CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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For what was supposed to be short, this past Monday’s City Council meeting took almost 2 hours. A number of issues took longer than was expected.

Two closed meetings were set for 4 p.m. I recused myself from the first one as it dealt with Rob Collison’s contract when he was the City Attorney for Cambridge, and the 2nd meeting was cancelled. The City Manager reported on the outcome of the 4 p.m. closed meeting. I will address this later, as the decision made was dealt with at the close of the Open Meeting.

At the 6 p.m. open meeting at an earlier email request of a citizen, I asked that item 10 be removed from the Consent Agenda. It was a request by the Rude Boyz MC (Motorcycle Club) to park cars on an open city lot on Chesapeake Court for people attending an inside event they were planning at a nearby facility. The citizen who contacted me was upset that the agenda showed a staff recommendation to deny the request. In reviewing the request, I noticed that despite the approval of the event and parking by the Police Chief and the Director of DPW, the recommendation was for denial.

Before addressing the other matters on the Consent Calendar, Public Comment was allowed on any topic. A representative of the Rude Boyz MC came forward to present his concerns about the proposed denial of the above request. His organization has been holding this event for at least 10 years at Governor’s Hall at Sailwinds but had lost their date when the use of Governor’s Hall was given to another organization. The MC uses the event as a fund raiser to help families in the community with food, clothing, and other resources that are not otherwise available. After much discussion and questioning, City Council approved the request on the condition that the MC provide a certificate of insurance that protects the city in the event someone is injured or property is damaged.

The insurance issue had not been raised before with regard to this and similar events but was now a consideration given what we learned at the recent Maryland Municipal League (MML) meeting regarding Risk Management. The City Manager indicated that moving forward the city will be seeking, when appropriate, insurance coverage for events to protect the city from claims. She mentioned two events on the Consent Calendar for which insurance will be provided.

We also learned from the City Attorney that Maryland Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT) can also provide insurance coverage for single events being sponsored in the city at a reduced cost. More information will be available through the City Manager’s Office regarding this benefit to community organizations and nonprofits.

The Consent Calendar then followed. While I will briefly touch on each of the items, if any of the events are of interest to you, please add them to your calendar so that you can participate.

* With some minor corrections, the City Council Meeting Minutes of July 10th were approved.
* The Hyatt request for skeet shooting on hole 17 of the golf course on August 9th starting at 9 a.m. was approved (Insurance is being provided)
* The Richardson Maritime Museum request for permission to hold the 12th Annual Cambridge Schooner Rendezvous October 19-22 at Long Wharf Park with set up occurring a day before and break down a day after was approved.
* The Wine Bar’s request for a noise ordinance variance for their Harvest Dinner/Wine Pairing on September 29th from 6-10 p.m. at Governor’s Hall was approved.
* The Choptank Bowling Center’s request for a Banner across Race Street from July 31-August 14 to advertise their car show to benefit Pleasant Day Medical Adult Care was approved.
* The request of the Council of Concerned Youth and the Men of Bethel for permission to use the property at Race and Cedar Streets for a fundraising event on August 5th from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. was approved along with a variance from the noise ordinance.
* The request to move the family movie night from September 1st to September 2nd from 8:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. and a variance from the noise ordinance was approved.
* The request of the police department to appropriate a $1,000 donation from Craig’s Drug Store into the 2018 budget and increase the police uniform budget by that amount for reoccurring police uniform expenses was approved.
* The police department request to appropriate $9,500 into the General Fund Budget and increase the police budget by that amount because of a grant that was received was approved.
* The unsolicited offer from the Thomas Family Irrevocable Trust to donate a 2,100 square foot parcel of unimproved property to the city was declined as it was too small to be usable by the city and would cost the city money to maintain it.

The next item on the agenda was a report from the office of the City Manager on council and budget accomplishments during FY 17. The requirement for this report came as a result of the establishment of the City Manager form of government. As the report is 65 pages long, I will not address all of the items contained in it but will provide you with some of the highlights. If you wish a copy of the full report, let me know at my email address above, and I can email that to you.

