CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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With the cancellation of the June 13th City Council Meeting and no meeting this coming week because of the Maryland Municipal League Meeting, I thought that I would provide a look back over the almost 1 year that has passed and see what has been accomplished – good or bad here in Cambridge. I won’t cover everything but will try to touch the important issues that were addressed or avoided by City Council.

When one does something like this, understand that it provides a limited picture of all that has been happening here including what we read about in the paper and what happens behind the scenes about which even the commissioners are not aware. The following are what I consider to be significant steps forward for Cambridge:

* The redevelopment of Cambridge Plaza into Cambridge Market Place that will bring a new grocery store and a new medical office building to the site along with several restaurants and a Starbucks.
* The redevelopment of Phillips Packing Company Building F by the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and its partners.
* The development of the park next to Building F by the city.
* The plans of Shore Regional Health to establish a state of the art Emergency Room here in Cambridge in conjunction with the future closing of the Dorchester Hospital and movement of those beds to a new planned hospital facility in Easton and support of the effort to establish the new medical building in Cambridge Market Place.
* The gift of the Metro Building in the Dorchester Square Shopping Center to Anchor Point, Inc., a local nonprofit that has an agreement with the developer of Cambridge Market Place to develop this property.
* The salvaging of the Hearn Building by Stan Keyser and his organization along with the possibility of doing the same for two neighboring properties owned by Historic Cambridge, Inc.
* The opening of the Harriet Tubman Visitor Center

As City Council does not meet until July 10th, next week I will give you a glimpse of what I learned at the MML conference that might be of interest to you and the rest of Cambridge as efforts continue on many fronts to improve our home town.

What follows are the significant gains and in the case of Rob Collison and Chief Dan losses during the past 11 months:

2016

July 11th

* Ordinance 1078 was sent back to Planning and Zoning for further consideration – This had to do with short term rentals via the Internet – Airbnb’s. I am not sure what has happened to this legislation.
* The selection of Delta Associates to perform Market Analysis Services regarding Sailwinds was deferred to July 25th. It was subsequently deferred until October when it passed. The report that they prepared was not accepted and no action was taken on it.
* The American Legion was before City Council regarding a grant request to the state for $150,000 for façade improvement which was approved for submission. In 2017 the city agreed to a 2 year lease of Governor’s Hall by the Legion.
* A letter of support for the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy’s grant request to the state for the Phillips Packing Company Factory F Project was approved by council. This project continues to move forward thanks to the efforts of ESLC and others.

August and September

* Nothing of note took place with city council

October

* Some changes in the membership of the HPC occurred
* The city granted to Delmarva Community Services up to $225,000 for new sidewalk construction at their new intergenerational center project in Cambridge.

November

* The following items for discussion were introduced for discussion at the next meeting of city council: paving of streets, sidewalks, animal control, and looking at the possibility of curb-side and/or dumpster recycling and having staff look into those items. At the next meeting City Council directed the City Manager to have staff research those issues and report back to City Council.
* Buildings were removed from the Old Burger King Site at Rt. 50 and Maryland Ave.
* Cameras for high crime areas in the city were approved.

December

* Council authorized City Staff to look into the possibility of a public-private collaboration on the rehabilitation of the former city hall. No further information has been brought back to City Council on this issue.

2017

January

* City Council approves the Eastern Shore Network for Change conceptual plans for “Reflections on Pine: 50 years after the fire, Cambridge Commemorates the Civil Rights Movement, Community and Change”.
* The Long Wharf and Marina Park Master Plan was presented to City Council by Long Wharf Committee, approved by City Council, and referred to staff for inclusion in the 5 year Capital Plan. The Long Wharf Committee was thanked for its hard work and sunsetted.

February

* Chief Dan reports that crime has reduced significantly in Cambridge in 2016.
* Request for funding approval to hire consultant to assist city with regard to the condition of its streets and how to assess and prioritize repairs was defeated. This funding request was approved in the 2018 FY budget.
* The Hearn Building has been shored up and planned rehabilitation and 505 and 507 Race Street may also be included in that project.
* A status report regarding the cameras for Greenwood Avenue is provided by staff.
* A Request for Expression of Interest in regard to developing Sailwinds is to be sent out by staff for response in April. Few were received.
* My interest and effort to look at different ways to address the problem of sidewalk improvement was abandoned as it did not develop sufficient interest from members of city council.
* Trash issues and raccoons were discussed in the context of how to solve those problems. Staff in subsequent months make recommendations regarding privatization of trash services that are approved by City Council and contract entered with a private provider to start July 1st.
* A grant is being sought to help with the development of Guidelines for the Historic District and HPC. It is later granted.
* The Ward 3 blight study included a request by staff to develop a plan to apply for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to fund a home rehabilitation project for the 3rd ward. Grant requests have been submitted.

March

* City Council approves Wharf repair at Sailwinds. Work begins
* Working Waterfronts project grant of $30,000 voted down.
* City Council agrees to setting aside $25,000 for human services grants to be included in 2018 FY budget.
* Personal Property and Real Estate Tax Rates considered and initially approved at $1.69 per $100 for personal property but denied for Real Estate at .8879 per $100. City Manager to make another recommendation as to Real Estate Tax Rate.

April

* Rob Collison is no longer City Attorney
* Chief Dan announces his resignation as Chief of Police
* Major Mark Lewis appointed Acting Chief
* Seawall Contract approved for planning of replacement from Choptank Ave. to Oakley Street.
* Working Waterfronts Grant brought back to City Council and approved.
* Efforts to modify the Cambridge Ethics Code defeated.
* Law Offices of Chip MacLeod hired as new city attorney for a limited term.
* Proposed Real Estate Tax Rate raised to .8179 per $100 of assessed value to obtain a constant yield for city taxes.

May and June

* Budget and public hearings were the main work done
* Budget adopted
* 319 acres of property on Egypt Road rezoned in order to allow for a possible solar farm there with restrictions related to plantings and coverage to shield the solar panels from the roadway.

Talk with you next week.

Steve Rideout