



UPCOMING MEETING DATES AND LOCATIONS

Thursday, May 10, Location To Be Determined, 7:00 pm
Thursday, July 12, Location To Be Determined, 7:00 pm
Thursday, September 13, Location To Be Determined, 7:00 pm
Saturday, November 10, Location To Be Determined, 10:00 am

**All CAN Board meetings are open to the public.
Everyone interested in CAN is invited to attend.**

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING March 10, 2018

**Dorchester County Office Building
501 Court Lane, Room 110**

MINUTES

Board Members Present: Chuck McFadden (President), Judd Vickers (Vice-President), Tom Puglisi (Secretary), Mary Ellen Jesien (Treasurer), Michelle Barnes (Membership Director), Roman Jesien, Dave Thatcher, and Greg Boss (constituting a Quorum of the Board under Bylaws Section 11, eight of ten members being present)

Board Members Absent: Frank Cooke, Sharon Smith

NOTE: CAN is not responsible for verifying the accuracy of attendee comments.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions.** CAN President Chuck McFadden opened the meeting at 10:05 am by welcoming Cambridge City Manager Sandra Tripp-Jones, the members of the CAN Board of Directors, and approximately 35 attendees.
- 2. Approval of Minutes.** Chuck McFadden introduced the minutes of CAN's January 20, 2018, Annual Business Meeting, which were previously distributed via email. It was moved (Chuck McFadden) and seconded (Tom Puglisi) that the Board approve the January 20 minutes as distributed, and the motion was approved by an 8-0 vote of Board members present.

- 3. Treasurer's Report.** CAN Treasurer Mary Ellen Jesien reported that CAN now has a total of \$1544.72 in its Treasury. The current funds have come primarily from dues payments.
- 4. Volunteers Needed:** Chuck McFadden announced that volunteers are needed for all of CAN's standing committees (Housing Quality, Communications, and Membership), as well as for two upcoming special projects:

 - a. ShoreRivers Cleanup Day on April 7.** CAN is organizing a group of volunteers to participate in the ShoreRivers Cleanup Day on April 7. CAN volunteers will meet at 10 am in the parking lot on Cedar Street between Perimore Street and Moreland Avenue (across from Generation III Marina). CAN will be joined by several high school students who have also volunteered to participate. Contact Chuck McFadden at Ragtime31@gmail.com or CambridgeCAN@yahoo.com for additional details. Please join us!!
 - b. Wallace Office Building.** CAN is organizing a group of volunteers to provide gardening surrounding the historic Wallace Office Building (at the corner of Academy and Gay Streets, adjacent to the Dorchester County Library) in connection with the current project to rehabilitate the building. Gardeners are needed both to design the garden and work on planting and maintenance going forward.
- 5. Survey on City Priorities.** Chuck McFadden announced that the "CAN Survey on Priorities for the City of Cambridge" will be distributed via e-mail very soon. The survey will also be available via CAN's website at <https://cambridgecan.org>. To join CAN and ensure receipt of all CAN emails, please contact CAN Treasurer Mary Ellen Jesien directly or via CAN's website at <https://cambridgecan.org/join-can/>.
- 6. Housing Quality Committee.** CAN Housing Quality Committee Chair Judd Vickers explained that Committee members monitor code enforcement and non-conforming property uses throughout Cambridge and attend Planning Commission meetings to monitor zoning-related issues. The Committee's activities allow the CAN Board to make important decisions to support – or not support – proposed changes, modifications, and other issues that affect our neighborhoods. One property of recent interest has been 203 Choptank Avenue, which had several structural violations and should have been returned to a single unit residence under the City Code. CAN members attended the Board of Zoning Appeals meeting and spoke against the owner's request for a variance to permit continued multi-unit use, which

the Board of Zoning Appeals ultimately denied. Interior modifications have been made to return the property to single unit occupancy. The Cambridge Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has accepted a plan to address the structural violations, and the property is now listed for sale.

7. Introduction of Cambridge City Manager, Sandra Tripp-Jones. CAN Secretary Tom Puglisi introduced Cambridge City Manager Sandra Tripp-Jones, who came to Cambridge with deep career experience in city government and is a Professional City Manager. Prior to coming to Cambridge, she was City Manager of Santa Barbara, California, and has also managed a number of international development projects for the International City/County Management Association. Ms. Tripp-Jones (who has been in her role for about two and a half years and will retire at the end June, 2018) is Cambridge's first City Manager and has displayed great leadership in developing the position and bringing a new level of professionalism to Cambridge City government. Her accomplishments in Cambridge have included initiating significant financial restructuring and budgeting reforms, which have saved the City a good of money, and organizing City Council activities around specific issues and proposals with concrete options for the Council to consider and act upon.

8. Presentation by Cambridge City Manager Sandra Tripp-Jones. Ms. Tripp-Jones introduced herself and indicated that she planned to address three specific topics in her presentation: enforcement of city codes, current City Council goals and priorities, and her accomplishments as City Manager.

a. Code Enforcement. Ms. Tripp-Jones described in detail the "Code Enforcement Management Audit" that she has conducted over the past several months. In conducting the audit, she compiled and analyzed all the hard data available from the City about code citations and outcomes over the 12-month period from March 1, 2017 through February 28, 2018. Handouts summarizing the audit were provided to attendees and are included here as an attachment. Ms. Tripp-Jones indicated that the goal of code enforcement should be timely abatement/remediation rather than collection of fines and/or judicial action. Important findings included the following:

- i. Two individuals currently perform City Code enforcement activities: (a) one full time city inspector (primarily responsible for cleanup violations), and (b) one 2/3-time contract inspector (primarily responsible for structural violations). During the audit period, these inspectors handled 1300 cleanup violations and 621 structural violations, respectively, with 341 of the 621 structural violations remaining unresolved after 30 days.

- ii. The City has not set specific priorities for code enforcement, but Ms. Tripp-Jones believes that (a) safety, (b) need for demolition, and (c) property values should receive the primary focus of enforcement activities (in that order), with property cleanup and grass cutting becoming a secondary, largely seasonal activity.
- iii. The current citation system is not working effectively, and process improvements are needed, including establishing (a) fixed timeliness standards for completion of required work; (b) mandatory recording of all violations and their resolution into the "Comcate" tracking system; (c) measured implementation of a "performance-based code enforcement" program under which uncorrected and/or repeated violations would result in regular inspections and eventual loss of rental licenses; (d) City programs to assist resident homeowners in accessing the funds to complete needed repairs; and (e) increased staffing to effect these changes.

b. Code Enforcement Questions and Answers.

- i. **Q:** Is there a City definition of livable dwelling? **A:** The City relies upon the Universal Development Code (UDC) standards. The performance-based program described previously would include specific standards and a rating system for landlords, under which landlords would know exactly what is expected and where they stand.
- ii. **Q:** How many of the 3000+ rental units in the City are owned by individuals with a single property versus individuals or corporations with multiple properties? **A:** Many rental units in Cambridge are owned by individuals with only one property, but there are also a number of owners with a large number of properties. Some owners in both categories are responsive to citations and some are not. However, there are a few landlords who own lots of properties in very poor condition and refuse to fix them. Ms. Tripp-Jones hopes that a performance-based rental system would encourage responsiveness and eventually remove unresponsive landlords from the market.
- iii. **Q:** Can the City identify unlicensed rentals? **A:** Yes, the City has several ways to identify unlicensed rentals, including comparing ownership records with water bills. Both owners and billing recipients are listed in the water database.
- iv. **Q:** Many property owners are not from Cambridge and/or are participate in multiple corporations with different name, often relying on property management companies that isolate owners from renters. Is this a

problem for code enforcement? **A:** The City has identified owners with multiple properties listed under different Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs). Dorchester County official Cindy Smith is working with the City to determine if such owners deserve special scrutiny.

- v. **Q:** Are 1.67 inspectors enough when Cambridge has had up to five inspectors at times in the past. **A:** The City Manager's audit report will recommend adding temporary seasonal staff to take care of property cleanup, hiring an employee to replace the contract inspector, and adding an employee to supervisor the inspection staff and provide assistance to homeowners in accessing funding for repairs. Freeing the full-time person from property cleanup to focus on structural violations should make a big difference. Planned inspection routes need to be established, and improved customer service must also be given high priority. Budgetary constraints make it unlikely that the City would hire more than the one additional staffer proposed.
- vi. **Q:** What is the proportion of inspector-identified violations versus citizen complaints? **A:** The City has received fewer than 200 complaints from citizens through the "Comcate" system. Telephone complaints are not currently being captured in "Comcate" but should be.
- vii. **Q:** Is there a plan in place to address abandoned and vacant properties? **A:** There are procedures in place with the County to address abandoned properties. If the taxes on such properties have not been paid, the properties are eventually sold by the County, gifted to Habitat for Humanity or the City, or demolished. Properties cannot generally be demolished unless repair costs are greater than the value of the property. About 30 properties have been demolished since Ms. Tripp-Jones became City Manager. Occasionally owners offer to sign property over to the City because they can't afford the costs of demolition.
- viii. **Q:** Are there misplaced incentives that encourage owners to let properties deteriorate? **A:** Tax sale law in Maryland is not effective in remediating poorly maintained housing. For, example the City/County cannot intervene in foreclosures where property taxes are being paid. Banks, mortgage companies, and a few landlords sometimes fail to maintain their properties and let liens for code violations accumulate, knowing that the liens will be collected only when the property is sold. This is one of the reasons we need a performance-based enforcement system. For owner-occupied properties, the most frequent problem is that the owner does not have the resources to maintain the property adequately. The City is trying to identify resources to help such owners.

The City was successful in obtaining community revitalization monies, including State monies, for the Pine Street area that will provide \$1.2 million for 20 properties under a defined plan. However, there are 900 units in the Pine Street area alone, so much more is needed for this and other areas of the City. It is hoped that the State will continue to provide revitalization money if the City develops and adopts good, workable plans. The City and County are working together to take a more aggressive approach going forward to address deteriorating and abandoned properties, while pursuing a more compassionate approach toward owner-occupiers who cannot afford maintenance.

- ix. **Q:** Does the City have a program to sell abandoned properties to individuals at low cost if the purchaser promises to live in the property and make specified improvements? **A:** Dorchester County has a program to take over abandoned houses and sell them for owner occupancy for as little as \$0.20 on the dollar. Purchasers must rehabilitate the property and live in it for at least three years. For additional information, contact Cindy Smith at csmith@docogonet.com or 410-228-0281 x1104 or see the Dorchester County website at <http://www.dorchestercountymd.com/departments/finance-treasury/>
- x. **Q:** if there are approximately 6500 residential units in the City and 3300 of those are rentals, then the City would seem to have about 50% of its housing units in rentals. Is this a desirable ratio? **A:** The City believes that rentals make up about 40% of its housing units. There is not necessarily any particular "desirable" ratio of rental units. Income is probably a better indicator, and Cambridge has a high percentage of low-income residents. Many of the homes in Cambridge are the owner's secondary (rather than primary) residence, which complicates interpretation of our data somewhat.

- c. **City Council Goals and Priorities.** Ms. Tripp-Jones indicated that the City Council has its eyes on "big picture" issues critical to making Cambridge viable and successful now and in the future. She listed the City Council's established goals and priorities as follows:
 - i. Ensuring strong financial health for the city (e.g., maintaining standardized and professional financial and budgetary processes).
 - ii. Ensuring safe and livable housing for all citizens of Cambridge (e.g., code enforcement, Pine Street development).
 - iii. Economic development (e.g., retail expansion, Sailwinds).
 - iv. Improved city facilities and infrastructure (e.g., community centers, parks)

and playgrounds, the "park in a box" initiative, restrooms for Great Marsh Park, flooding and sea rise, street assessment survey / street infrastructure study). Ms. Tripp-Jones noted that since the State cut funding for street maintenance a number of years ago, Cambridge has been limited to about \$250,000 per year for street maintenance, which has resulted in widespread deterioration that will be very costly to remediate.

- v. Ensuring public safety.
- vi. Ensuring the availability of modern health facilities.

d. Accomplishments as City Manager. Ms. Tripp-Jones listed the following accomplishment during her tenure as City Manager:

- i. Establishing City Council processes that are organized around a specific agenda with concrete recommendations/options for action.
- ii. Instituting a budget process that focuses on activities/services to be performed/delivered.
- iii. Adopting a purchase order system that is organized and earns interest for the City.
- iv. Adopting an automated budget system.
- v. Completing the Cambridge Blight Survey, which will help the City develop plans for improved housing.
- vi. Installing security cameras in high crime areas.
- vii. Instituting financial improvements, including the consolidated emergency dispatch system, the refinancing program, trash pickup privatization, and contract administration procedures to identify money owed to the City.
- viii. Strengthening City/County/State partnerships. County partnerships include consolidation of emergency operating centers, cannery park development, Maces Lane Community Center, City/County Habitat projects, the "Park and Ride" grant application, Woods Road economic development, the Hearn Building restoration, Ironman and Eagleman Maryland, coordination of City Police / County Sheriff operations, particularly in drug enforcement and sharing resources and intelligence, pending Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a not-for-profit entity to develop Sailwinds with contributions from the County
- ix. Facilitating infrastructure improvement (e.g., cannery park stream restoration, Bailey Road sidewalk construction, rehabilitation of the 300 block of High Street, Long wharf reconstruction).
- x. Hiring (e.g., police chief, new city planning assistant for housing).

e. Miscellaneous Questions and Answers.

- i. **Q:** What is happening to recruit your replacement? **A:** Ms. Tripp Jones stated that she is not involved in the recruitment or hiring process for her replacement. However she does know that the deadline for submission of applications is March 15.
- ii. **Q:** What are the challenges that the new City Manager will face? **A:** Ms. Tripp-Jones responded that the hardest challenge will be improving financial revenue growth to meet the inevitably increasing costs of government in the case of revenues that are essentially flat (although not declining). For example, the pavement management study will show that a modest property tax increase is needed because so little has been done in street maintenance since the State dramatically decreased its funding. The need for a tax increase will be difficult for many people to accept. However, the most important factor in the development of Cambridge is the vision set by its citizens and the City Council as it moves into the future. The City Manager carries out the vision of the people and the Council, and that vision is the most important driver for going forward.
- iii. **Q:** People just don't get off Route 50 to stop in Cambridge. New people coming to Cambridge have difficulty finding local businesses and services. What is being done to assist small businesses and create jobs, address generational poverty, and meet the many other economic and social concerns affecting Cambridge? **A:** Economic development one of the City Council's major priorities. There has been a marked, positive turn-around in the Cambridge downtown compared to 15 years ago, so progress is being made. Cambridge is coming back. However, the City does not act as a Chamber of Commerce, which is a private function that has just gotten back on its feet after years of inactivity. The Chamber does distribute a guidebook listing area businesses.
- iv. **Q:** Tourism is essential for Cambridge, which is building a reputation as a festival town where something fun is going on every weekend. This helps bring people in from the highway, and even encourages purchases of second homes. What is being done to promote more tourism? **A:** The County, rather than the City, handles marketing to encourage tourism. The non-profit Cambridge Mainstreet (now called "Downtown Cambridge") sponsors most of these "festival" events that attract tourism.

9. Closing Statements. Tom Puglisi thanked Ms. Tripp-Jones for addressing the meeting,

listening so carefully to attendees' concerns, and providing such detailed answers to questions. Chuck McFadden reiterated how important it is for people to join CAN and actively participate in CAN's programs and projects. He noted that the City Manager has laid out many issues that concern us and provided concrete proposal to move Cambridge in a positive direction going forward. It is now our responsibility to talk to our Commissioners, show up at City Council meetings, and provide support for the City Manager's proposals. We need to show the City Council that we are committed to moving Cambridge forward in a positive way.

10. Adjournment. Chuck McFadden made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Tom Puglisi seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:40 am

CAN BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

March 10, 2018 - Meeting Minutes

ATTACHMENTS