CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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It was a cold and rainy night for the March 12th City Council meeting, and it was almost as cold in council chambers as it was outside. A few hearty citizens came to watch and participate in the meeting. The Mayor and all of the commissioners were present along with the city manager, city attorney, police chief, and city engineer.

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m. with a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance. There was no one present who wanted to speak during the public comment portion of the meeting.

The agenda was adopted as presented except that items 5 and 6 on the Consent Calendar were taken off for further discussion.

The following items on the Consent Calendar were approved unanimously by City Council:

* The Meeting Minutes of the Council Meeting of February 26th
* The Meeting Minutes of the special regular council meeting of March 5th
* The request of the Cambridge Police Department to hold an Easter Egg Hunt on March 24th (rain date the 31st) from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Great Marsh Park
* The approval of the First Amendment to the Settlement Agreement with Outdoor Income Partners, LLC and authorization for the Mayor to sign it regarding the billboard located at 2721 Ocean Gateway.

Following the approval of the above items, Ordinance 1116 was read for a 2nd time after which a public hearing took place for any public comment. None was offered, so the public hearing was closed and the Ordinance was passed unanimously. This ordinance repealed Ordinance 1019 that had authorized a program for the boarding of residential structures and monitored rehabilitation of them. The program had little use, and there were no properties currently involved in the program.

Old Business had the request to award the contract for the design of the Peachblossom Branch Stream Restoration Project to Ecotone, Inc. for $50,652 and the appropriation of the $70,000 grant revenue to the General Fund and then to the Department of Public Works Fund in order to pay for the services that were approved. The additional monies were requested by staff in the event additional work beyond the original bid was required. If that is the case, the city manager will return to city council with a request to amend the contract along with an explanation of what the additional funds will be used to accomplish.

Following Old Business, The Commissioners took up the request of Suzanne Sullivan on behalf of Shore Rivers for a letter of support for a Chesapeake Bay Trust grant for trees, bioretention, and green parking at Waugh Chapel and on lots owned by Habitat Choptank. Questions were raised regarding the grant and how it related to Pine Street, and suggestions were offered as to other places that might be available for the grant funding. After Ms. Sullivan explained the limitations that she had with regard to this particular project and the available funding, City Council approved the Mayor signing the support letter on a vote of 3-2.

The next matter to be taken up was one that had been removed from the Consent Calendar. It was the request to approve a proposed Easement Agreement with Egypt Road Solar, LLC and authorize the Mayor to sign it. The City Manager had made one modification to the agreement that she explained to the Commissioners.

While no final agreement has been reached between the City and Egypt Road Solar, LLC with regard to the proposed Solar Farm on Egypt Road, the company is seeking to have all of the necessary preliminary agreements in place in order to identify their costs. They also want to ensure that when a final agreement is reached, especially with regard to the PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes), that they will be able to begin their planning and work soon thereafter.

Concerns were raised by members of City Council that the City was expending resources before any final agreement had been reached. The City Manager advised the Commissioners that Egypt Road Solar, LLC was funding the City’s costs for the work of the city attorney and city retained experts on Solar Farms in regard to this preliminary work. After full discussion of the matter, the Commissioners approved on a 5-0 vote the request regarding the Easement Agreement and permission for the Mayor to sign it as it had been amended.

With New Business, after discussion and questions by the Commissioners, three items all received approval by the Commissioners on 5-0 votes. They included the following:

* The appropriation of $1,500 to the General Fund Revenue and increase the Police Department budget by that amount for “evidence buy” money.
* The creation of a Housing Specialist position within the Department of Public Works Planning and Zoning Division with a job classification of Grade 12 and subject to the City Manager returning to City Council at the first meeting in April to address some issues regarding the pay of some employees within the Department of Public Works. This Housing Specialist recruitment will be allowed to move forward for what is a grant position for the Pine Street Area Rehabilitation Project.
* A MOU with Dorchester County to establish a joint venture non-profit corporation for redevelopment of the Cambridge waterfront adjacent to and inclusive of certain University of Maryland Shore Regional Health Properties that the Mayor was authorized to sign.

The Commissioners and the public in attendance were then reminded of the Constant Yield Public Hearing that is scheduled on March 26th as part of the regular City Council meeting. This is an important part of the budgeting process that will ultimately result in the FY 2019 budget.

The final item on the agenda was my request that the City Council indicate their support in principal for the possibility of allowing placement on City property of one or more recognitions of the contributions that Slaves provided to the City and Dorchester County. This idea came as the result of what Washington and Lee University did a few years back to recognize the contributions that slaves had made in the building of the University and its history. The project that I am hoping will be undertaken would be at no cost to the city or city taxpayers but would engage the community in research, conversation, and recommendations of the kinds of recognitions that the community might feel were appropriate. City Council would then be able to determine what, if any, of the proposed memorials would be allowed to be placed on City property.

After a full discussion of the project and my request, I withdrew the request from consideration. The discussion that took place and the differing views are, I think, important for everyone to know. At the same time, I am not the person to try to explain them to you.

Rather I would urge you to see and hear the discussion on [www.townhallstreams.com](http://www.townhallstreams.com). Go to the website and where you see “Albany, NH” click on the arrow. A number of cities, including Cambridge will be revealed. Go to Cambridge and look in the lower righthand part of the page for the March meeting. The discussion starts at

 1.04 hours and goes to 1.27 hours, or for 23 minutes.

It is the first time that I recall since I was elected to City Council that there has been a discussion by the Commissioners and the Mayor about race issues at a City Council meeting.

The other important matter that came up before we adjourned was that the Mayor announced that the search committee for the new City Manager had received 4-5 applications. The committee is scheduled to start looking at the applications that have been received later this week. The position is open until filled, but the limited number of applications is concerning to me. If you know of anyone who has experience in this area, please have them take a look at the search information that is found on the City website.