* Crime reduction – Neighborhood Watch programs are being developed – Greater collaboration with Sheriff, State Police, and Federal Agencies – Installation of Crime Analysis Computer Software to help identify high crime areas and types of criminal activity
* Financial Health of City – Identify blighted areas in the city and seek state resources to help address the identified problem areas – Place more properties back on the tax rolls – Undertake a Management Audit of Code Enforcement department to increase its effectiveness - Coordinate with County on blight reduction –
* Promote Economic Development – Seek to increase Marina revenues to reduce losses there – Advance the Sailwinds project in collaboration with Shore Health decisions on hospital – Wharf repair taking place and due for completion in 2017
* City Administration – Updating city website and intercity staff communication - Improving budgeting process – consolidated city 911 services with county with expected future cost savings – Implemented citizen/city complaint computer software to help address citizen concerns more effectively (See city website – FAQ link) – Improve and expedite HPC process with more to do – Started stream restoration process at Cannery Park – Replaced lighting in public buildings to save money – Moved to private sanitation services with cost savings

The next item on the agenda was an update to the City Council on the progress being made to establish a Parks and Waterfront Committee and to create some basic standard rules for the running of city committees and commissions that can support existing committees and commissions that already have rules and give guidance to new committees that might be created. Prior to finalizing any of this work, existing committees and commissions will be contacted for their input on these ideas.

Dave Cannon and I provided information and a couple of memos on these issues. If you would like to see them, let me know; and I will forward them to you.

The next item was a proposed budget amendment to modify the budget for the City Attorney to add funds from the General Fund Balance in order to pay Rob Collison, our former city attorney, one year’s salary due under the terms of his contract of employment with the city. As I rent office space from Rob, I have recused myself from participation in this matter from the outset as under the city ethics ordinance, I have a conflict of interest.

I recused myself from this matter and went into the back room of Council Chambers. Others who were at the meeting will have more information about what happened, but apparently Commissioner Foster wanted to abstain from the vote. As the movement of these funds from city reserve funds to the current budget to pay this obligation required 4 votes, and I was not able to vote, Commissioner Foster was given the opportunity to speak with the new City Attorney and Commissioner Sydnor. After that consultation, the vote was taken again and passed 4-0, thus allowing Rob Collison to be paid as required under the terms of his contract that was previously terminated without cause in April of this year.

In the midst of Commissioners Foster and Sydnor talking with the City Attorney, the final item on the agenda was taken up. It is a 50 year license agreement by the City with the Maryland Transit Authority, a modal agency of the Maryland Department of Transportation that allows the city to use a 2.34 acre inactive railroad right-of way from Cedar Street to Washington Avenue that passes the Phillips Factory F Building. Both Commissioners returned to the meeting in time for the vote that approved the agreement unanimously.

With the end of business for the evening, each of the Commissioners, The Mayor, city staff present, and the City Attorney were given the opportunity to discuss matters of interest or concern to them. I and other members of City Council spoke about the “Reflections on Pine” Events and how positive they had been.

I mentioned that I felt that Dion Banks and Keisha Petticolis and those who had worked with them on the events had given the City and its citizens a gift; and that like all gifts, we can receive it gratefully and use it to make Cambridge a better place to live or we can receive it and put it in a drawer and ignore it. I hope that we will do the former and use what we heard and learned to bring even more reconciliation to this community from the events of 50 years ago.

As a “come here” long after the late 1960’s, I had my own experiences from those years and later on was lucky enough to become friends with Rev. Elbert Ransom, Jr. who was involved in the Civil Rights movement elsewhere in the country as an aide to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I learned that much of what Cambridge experienced during that time was experienced in many other communities around the country, many of which have been able to achieve the racial reconciliation that those who led “Reflections on Pine” began and hope to accomplish here in the coming months and years.