CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

swrideout@aol.com

November 13, 2017

With 23 items on the agenda, you would have thought that City Council would be meeting late into the night on Monday. That was not the case as most items were not controversial and all but one of the votes by the commissioners were unanimous.

Prior to the 6:00 p.m. Regular Session, City Council convened at 5:00 p.m. in Regular Session for the purpose of going into closed session to discuss the appointment of an Interim Police Chief and discussion of City Council Chambers Security. After meeting and discussion City Council returned to Regular Session at 6:00 p.m. where it was announced that Wayne Bromwell, Jr. has been selected to be the Interim Police Chief starting December 1, 2017 until March 1, 2018 unless extended beyond that date. His salary will be $85,000 on an annualized basis.

The reason for this appointment is that the Acting Police Chief is retiring December 1st, and there is a need for an acting chief during the search for his replacement. Mr. Bromwell indicated that he was available to serve as interim chief and that he was not going to be a candidate for the job of Chief. He retired in 2014 from the Cambridge Police Department as a Major and is well known and respected by the police force.

The first order of business after adoption of the agenda was to recognize and congratulate the graduates of the recent Cambridge Police Citizens Academy. It is an interactive program run by Sgt. Patton that allows members of the community to receive an in depth and personal view of daily police activities including mock traffic stops, building searches, live simulation training, as well as many other educational tools.

The following citizens were recognized and congratulated for their participation and completion of the program: Jennifer Zebley, Jessica Burke, Jessica Mimms, Justin Hoxter, Ashley Molock, Charles Foskey, and Walter Meyers III.

During the public comment period, Amy Craig and others spoke about the upcoming Christmas Tree Lighting, urging people to attend, and the need for funding in the future from the city. Monroe Smith had some concerns and questions about bills that he had received from the City regarding some of his properties. He and the City Manager will meet to discuss these matters. Dave Thatcher and others representing the Cambridge Association of Neighborhoods (CAN) spoke on the importance of keeping the City Manager form of government without changes and to ensure a timely replacement of the current City Manager, who is retiring June 30, 2018. There was also a presentation regarding the numerous business signs being placed on sidewalks in the downtown area of the City. The matter was referred to the City ADA Committee for further consideration.

Next on the agenda were requests from the public. Tim Ailsworth, the Executive Director of the Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT) appeared to announce a $6,000 grant to the City Police Department for cultural diversity training. City Council unanimously approved acceptance of the grant with thanks to LGIT and appropriated the $6,000 into the FY 2018 General Fund and increased the Police Department Budget by that amount.

The requests from Cambridge Mainstreet were both unanimously approved by City Council. The first was for a resolution supporting the existing Federal Historic Tax Credits that help the city with much of the historic preservation work taking place here. The other was to plant trees in cooperation with the City DPW on the City Property at Race and Cedar Streets.

The request from the residents of the 100 and 200 blocks of High Street to mitigate the effects of traffic in those blocks was referred to the Traffic and Safety Committee for consideration and report back. Wanda Smith’s request that city council consider some storm water management issues at Cattail Crossing, where she lives, resulted in City Council directing the City Manager and City Attorney to provide a letter to her with all available documentation that the city has regarding this issue. Both of these matters received 5-0 votes in favor.

The Consent Calendar resulted in unanimous approval of the following:

* The October 23, 2017 meeting minutes with some minor edits
* The request of the Christmas Tree Lighting Committee for a noise ordinance variance and traffic control assistance for the November 25th tree lighting.
* The request of Pleasant Day Medical Adult Day Care Center for permission to hang a banner for the Festival of Wreaths Event if the city’s truck used to do that work is back from the repair shop.
* The Official list of Holidays for 2018
* The City Council Meeting Schedule for 2018

The one item of Old Business was the acceptance of a Community Legacy Grant for $7,500 for Bollards to be placed downtown. Bollards would be buried at intersections of some of the downtown streets to be raised for downtown events to help block vehicular traffic when the streets are closed for an event. These would replace saw horses or tapes that have been placed in the past to cordon off a street for a downtown event. At this juncture this funding along with some additional monies set aside in the city budget will not be enough to all of the streets that are usually closed for city events. The $7,500 was accepted and the funds appropriated to the FY 2018 General Fund for placement in the Public Works Capital Improvement Program. The plan would be that when the work on the 300 Block of High Street is undertaken, bollards will also be placed at the intersection of High and Poplar Streets.

With New business the following matters were taken up:

* The September 30, 2017 quarterly financial statement. The PowerPoint presentation on this is included with this report.
* City Council appropriated a $158 donation from Rommel Chesapeake, Inc. into the FY 2018 General Fund Budget and increased the Police Department Budget by that amount and with thanks to Rommel Chesapeake, Inc.
* City Council approved unanimously the proposed revised Police Captain Class Specification that goes along with a prior decision by City Council to modify the structure of the leadership of the Cambridge Police Department.
* City Council unanimously approved the amendment of the Personnel Policy Section 6 to allow up to 15 hours annual leave for city employees except for Volunteer Fire Personnel to perform volunteer work in the community with approved nonprofit organizations and the Dorchester County Public Schools.

A few miscellaneous items were then discussed. The meeting notes of the City/County Coordinating Committee were provided. See attached.

Work Sessions were set as follows:

* Wednesday November 15th – 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in City Council Chambers to discuss and identify potential Council goals and Capital Improvement Program Items.
* Monday November 20th – 5 p.m. in City Council Chambers to consider how and when Council Members are assigned to Council Committees and as Committee Liaisons.
* Thursday December 7th at 11 a.m. in the Training Room of the Public Safety Building with the Sailwinds Inc. Board to consider formalizing a relationship relative to the Sailwinds Development.

The Municipal Government Works Month Proclamation was adopted unanimously. The 2018 Budget Appropriation for the City Manager Recruitment was considered and three commissioners voted in favor of the request for an appropriation of$30,000 from the General Fund Appropriated Reserve to the Mayor’s budget to pay the costs of recruitment services and ancillary costs associated with the search process in hiring a new City Manager.

This was the only matter during the entire meeting where there was any disagreement. Three Commissioners voted in favor of the appropriation – Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and I. The other two Commissioners abstained.

The reason for seeking the appropriation is to fund portions of the search for the new City Manager to replace Sandra Tripp-Jones, who will be ending her work for the city on June 30, 2018. There is a belief by a majority of City Council that the search committee that is led by the Mayor needs professional support for its work in order to find the right person to take on the challenging work of City Manager.

As the City Manager is a unique position and requires a combination of skills that need to match the goals and vision of the Mayor and Commissioners, having someone available to advise the search committee and the City Council, who has worked in this field, was felt to be important. Further discussions are planned to see if some alternative solution to this issue can be found.

During final comments by the Mayor, Commissioners, and staff, $1,700 that had been previously appropriated but not used for nonprofit funding was approved for Mainstreet ($1200) and for The Cambridge Christmas Tree Lighting ($500).

I also mentioned a project that I am working on with the Dorchester County Public Schools to establish an intern/mentor program for selected students to undertake projects related to local government as part of their school curriculum. The idea is to seek out 8 students for a pilot project that will go from January to March.

The students will be required to attend at least one City Council meeting a month, develop a research project related to local government with the aid of their teacher or counselor, seek support in their research from the Mayor and/or members of City Council, prepare a PowerPoint presentation based on their research, and then make a presentation on it either to their class with elected officials in attendance or at a City Council meeting, if permitted.

The hope is that an ongoing program of support for a limited number of students each year that involve the Mayor and Commissioners can be established to help the students have a better and more comprehensive understanding of local government.

I hope that the above has been helpful to you in understanding what is going on here in Cambridge with your government.

Steve