

CAMBRIDGE MATTERS  
By: Commissioner Steve Rideout  
[swrideout@aol.com](mailto:swrideout@aol.com)  
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At the City Council meeting on December 11<sup>th</sup>, I received an envelope from the Mid Shore Board of Realtors. It contained a publication called “On Common Ground” that is published twice a year by the National Association of Realtors (NAR). With some free time available over the Holidays, I took the opportunity to read it.

What I found interesting about the report is that some of what it discussed and promoted as happening around the country in larger cities is happening here in Cambridge at different levels. As I read through the document, names of local people popped into my head as being those here who have been talking about these ideas, sometimes for years, and also doing something to make them happen.

Sometimes it helps us to take a step back and think about what is and can be accomplished when there is a vision for our community, and we come together to make it happen.

What follows is not a complete summary of the report or of what is happening here but contains some of the areas of discussion and bullet points that I have pulled from the NAR document to which I have added my knowledge of our community.

**The 2017 NAR Community and Transportation Preference Survey –**

- 6 of 10 people would spend more to live in a community where they could walk to parks, shops, and restaurants
- More than 50% indicated that they would prefer to live in a house with a small yard vs. a similar house with a large yard if it enabled them to walk to more places

- More than half also said they would prefer to live in an apartment or townhouse if it meant an easy walk to places they need to go and a shorter commute to work
- 60% of the respondents said they would pay at least a little more to live in a walkable neighborhood
- Maintaining and repairing roads, highways, freeways, and bridges was the number one transportation need facing government in the coming years for 74% of the respondents
- Providing convenient alternatives to driving such as walking, biking, and public transportation and expanding public transportation were each considered a high priority by 45% of the responders

*This is a national survey that involves communities larger than ours. Cambridge is clearly a walkable community that fits the kind of data offered above. The waterfront report about Cambridge from CampionHruby talks about how walkable Cambridge is. Having more local retail and restaurant businesses up and running would certainly continue to support here what appears to be a growing trend around the country. Some information regarding Micro Breweries that appears later in the publication is right in line with what we are seeing here as a result of RAR opening and growing. The interest in maintaining and repairing roads fits nicely into the work being planned for the 300 Block of High Street and the street maintenance survey that is currently underway to help City Council have data upon which to make decisions about the road repair needs in Cambridge. There have been discussions by some in the past about the idea of the city allowing golf carts and improving pedestrian safety.*

### **Mall Makeovers –**

- Too many of the nation's malls have been failing for years
- The best way forward is to transform malls into major mixed-use and walkable communities
- In a suburban Maryland project, smaller rental units of efficiencies, studios, and junior one-bedrooms have generated the most interest.

- A user of the smaller rentals is a “young renter, ... fresh out of school who’s looking for a smaller, maybe less expensive unit but still values having retail around and a walkable experience”

While Cambridge does not have any Malls or the population size that would support a Mall, we do have developers who are rehabilitating and converting downtown Cambridge properties to meet this vision. Factory F on Dorchester Avenue is another project spearheaded by the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy that has huge potential to bring new businesses and jobs to the community.

### **Greening for Growth –**

From the report we learn that “Growing cities are finding that streets must not only serve as the urban circulatory system, but the same right-of-way also must act as the kidneys and lungs of the municipal organism – clearing waste from storm water, improving air quality, and providing space for residents to breathe.... ‘Complete streets’ policies – adopted by more than 1200 cities – aim to convert streets designed primarily for car traffic to also provide protected space for people on foot, bicycle or getting to transit.”

Later in the report we are told that “A growing body of research shows green and complete streets provide particular public health and safety benefits to low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, though the bonuses are not limited to that population. ...Going to parks is great, but not as important as the connectivity through neighborhoods....That’s why green streets are so important: They are good for children getting to school, people walking to work or transit, or to do errands.”

One of the high priority projects identified by City Council was providing a sidewalk on Leonard Lane from the public housing located there over to Washington Street. The reason is that people from that community have to walk in the street much of the way because the sidewalk is incomplete in that area. Additionally, City Council recently set aside \$130,000 for the

purchase of park equipment that is needed throughout the city. Over \$1 million from state, local, and Habitat Choptank resources has been allocated for rehabilitation of homes (not rental properties) in the Pine Street Area of the City, which is an important part of our walkable community. The School Board just received a State Highway Administration grant for \$200,000 for sidewalks for Bayly Road that will help keep children safe who are walking to school. The city has state funding to clean up and beautify the open space next to Factory F that is called Cannery Park.

Based on a letter from the residents of the 100 and 200 block of High Street, City Council has forwarded their request for traffic calming to the city traffic and safety committee for consideration. Cambridge Mainstreet recently received approval to plant trees in the vacant lot at Race and Cedar Streets. The city traffic and safety committee has also been asked to consider ways to make crossing the street safer at Poplar and High Street and at the intersection of Gay, Poplar, and Race Streets.

The work done on Maryland Avenue has provided green space and ways to calm or slow traffic. The environmental portion of the parking area at Long Wharf is a work in progress. Both projects are aimed at reducing water runoff into the Choptank River. There have been a number of people here who have advocated for more bikes and walking and fewer cars on city streets. The entrance to the city at Rt. 50 and Maryland Ave. has been greened so as to make it a more attractive entrance to the city.

Many individuals and community groups such as the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, MidShore Riverkeepers, Cambridge Multisport, Cindy Smith for Dorchester County, and the Cambridge Association of Neighborhoods work to improve the environment through neighborhood and river cleanup projects.

What is being done is not just for the city to do but is being done in the context of public –private projects. Habitat Choptank is an important partner in the Pine Street Area project. Charlie Fairchild, the developer of

Cambridge Marketplace, will be including green areas in the parking lot there for water runoff to go.

## **The Craft Brewing Industry -**

The NAR report tells us that “in 2016, the craft brewing industry contributed \$67.8 billion to the (national) economy and created 456,000 jobs. Now, the craft brewing industry is having a rippling impact on local economies, as it finds its niche in abandoned neighborhoods and struggling towns from Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon, - and many places in between.” Later on in the report we learn that “A brewery can bring new life to a vacant industrial building or retail shopping center and can help boost leasing demand...Locate a brewery in a walkable neighborhood, and it can become an instant draw for existing and potential residents. Landlords are taking note of craft beer as a growth industry, which will create an increased demand for their properties.”

For Cambridge, we have RAR that is a very important resource for our community in many ways.

## **Urban Agriculture-**

From the NAR report, “Cities officials are looking around and asking what do we do with all of this unused property? They don’t want it to just grow weeds and be blighted. They want to use that space for growing food and recreation and contributing to a sense of community.”

“ In addition to providing fresh produce for people who live in so-called ‘food deserts’ – where grocery stores are often few and far between – schools and teachers are using gardens as a learning platform to get kids interested in growing food, creating good eating habits and learning about environmental health.”

The Dorchester County Technology Center has agriculture courses for students. Urban gardens are starting to appear in the city such as behind

Waugh United Methodist Church. As part of the Pine Street Area project ideas are being developed on how to effectively use some of the existing vacant land for small parks and gardens. I am sure that there are other similar projects within the city about which I am not aware.

### **Aging in Place-**

This is the aim of older people everywhere. Almost 90% of seniors want to stay in their home or community as they age.

The cost of housing here is relatively low, but the services for the elderly available from Dorchester County as with any rural community are limited. Aside from the police department, the City of Cambridge provides no social services for people of any age. Those services are provided by the county and the state as well as churches and nonprofits. The Dorchester YMCA is a major supplier of programming for the elderly as is Delmarva Community Services and Pleasant Day Medical Adult Day Care Center.

City Council through tax incentives has encouraged the elderly to purchase homes here as their primary residence. The need for collaboration and cooperation amongst churches and nonprofits is critical to help fill the gaps.

I hope that the above has been helpful. One thing that most of us can do is volunteer in some way to help address the many challenges that government is not able to address.