it. CM Rasmussen seconded. In discussion, CM Shields objected that this may prevent the police from obtaining needed equipment in short order. MPT Kulpa-Eddy clarified that only vehicles, particularly those of military issue, would be covered by this motion. The motion carried 4 to 1, with Mayor Jewitt opposed. TA Cowles was asked to provide more detailed cost estimates of insuring, outfitting and maintaining the Humvee.

***Branchville Road sidewalk – letter of support:*** TA Cowles explained that the cities of Berwyn Heights, College Park and Greenbelt agreed to cooperate in working with the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), SHA and Prince George’s County to make infrastructure improvements along the Route 193 corridor. The City of Greenbelt is particularly interested in getting sidewalks built in front of 5600 and 5700 addresses on Branchville Road to connect the sidewalks from the Greenbelt Station development with those along Route 193. As some of the properties are within Berwyn Heights’ boundary, the Town has been asked to send a letter to MDOT asking about funding opportunities for completing the missing section of sidewalks. A draft letter has been provided for the Council’s approval.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy suggested that the businesses, PG Scrap and the Concrete Institute, be notified of the letter. The Council agreed to send the letter as drafted.

## **2. Discussion Items**

***Emergency trailer repairs:*** Mayor Jewitt said that the NW/EP Committee is in the process of taking inventory of the contents of the emergency trailer and has asked the Town to make repairs to the roof. TA Cowles said that a Public Works employee has fixed the leaks in the roof, and remediated the mold inside the trailer. Mayor Jewitt said that trailer maintenance responsibilities will be clarified in the Standard Operating Procedures that are currently being drafted.

***Climate Pledge:*** Mayor Jewitt said that the Green Team has asked the Town Council to take the climate pledge that “Sustainable Maryland” asked its member municipalities to consider. CM Rasmussen explained, following the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords, a number of governors and mayors across the United States have pledged their continued support for the Paris

Accords, which commits signatories to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate global warming. He would advise against taking up the pledge because it would be seen as a partisan political act, regardless of how the Council votes. The Council has recently adopted a green purchasing policy that essentially acts on the goals expressed in the climate pledge. The Council agreed and did not take an action.

***Next Door app:*** CM Rasmussen said that some 230 Berwyn Heights residents are subscribed to the *Next Door* application, which provides a way for neighbors to connect with each other by social media. It mostly serves as a community bulletin board where people advertise anything from lost kittens to free furniture. However, sometimes issues are raised that have policy implications. He is concerned that residents think this is an official channel where they can voice ideas or grievances, but to which the Town fails to respond. He suggested that the Town monitor the site for content relevant for Council consideration.

In discussion, Councilmembers said that *Next Door* is just one of many social media platforms that residents use to discuss community issues. The Town would be hard pressed to monitor all of them or decide which one should be official. However, the Town may want to think about a social media strategy and, at some point, hire staff to engage with residents over social media.

### **3. Minutes**

The Council reviewed the June 19 worksession minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Shields, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

### **4. Announcements/ Department Reports**

Mayor Jewitt reported on attending her 2nd MML convention, attending the Prince George's Police Chiefs' Association meeting where Detective Unger and Police Clerk Iris Cruz were honored as officer and employee of the year, meeting the new BHES principal Amanda Alerich, and Channel 4 carrying a story about the July 2 house fire in Berwyn Heights and the ensuing altercation between two fire fighters.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy announced an upcoming Town Hall meeting on the County's zoning rewrite effort and reported on her activities at the MML convention. She again carried the Town's flag in the Parade of Flags, using the tag line 'Berwyn Heights: winning hearts since 1896.'

CM Rasmussen thanked Councilmembers and residents for their words of sympathy regarding the house fire that occurred at one of his rental properties. The fire was caused by a gas grill that was used on a wooden deck. CM Rasmussen also reported on the MML convention, where he conversed with County Councilmember Glaros about Berwyn Heights' recently revised Rental Housing Ordinance, and witnessed a car fire in the hotel parking garage. He received citizen comments on barking dogs, enforcement of bamboo regulations, and upgrading the amperage at a residential property.

CM Dennison reported that she attended the MML convention where she celebrated her birthday. CM Shields announced the Boys & Girls Club ongoing fall soccer registration, a vacant secretary position on the Executive Board, and former Boys & Girls Club leaders Shinita and Eric Hemby moving to Canada. CM Shields also reported on a meeting with the new BHES Principal, as well as his continued work on a Town organization policy and a citizen survey of Town services. He may seek advice from the University of Maryland's Institute for Governmental Service.

## **5. Citizen Comments**

Mayor Jewitt received comments on bamboo enforcement, barking dogs, trash collection, a new used clothing container in the Staples parking lot, on-street parking issues and placement of stop lines and stop signs. MPT Kulpa-Eddy received comments on the improper placement of stop lines and crosswalks and a dead tree at Ruatan Street and Berwyn Road. She also requested a memorandum explaining what will be done to correct the stop lines and stop signs issue, and information on when the Council authorized the posting of various school zone speed limit signs with the 'photo enforced' message, in particular one such sign in the 8900 block of 63rd Avenue.

## **6. Town Council Schedule**

The Council reviewed the calendar. A WSSC representative is confirmed to present at the Four Cities meeting on July 26.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk