



# Town of Berwyn Heights

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## Minutes Worksession March 5, 2018

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, Clerk Kerstin Harper and Dana Brown, Parkdale High School Community Resource Advocate.

Mayor Jewitt made changes to the agenda as guest presenter Dana Brown was delayed.

### **3. Minutes (discussed out of order)**

On a motion by CM Shields, seconded by CM Dennison, the February 20 worksession minutes were approved 5 to 0. The February 14 Town meeting minutes were distributed.

### **2. Discussion Items (discussed out of order)**

**Strategic Plan update:** TA Cowles provided an update on the strategic plan adopted by the Town Council in fall of 2016. The strategic plan is broken down into a series of action items that allow for a step-by-step implementation of the Council's long-term priorities.

#### **1. Strategic Issue-Infrastructure/ Public Safety:**

Short-term measures to improve facility adequacy and security have been largely achieved. Outstanding tasks include the creation of an electronic archive from the Town's paper records; security improvements around the Town Center; and development of an RFP for an architectural engineering study to create better work spaces for the Administration, Code and Police Departments.

#### **2. Strategic Issue-Infrastructure:**

The goal of creating a system to bring Town roads up to standard has been achieved. An assessment of the condition of Town roads and a schedule for their repair was completed late last year. Phase I of road renovations is expected to start in the summer of 2018.

#### **3. Strategic Issue-Community Engagement:**

Efforts to improve communications with residents and businesses are ongoing. There are plans for surveying residents and businesses on their communication preferences. Meanwhile, the Town continues to use newsletters, the website and social media to reach residents. TA Cowles will try to obtain the results of a Green Team online survey that included communications preferences.

Efforts to increase residents' participation in Town activities are ongoing. The Town is publicizing important information in English and Spanish and is reaching out to local schools.

#### **4. Strategic Issue-Town Aesthetics:**

The goal of increasing the tree canopy and maintaining species diversity is partially complete. The Town worked with Pepco on a tree replanting plan, and is educating residents on the value of protecting trees

with the help of the Green Team/ Shade Tree Board. This year's budget has funds to purchase GIS software to manage the tree canopy as well as to perform tree maintenance work.

Beautification efforts are ongoing. A "Citizen of the year" plaque has been installed at Pop's Park, New plantings are planned for the Town entrance at Pontiac Street and Kenilworth Avenue and a design for new welcome signs is needed.

#### 1. Strategic Issue-Economic Development:

The goal of implementing the County Sector Plan for the commercial corridor along Route 193 has made progress in a couple of areas. The Town filed an application with the Maryland Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) for *sustainable communities* designation, which will provide access to new funding sources and expertise. The Town is also working with Greenbelt and College Park on an Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel (ULI TAP) to develop actionable recommendations for making improvements along the Route 193 commercial corridor. The owners of Beltway Plaza Mall made a recent \$1,000 contribution to funding the Panel. The need for further economic development technical assistance may be determined based on the results of the ULI TAP.

#### 1. Parkdale High School funding request

Mayor Jewitt welcomed Dana Brown, who heads the *Girl Power* mentoring program at Parkdale High School and had contacted Mayor Jewitt with a donation request. Mayor Jewitt briefed the Council on the program at the last worksession but could not answer all their questions. Ms. Brown was invited to give an overview of the mentoring program.

Ms. Brown explained that the program started 3 years ago with a request from a support group for 24<sup>9th</sup> grade Latina girls transitioning from middle school to Parkdale High School. Since then the program has grown to over 60 participants, mostly through word of mouth, and is open to all girls. The program aims to engage underachieving and at-risk students. Participants meet for 18 bi-weekly sessions focusing on self-improvement and acquiring life skills. As an incentive for self-improvement, three \$2,000 scholarships are offered for attending college or other schools of continued education to the most improved student in the areas of 1) academic studies, 2) school attendance and 3) behavior/ attitude.

In response to questions, Ms. Brown said that this is the first year in which scholarships are awarded. Donations are deposited in an account managed by Parkdale's bookkeeper, and released to the winners upon successful graduation and receipt of an acceptance letter from an accredited school of their choice. Girls who are average students are equally eligible to compete for a scholarship. Ms. Brown did not have information at hand as to whether Berwyn Heights' students currently participate in the program. CM Rasmussen said he hopes the Town's support for this program is a first step in building a better relationship with Parkdale High School, and making it a more attractive option for Berwyn Heights students. Ms. Brown invited Councilmembers to visit Parkdale High School, and to participate in an advisory committee that works to build a support network and anchor the school more firmly in the community.

After Ms. Brown's departure, the Council further discussed the value of the program. MPT Kulpa-Eddy, CM Rasmussen and Mayor Jewitt expressed support. CM Shields was skeptical that the program would benefit Berwyn Heights students. The Council voted 4 - 0 - 1, with CM Shields abstaining, to make a one-time donation of \$2,000 to the *Girl Power* program.

#### 2. Discussion Items (continued)

**Town Administrator FY 2019 budget presentation:** TA Cowles provided line item spreadsheets of the proposed FY 2019 General Fund and Public Safety Taxing District (PSTD) budgets, as well memoranda

summarizing important budget changes. The budget is focused on funding the Council's priorities as laid out in the 2016 strategic plan, as follows:

- \$1,238,000 from the Infrastructure Reserve and incoming Highway User Revenues (HUR) to fund Phase I of road repairs, comprising those sections of road rated "poor."
- 26% increase in PRECA funding to improve community engagement, including funds for a concert series, Green Team environmental education and tree preservation efforts, and Police Department community and business outreach activities.
- Additional funds for enhancing the tree canopy through replanting efforts.
- \$30,000 reprogrammed from FY 2018 for economic development activities. Berwyn Heights, College Park and Greenbelt are partnering in an Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel, which will develop actionable recommendations for improvement along the Route 193 commercial corridor.
- \$40,000 reprogrammed from FY 2018 for an architectural engineering study of Town facilities to improve work spaces for the Administration, Code and Police Department staff.
- 1 ½ % COLA plus merit increases, ranging from 0% to 4% based on the annual performance evaluations, as well as across-the-board increases in the conferences & training appropriations to enhance opportunities for professional development of Town staff and remain competitive with surrounding jurisdictions.
- Capital purchases comprising \$30,000 for Berwyn Heights' contribution to a new Four Cities street sweeper; \$18,000 for the replacement of the dump body of a Public Works dump truck; \$25,000 for the replacement of the service bay doors at the Public Works yard.

In response to Councilmembers questions, TA Cowles said that the budget increases are predicated on an expected 8.2% increase in real property tax receipts. Income tax receipts are budgeted conservatively at \$375,000. A 10% increase in Public Works salaries is mostly due to raising the hours of a part-time administrative assistant from 15 to 30 hours per week, plus a newly mandated paid sick leave for part-time employees. The salary increases also reflect the first full year of bringing employees up to the minimum rate in the new pay plan.

***Animal Ordinance:*** MPT Kulpa-Eddy distributed two versions of Ordinance 101 – Animals. Version I retains the Town's authority to enforce animal violations, i.e., to write citations, assess fines and impound animals. Version II was developed based on the Council's conversation with Rodney Taylor, Chief of the Prince George's County Animal Services Division, and hands enforcement authority over to the County with some exceptions: the Town's Code officers may continue to serve as initial point of contact to determine if a complaint has merit before it is turned over to the County, and Police would respond to any immediate threats to health or safety in connection with animals.

TA Cowles reported that the Police and Code Department reviewed the Ordinance and gave feedback. The Police Department was skeptical it could enforce a provision mandating that cats must be confined to an owner's property. The Code Department expressed willingness to take animal training offered by the County, but did not think the Town has the resources to enforce animal violations. Municipalities that exercise this authority usually have a full-time animal control officer, a specially equipped vehicle for transporting animals, and a temporary holding facility.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy recommended the Council move forward by introducing version II, which acknowledges that the Town does not currently have the ability to take on full-fledged enforcement of animal violations. For introduction the Town still needs to obtain the County's book of standards for the proper care of domestic animals to be referenced in the Ordinance.

CM Rasmussen had several suggestions for improving the Ordinance, including: 1) retaining the detailed animal welfare standards currently in the Ordinance in addition to referencing the book of standards, while noting that the stricter standard shall apply; 2) having a definition for animal nuisance behavior other than uttering of loud noise exceeding a specified decibel level; 3) adding an option for a Town code officer to leave a verbal notice for animal violations in addition to a written notice; and 4) replacing the term “disposing” with “processing” of an animal.

## **5. Announcements/ Department Reports/ Citizen Comments**

Mayor Jewitt regretted that some residents experienced power outages during a recent wind storm, and thanked first responders for taking care of downed wires on 60<sup>th</sup> Avenue. As a member of the MML community outreach committee, she is working on increasing participation in the “If I were Mayor” contest. She also enjoyed talking with residents at the recent potluck event.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that the Police checked on her welfare during the windstorm; that WSSC plans a sewer repair and rehabilitation project between June 2018 and June 2019, which will affect lines on 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue between Ruatan and Tecumseh Streets; and that she attended a County Council District 3 get-together hosted by Dannielle Glaros. A Department of Public Works & Transportation (DPW&T) transit vision plan is being developed on which residents can comment via an online survey or by attending a public hearing. County Council Chair Glaros will hold a Town Hall meeting on April 11, where citizens can speak with representatives from many County agencies.

CM Rasmussen reported he lost a tree in his back yard during the wind storm. Last week he met with Code Supervisor Glass and TA Cowles to discuss how to handle property owners who are slow to come into compliance. The Code Department developed a new refuse violation notice that can be attached to a bin, with copies for the Code and Public Works Department, as part of an ongoing effort to improve the refuse and recycling disposal process. Business licensing will be transferred from the Administration to the Code Department, increasing the salary expenses for the Department. The next Council may have to undertake a couple of minor Ordinance revisions to clarify snow removal responsibilities on sidewalks and to remove the copy-righted word “PODs” from Ordinance 104.

CM Shields announced an upcoming CERT training workshop and reported that the County called up CERT teams to respond to an apartment complex in Suitland, where walls had collapsed during the wind storm. He continues to accept comments on plans to install bike lanes along Campus Drive (formerly Paint Branch Parkway) between Cpl. Frank Scott Drive and Kenilworth Avenue, which he will forward to the appropriate County official. Town organizations are encouraged to comment on the revised organization policy he recently distributed. A Knitting Circle, which came into being last year has ceased to meet. A Needle Arts Society operating in College Park might be possible an alternative.

## **5. Town Council Schedule**

The Council reviewed the schedule of events and activities. The Budget Worksession was confirmed as being changed from March 24 to Friday, March 23.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk