CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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The last City Council meeting for February was a short one with the Mayor being absent due to her travel to Ethiopia and Commissioner Cannon also not attending. Commissioner Foster was the Mayor for the meeting.

There was no public comment and only one request from the public. That request came from Mr. and Mrs. Marc Mandel, who have a contract to purchase 164 acres of land next to Highway 343 and adjacent to the Canvasback townhomes development. I had been contacted by Mr. Mandel a couple of weeks ago with regard to his possible purchase and put him in touch with city staff to help him address his concerns.

As they had a time limit within which they needed some answers, they came to City Council seeking some relief. After the presentation and questions and comments from the commissioners, city council voted either to refer matters to staff or indicated that the Mandels’ desire to rezone the property from Residential to Resource Conservation would probably not work and the request to approve the discharge of firearms on the property would not be allowed.

As they have the right under the law to seek the rezoning, this matter may be back before City Council at some point in the future. Interestingly, their raising the issue of discharging firearms in the city caused me to review that Ordinance. I concluded that the current language did not allow an event that had been routinely approved by the commissioners for many years. That involved allowing the discharge of shotguns at the Hyatt for skeet shooting at golf events on the17th hole. As a result, I moved and the commissioners approved my request to refer the amendment of city code section 12-18 to the city attorney for drafting of language that would permit this event in the future.

The Consent Calendar was read and approved as follows:

* The February 12, 2018 meeting minutes were approved.
* The request of the Cambridge Little League to hold their opening day parade on April 14th (or the 21st as a rain date) starting at 8:00 a.m. set up until completed and going from Long Wharf to the Little League Field was approved.
* The City’s request for a noise ordinance variance and extra trash cans for Family Movie Nights at Sailwinds Park Amphitheater on May 4th and September 29th from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. was approved
* The request of the Dorchester County Community Wellness Coalition to use the Race and Cedar Streets lot on May 19th from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a community health & wellness resources event was approved.

Ordinance 1116 was introduced for its first reading and continued over to March 12th for second reading, public hearing, and adoption. This is an ordinance that was recently drafted as the result of a vote in June 2016 by city council to repeal Ordinance 1019 that is called the “Boarding of Residential Structures and Monitored Rehabilitation Program”. Ordinance 1019 had been passed in October 2011 to create a process for the boarding up and renovation of residential structures in the city and to require the restorations to take place with a reasonable period of time. As the program had not proved to be very helpful, in June 2016 City Council voted to end the program. No properties are currently enrolled in the program.

Next on the agenda was the setting of dates for the city council to hold hearings and have presentations on the FY 2019 city budget. The first meeting will be on March 26th where City Council will hold a hearing on the constant yield property tax and personalty tax rates. The list of the upcoming meetings is included with this report.

The final action of City Council was a review of the meeting notes from the County/City Meeting that discussed issues of mutual importance to both governments. Some of the matters discussed included:

* Cannery Park – the progress on the different aspects of this initiative including the design charrette for public input, review of final designs, the progress of the rails to trails portion of the project, and the stream restoration effort that is ongoing.
* Park in a Box – The City and County will have a portable park within a trailer to move from park to park for summer programs for children. The city will provide the trailer, and the county will provide materials and staff for the project.
* Police Radios – The County is changing its radio system to a new 700 MHz frequency as part of a new statewide system. As part of this change, city police and fire department radio will have to be replaced. The city manager indicated that the county had agreed to fund the purchase of the city’s radios that will cost approximately $468,000.
* Tax Sale Properties – The County has implemented some new procedures that are working well to dispose of tax sale properties upon which they foreclosed. The city will need to make some ordinance changes in order to coordinate with the county for property in the city that needs to be sent to tax sale.
* Solar Farms – The city and county were asked to jointly negotiate PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) fees by the counsel for the company seeking to build a solar farm in Cambridge and then to negotiate the split of those fees between the two governmental agencies. Both the city and county declined to do that.
* Old Maces Lane School Building – Our local legislators are seeking a bond bill in the legislature to help fund that effort. In addition other funding is being sought through grant applications with various agencies for funding.

Thanks for reading. Steve