CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

swrideout@aol.com

 May 10, 2017

Your City Council met on Monday to undertake a number of tasks. The first order of business was a public work session at 5:00 p.m. to discuss city needs and possible grant opportunities that are or could be available. A consideration for any possible grants would be the amount of money or resources the city would need to contribute as a match in order to receive a grant.

No decisions were made at this meeting, but the commissioners and the public were allowed to contribute their thoughts on the presentation made by the City Manager and staff. One of the challenges presented was that some grants needed to be submitted right away in order to meet deadlines, so the City Manager needed some direction to assist in meeting those deadlines.

In addition to grant ideas submitted by staff, Matt Pluta from the Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy provided a list and explanation of some additional grant possibilities with application timelines of September 2017 and March 2018 for submission that allows for further discussion with city staff.

Areas of staff interest for grants include the following:

1. **Sidewalks and Bikeways** – Sidewalks along Bayly Road for children to get safely to school and a portion of Leonard Lane that has no sidewalk are needed. Another area is Rails to Trails at Cannery Park. Senator Cardin apparently has offered to assist as this is an area of interest to him.
2. **Low and Moderate Income Housing** – This is an area of interest to the city to help fix up some of the deteriorating housing stock in the city that has contributed to the reduction in the real estate assessment values for some properties. Of particular interest is housing rehab in the Pine Street area and repair of drainage at the Housing Authority property.
3. **Residential, Commercial, and Industrial Property** – The city always seeks Façade improvement support to help homeowners and businesses improve the appearance of properties throughout the city. There is also an interest in seeking support for economic development within the city.
4. **Parks and Community Centers** – The old Maces Lane School has been discussed for years as a possible community center, and funding might be sought to help pull together some plans to help make that happen. Discussion continues about how to make Great Marsh Park more user friendly for the many people who go there. Having public restroom facilities available is an ongoing hope for the future. Finding funds to help improve our community parks is also being considered by city staff and through the suggestions of the Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy.
5. **City Marina** – Repairing and/or replacing city marina docks as well as the need to dredge the marina and reduce wave action are continuing concerns. Seeking available state funding to assist with this work is an ongoing process. In addition city staff continues to seek ways to increase marina income and also reduce costs of running the marina.
6. **Clean Water** – This is the area where the Midshore Riverkeepers Conservancy can bring some interest and expertise to the city to identify some possible grants to help address this important issue.

There were other areas of interest including other environmental benefit programs, fire services and apparatus, and police services. One of the important issues sought for fire services is having a tower truck. I suggested that this also might be a regional concern for nearby towns and that city staff might reach out to them to see if we might be able to develop a collaborative grant request that would benefit several jurisdictions and thus be more inviting to be funded. The City Manager indicated that she would follow up on that idea.

The regular City Council meeting began at 6 p.m. Following the moment of silence and Pledge of Allegiance, a long meeting followed. First on the agenda at every meeting is the opportunity for the public to make comments. This time was moved from the end of every meeting to the start so that people who wanted to address City Council could do so without having to wait to make their comments. While we do not have a large number of presentations or comments, I would encourage anyone who has a concern to come and let us know what is on your mind or what you see going well in the city or not going well. You can make a difference.

Next was a request from the Healthy Waters Roundtable – Chesapeake Bay Foundation for $6000 and support for an application to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for a grant to provide technical assistance and seed funding for Clean Water Projects on the Eastern Shore. The request was approved by City Council with some modification of the request that would allow the city flexibility on what projects it might want to support.

A number of matters were then taken up on the uncontested agenda including community events scheduled for the coming months that needed City Council approval. All were approved.

Next came some proposed ordinances that were on for first reading to then be continued to May 22nd for a public hearing and possible adoption. Some were meant to clarify the UDC and others involved substantive new laws. They included the following:

* Ordinance 1099 is intended to clarify or define ground floor retail, kitchens, food trucks, duplex units, accessory dwelling unit, accessory structure, accessory apartments, and to coordinate appropriate definitions with section 4.2.3 A.2 of the UDC. It was read and set over to May 22nd.
* Ordinance 1100 was intended to allow Food Trucks in some commercial and Industrial zones as a permitted use with conditions. After questions were raised by Commissioners, a vote to set it over to May 22nd for 2nd reading, public comment, and possible adoption was defeated on a vote of 2-3. The city staff memo in support of this proposed ordinance indicated that “Currently food trucks are not addressed by the UDC, however, there have been increasing requests for information about the permitting process and staff has reason to believe that there may be a surge in food-truck proposals in the foreseeable future.”

As a result of the defeat of this proposed legislation, I did a quick review of the city code to see what law existed here that allowed food trucks. I found that it was limited under 11-10 of the city code to special events that were approved by City Council. I have suggested that this matter be placed back on the City Council agenda in order to more properly address this gap in our current city law.

* Ordinance 1101 deals with Micro Breweries and cleans up an error that occurred so as to grant permission for a Micro Brewery here in Cambridge and “… allow a pub and an associated micro-brewery and distillery as (a) permitted use with conditions in the Downtown Waterfront Development District sub district, Core, General Commercial and CMU Zone Districts.” This ordinance was moved on to a 2nd reading, public hearing, and possible adoption on May 22nd.
* Ordinance 1102 deals with allowing solar energy facilities within the city and under what circumstances. This ordinance was likewise continued to May 22nd for the 2nd reading, public hearing, and possible adoption.

The next matter of business involved the proposed FY 2018 budget. The City Council and members of the public present heard presentations on the following departments:

1) Public Works

2) Marina

3) Municipal Utilities Commission — Water Fund

 That was followed by further public comment and a continuation of the public hearing to May 15th at 6:00 p.m. to allow for further opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed budget. The proposed budget can be found on the City of Cambridge Website, and I would urge anyone interested to take a look at it and come to our next meeting to let us know your thoughts about it.

The 3rd Quarter financial report, which is included with this memo, provides an excellent summary of what the city has taken in so far this year in revenues and what has been spent. If everything continues as planned, we will be very close to meeting the anticipated income and expenditures for the year. The one unusual item is the one-time payment received from the State for past errors in tax assessments of the city. The City Manager acknowledged the good work of Ginger Heatwole, the City Finance Director, and her oversight of the current budget and expenditures.

Before closing out the meeting, the Commissioners received and approved a staff report addressing some of the propose grant requests for the coming year including the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Community Legacy Grant Applications, and the Maryland Highway Administration Safe Routes to Schools Grant Application.

That means that at least the following will be submitted:

A. Pine Street Area Low-Income Homeowner Housing Rehabilitation program, in the amount of $250,000 (DHCD - CDBG);

B. Drainage Repair in area of Housing Authority in the amount of $275,000 (DHCD - CDBG);

C. Façade Improvement Project in the amount of $100,000 (DHCD Community Legacy)

D. Sidewalk along one side of Leonard Lane in the amount of $350,000.00 (DHCD Community Legacy);

E. Retractable bollards for Downtown Street Closures in the amount of $7,500 (DHCD Community Legacy); and

F. Bayly Road Safety Improvements in the amount of $200,000 (MD Highway Administration Safe Routes to Schools).

City Council also scheduled a work session on May 12, 2017 from 11:00 am until 12:00 pm at the Public Safety Building, 8 Washington St, Cambridge. MD 21613 to talk about privatizing sanitation services in the city. The community is welcomed and encouraged to attend.

Thanks for reading. If you have questions, please be in touch with me.

Steve Rideout