



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Jodie Kulpa-Eddy

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Christopher Brittan-Powell (Mayor Pro Tem)
Shinita Hemby
Faustino Menjivar
Jason W. Papanikolas

Work Session Minutes June 21, 2022| 7:00 p.m. Council Chamber

Call to Order

Mayor Jodie Kulpa-Eddy called the meeting to order at 7PM. Also present were Mayor Pro Tempore Chris Brittan-Powell, Councilmember Shinita Hemby, and Councilmember Jason Papanikolas. CM Faustino Menjivar had an excused absence. Also present were Town Manager Laura Allen and Town Clerk Melanie Friesen. Present were Carter Reitman, Olivia Ceccarelli-McGonigal, and Ashlee Green from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Ray Smith for the Senior Center. Residents from the Berwyn Heights community were also present.

Approval of the Agenda

CM Papanikolas moved to approve the agenda. MPT Brittan-Powell seconded. After no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

1. Mayor

a. Announcements

MPT Brittan-Powell shared wishes for a speedy recovery for Mike Attick.

b. Presentations: Sustainable Communities Renewal

Mr. Carter Reitman reviewed the Sustainable Communities program. It started in 2010 as a part of a series of revitalization designations that began in 1995. Maryland incentivizes revitalization by making money available to specific localities. He differentiated Sustainable Communities from Sustainable Maryland Certified. Sustainable Maryland Certified is an environmental program developed by the Maryland Municipal League and the University of Maryland, whereas the Sustainable Communities designates geographical areas for State resources. The Sustainable Communities Act encourages local governments to identify areas of need and create an action plan. The action plan is good for 5 years and then it sunsets and needs to be renewed. DHCD is the lead agency, but there are several other state agencies involved such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources. Seeking the Sustainable Communities designation grants access to a toolbox of State resources from hundreds to millions of dollars, depending on the projects. For some of the programs the Sustainable Communities designation is required to access funding, while for others it simply makes the Town more competitive. Mr. Reitman reviewed the renewal process, which involves reviewing the previous application and action plan and then completing a comprehensive action plan by the sunset date (February 2023). He further explained that the action plan should be developed by a workgroup comprised of individuals from staff, elected officials, and community members. MPT Brittan-Powell asked if it was possible to work with other communities on the designation. Mr.

Reitman explained that yes, the Sustainable Communities designation does not have to incorporate all of the municipal boundaries but can cross boundaries with cooperation between communities, and that in Prince George's County the most common partner for municipalities is the County itself. Ms. Olivia Ceccarelli-McGonigal further explained that if partnering with another municipality, there would need to be shared outcomes and authorizing documentation from both partners. Mr. Reitman shared slides of projects that have been funded by the programs available. He also shared that there is another opportunity available to Berwyn Heights based on its location within the Beltway. Ms. Ashlee Green gave more information about the National Capital Strategic Economic Development Fund, which can be used for façade improvement, pocket parks, sidewalks, and other Capital Improvement Projects. Mr. Reitman explained the process of creating the action plan, which is the integral piece of the renewal process. He then opened the floor for questions. TM Allen stated that it was her understanding that the renewal process did not require the Town to start from scratch, but rather develop a new plan based on the current plan. This was confirmed by Mr. Reitman. MPT Brittan-Powell asked if this was akin to Buildable Communities and asked about collaboration with other departments within the State. Ms. Green further explained the funding process. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy noted that many of the projects presented were on private property and inquired if funding was available for public spaces. Ms. Green replied that yes, funding is available for public spaces and stated that they have helped fund new buildings and expansions for municipal buildings, police stations, and more. CM Hemby asked about the construction process. Ms. Green replied that the municipality controls the construction process. MPT Brittan-Powell asked about residential façade improvement. Ms. Green shared that a program could be set up to either target certain geographical locations in Town or set up on a first-come, first-served basis. TM Allen asked if the Town would need to provide matching funds for a program. Ms. Green responded that it isn't necessary, but it is something that can show that the municipality is committed to the program. Ms. Ceccarelli-McGonigal further explained that something like a façade improvement program for private property would need to be entirely public, on the outside of a home so that the impact is felt by the whole community. TM Allen asked about receiving technical support in the process of the renewal. Mr. Reitman shared that each municipality has different capacities and will produce a different product and that support is available. TM Allen asked if the DHCD would be able to help staff community meetings and provide document translation. Ms. Ceccarelli-McGonigal explained that translation is not in their budget, but that they could talk in-house about the possibility of helping staff meetings. Resident Meg Miller asked more about the possibility of using these funds to finance new municipal buildings, including looking for real estate and feasibility studies. Ms. Green replied that they don't do feasibility studies but they can help fund many parts of a large project. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy stated that the Historical Committee was working to put together information for homeowners of historic homes and wanted to know if DHCD worked with historic residences. Ms. Green shared that it is a different department, the Historic Trust, that handles those requests but that all funding from their office is reviewed by the Historic Trust.

c. Calendar

TC Friesen reviewed the items on the Town Calendar. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy shared that she is going to be attending the Police Luncheon on June 22nd. She will also be attending a County public hearing on the 28th regarding a business on Balleg Avenue that is interested in digging a well instead of hooking up to WSSC. . Resident Dave Wolfinger asked about the intended use and stated there are reasonable exceptions that

could be supported by the Town. Ray Smith added that there is a Thursday game time for Seniors. Angie Wolfinger added the kickoff concert at Lake Artemesia.

d. News from the Town Manager: GFOA Conference Report

TM Allen shared about the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. She attended their conference in Austin and shared that she is on the board and is president-elect. She added information about trash pick-up changes triggered by Juneteenth and the completed light replacement work on the pedestrian bridge. She shared the Town Center air conditioner is repaired. Additionally, the ARPA review committee has approved the first application for residential relief. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy asked if there are any ideas from the GFOA meeting the TM would like to implement. She shared about wanting to provide phishing awareness, noting that a Town employee received a phishing attempt the same day. There will be an all-employee meeting on July 1 to give opportunity for staff to check in and receive information about the healthcare offerings. MPT Brittan-Powell asked about disparity in treatment and resources of Town departments. He asked about the competitiveness of wages within the Town, and within departments themselves. TM Allen explained the process of a Town-wide salary survey.

e. Citizen Comments

Resident Meg Miller spoke about making the presenters at the previous worksession wait and appreciation that the presenters for this meeting were allowed to go first. She also encouraged that there be training among all the staff, not just department heads. She expressed interest in the presentation on Sustainable Communities and the possibilities it could bring for the community. Ms. Miller also asked about the application renewal process. TM Allen responded that there was a workgroup put together for the 2017 application and she imagines that something similar will happen for the renewal application.

Resident Dave Wolfinger expressed his frustration with a lack of stop sign enforcement. He also expressed dismay over the condition of the utility poles and the communication lines that are cut, tied, and left hanging on the pole.

Council discussed Mr. Wolfinger's comment on stop sign enforcement. CM Hemby stated that the police cannot take the position that they aren't going to do anything. MPT Brittan-Powell stated concern about a lack of accountability in the Police Department regarding enforcement. He would like to see accountability on the issue and see data about enforcement and to see if other comparable communities have data on their enforcement. TM Allen reminded Council that there is a grant for a traffic engineering study of all of the Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights task force recommendations, starting July 1st.

Resident Angie Wolfinger asked that whatever traffic enforcement is done for stop signs also be enforced for cyclists.

Resident Ray Smith also expressed concern over the behavior of some cyclists in the community. He stated concerns about drivers ignoring the one way signage and that he'd like to see a large "Do Not Enter" painted on the street at the entrance of the 6200 block of Seminole St.

f. MML Conference Report Out from each attendee

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy shared that all the Councilmembers attended the Maryland Municipal League (MML) Conference in Ocean City on June 12-15th. TM Allen also attended and TC Friesen attended Staff Expo Day. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy volunteered at the registration desk on Sunday and Monday. She attended the session on police reform,

which included the recognition the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights has been repealed, the creation of the County level Police Accountability Board, the mandatory use of body worn cameras, additional reporting requirements, and the change in the definition of “use of force”, from reasonable to “necessary and proportional”. She attended several other sessions including Public Speaking for Municipal Officials, the “Small Towns” discussion forum (which addressed the Maryland technical assistance program for ARPA and hiring and recruitment of public employees), the Maryland Mayors Association luncheon, the Prince George’s County Municipal Association breakfast, and the gubernatorial candidates forum. She also attended sessions on collecting Personal Property Taxes, which will have changes in 2023 and may have implications for the Town’s revenue. She attended the “Mental Health and Public Safety” workshop and learned about the Hyattsville employees “Mental Wellness Check-in” program. Finally, she shared that she attended the COVID-19 lessons learned session, where most municipalities reported a significant impact on services but not much impact with revenue. It also covered transitioning to a new normal in post-COVID times.

MPT Brittan-Powell shared that this was his first MML conference in person and found that it was very helpful to speak with vendors and other municipalities of similar sizes. He valued the conversations and connections highly. He also commented on his difficulties with finding his records for certification in the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance.

CM Hemby stated that this was her first conference and she was pleased to see the Mayor volunteering. She thanked TM Allen for helping guide her throughout the building. She took the first-time attendee class which introduced her to new Councilmembers from other municipalities. She took several Academy core courses including classes on Effective Meetings, the Open Meetings Act (OMA), Risk Management, Ethics, and Municipal Budgeting. She felt that the OMA and Risk Management courses were very eye opening, but that the Budgeting course attempted to convey too much information for one class. She also attended a course on Code Compliance/Enforcement that she was appreciative of.

CM Papanikolas attended an HR class on recruiting the next generation. He shared that the new generation entering the workforce is values oriented and want to live the values of the community that they work for. He continued, stating that everyone is having the same difficulties in filling positions in Public Works and Police Departments. He also attended the Economic Update and shared that all the economists agreed that we are going to have a recession in the next year and that inflation will continue on the current trend for a while. He shared that he attended the “Large City” forum, which Berwyn Heights is not, but found that they were discussing the same topics that small communities were: hiring, police reform, and ARPA compliance. He also attended the “We Can’t Do That” session on Code Compliance/Enforcement as well as the Snap session that the OAG (Office of Attorney General) put on about use of force investigations as well as the cyber security roundtable. CM Papanikolas and TM Allen discussed training options for Town Staff on cyber security.

TM Allen shared that she is also a graduate of the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance and that she volunteered as well. She attended the OMA and Ethics sessions. She attended the department directors and board of directors meetings for MML as well as the Snap session on the Sustainable Maryland silver level. She had good conversations with engineering firms whom might be good partners in working on stormwater issues through ARPA. She attended the economic outlook session as well and highlighted that interest rate changes take 12-18 months to ripple through the economy. She also attended the social media session and found it informative. She

highlighted that if elected officials want to have a media page that features their elected positions it should be separate from their personal page.

TC Friesen attended the Staff Expo Day and went to a session on Equity in Climate Resilience, the Maryland Municipal Clerks Association luncheon, the Snap session presented by the OAG and the Ethics core class.

2. Code Compliance

CM Hemby shared that during MML, she received a call and reviewed the process that was undertaken for addressing the complaint. She encouraged residents to share or call staff regarding code compliance issues or to reach out to her.

3. Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs

a. Seniors Club Town Center Use Agreement Renewal

CM Papanikolas reviewed that the Seniors Club joint use agreement is due for renewal. The language proposed is identical to the agreement that has been in place since 1987. Mr. Ray Smith thanked the Town Council and Government on behalf of the Seniors. He stated that he is not aware of any changes that need to be made to the agreement and would like to see it extended for two years with a one year extension. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy inquired about the status of the G. Love Room, asking to clarify if it was considered part of the Senior Center or if it was a separate Town facility. TM Allen stated that the G. Love Room is part of the Town facilities as the room is managed and reserved by the Town and not the Seniors. Mr. Smith also stated that the Love Room is not part of the Senior Center, though they might use it from time to time if it is open and available. TM Allen suggested a 5 year renewal instead of a 3 year renewal with extensions. Language in the agreement will be updated to reflect that the status of the G. Love Room and for a 5-year agreement. Mr. Smith asked for confirmation that the Seniors will still have access to the computers in the G. Love Room when it is not reserved. Finally, Mr. Smith shared that the last meeting of the summer for the Seniors Club will be on June 28th.

4. Public Safety

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy shared that the Primary election is July 19th with early voting from July 7th-14th. Only registered Republicans and Democrats are able to vote unless there is a non-partisan race in the voters district. The closest early voting location is the College Park Community Center and the closest drop box for mail-in ballots is the Berwyn Heights Community Center.

a. Greenbelt Road Corridor Plan Committee Member

Mayor Kulpa-Eddy reviewed that the recent Town election has left the current Greenbelt Road taskforce with only one of two representative spots filled. MPT Brittan-Powell shared some background. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy asked what remains for the taskforce to complete. There was discussion about refilling the position or waiting until the next phase of the project. Generally, it was agreed to leave the position unfilled.

5. Public Works (no report)

6. Administration

MPT Brittan-Powell inquired about the possible use and future discussion of hiring a lobbyist. CM Papanikolas shared that his conversations have led him to understand that most small municipalities engage a lobbyist if there are several projects they are seeking funding for at a State level. He shared it costs about \$3000/month for the length of the legislative session. Resident Meg Miller shared her positive experiences within her work.

TC Friesen read a question from Joan Hayden sent by email requesting a copy of the MML material that Council received. Mayor Kulpa-Eddy stated that if the information is public, we can post a link to requested information. Ms. Hayden also asked about the welcome packet and if older residents can get a copy of the package as well. CM Hemby shared that the welcome package will be delivered to all residents of the community to begin with.

7. Adjournment

CM Papanikolas moved to adjourn the meeting. CM Hemby seconded. After no discussion, the motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 9:31 PM.