CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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City Council continued working on the proposed budget at its meeting on April 16th with presentations by the Police and Fire Departments, Planning and Zoning, Economic Development, and the Municipal Utilities Commission. A copy of the Power Point presentations is attached to your email. There was also a presentation by representatives of Main Street regarding their request to be included in the City’s FY 2019 budget as well as attendance by a number of citizens who participated in the ongoing public hearing on the budget and commented on a variety of matters and concerns.

Police Chief Mark Lewis made the presentation on behalf of the Police Department and noted several positive accomplishments in the past year. Serious crime continues to go down and is expected to reduce further in the coming Fiscal Year. The camera project in the Greenwood Avenue area has been especially successful in that crime has gone down a reported 40% in that area based on data from the City’s Community Crime Map Program that can be found on the internet at <http://www.communitycrimemap.com/?address=CambridgeMD>. If you want to sign up to receive data from this system on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis please go to the link above and sign up for the areas and types of crime that interest you.

The Rescue Fire Company reported on what it has been doing the past year. It is an all-volunteer organization with 51 active members. If you might be interested in helping out in many ways that go beyond fighting fires, the Rescue Fire Company can always use your help. In FY 2018 they estimate close to 1,000 total responses with 90 of them being fires. Those numbers for FY 2019 are expected to be up slightly. The major equipment acquisition they are seeking is a tower truck to replace the current truck that is now over 20 years old. We were told that the average life of one of these trucks is approximately 20 years. Funding for most, if not all, of the cost for a tower truck would come from grants.

The Planning and Zoning Department has been busy in FY 2018 and plans to be even busier in FY 2019. Some of the work being undertaken and/or finished this fiscal year includes work in the Pine Street Area with Habitat Choptank that will continue in FY 2019. Development of the Cambridge Marketplace has been consistent during the year with more to come in FY 2019 as is the case with the work on Cannery Park.

The Historic Preservation Commission Guidelines are in final draft form and are available on the City website for review and comment. Once finalized by the HPC, they will be brought to City Council for approval and then presentation to the Maryland Historic Trust for final approval and return to the City Council for final adoption and implementation by the HPC. The HPC members and staff have developed comprehensive, readable, and understandable guidelines that will help facilitate the work on properties in the Historic District of Cambridge.

The plans for FY 2019 are as comprehensive as this year and when completed will help even more with the ongoing improvement of properties, parks, and other areas of the city as well as the quality of life here. The PowerPoint presentation attached will provide you with much greater detail on everything that is going on and planned by the Planning and Zoning staff.

The work of the Economic Development Department is varied with the goal of supporting events for the benefit of city residents and promoting the City and its economy through tourism, bringing new businesses to the city, and supporting existing ones. Their presentation is also included.

The Municipal Utilities Commission has a number of responsibilities that include providing the city residents with clean water, processing water and sewer bills, administering rental registrations for the city, and a number of other tasks that are best described in the attached PowerPoint.

Following the above presentations that included questions by the Mayor and Commissioners, Katie Clendaniel, the Executive Director of Cambridge Main Street, and Grace Gonzalez, the President of Cambridge Main Street, made presentations in support of the organization’s request to be included in the City Budget starting in FY 2019 on an ongoing basis with a request for funding in the amount of $20,000.

Following their presentation, the public hearing on the budget that started on April 9th was continued with the opportunity for anyone to speak about any of the matters discussed regarding the budget including the Main Street request. Most of those present spoke on the request by Main Street either in support of or against it. One business owner indicated that a group of about a dozen business owners in the city were in the process of establishing a downtown business association. Others also spoke briefly regarding other budget items. The Mayor and Commissioners asked questions in order to clarify the purpose of the request by Main Street and what the monies would be used to accomplish.

The Main Street presentation indicated that for FY 2018 they were currently anticipating a deficit of approximately $25,000. At the same time, they were asking for $20,000 from the city and planned to ask for $10,000 from the County and $10,000 from the state for FY 2019. If all of the requests were successful and nothing was done to reduce the FY 2018 deficit, they would have an additional $15,000 for the coming year to do additional work, assuming their other FY 2019 income remained the same as this year and their expenses for the coming year went down.

It appeared that Main Street was seeking the funding from the city for operational costs but that no plan was offered to show what, if anything, they would be doing for the remainder of this Fiscal Year to reduce the anticipated deficit of $25,000 so that more of the hoped for $40,000 from the city, county, and state could be used more effectively in FY 2019 to support businesses and events in the Main Street Area that includes Pine Street.

From my past work life, I have become accustomed to making decisions once all of the evidence was presented and considered. That is not always the case with government.

On motion of Commissioner Foster and a second by Commissioner Sydnor, we considered and discussed if the FY 2019 budget should include $20,000 for Main Street subject to conditions that we would decide on later with the requested funding coming from reserves. I spoke against deciding the matter at that time and urged that we continue the decision over to the next Budget meeting that would complete all of the budget presentations (evidence) from city staff and allow us to receive more information from Main Street about concerns that I had before making a decision. I was interested in their plans to reduce their deficit and how they planned to support the efforts of a group that wants to hold an event on Pine Street.

My argument was not successful, and the motion of Commissioner Foster was passed 3-2 with Commissioners Sydnor and Cannon voting in favor and Commissioner Hanson joining me in opposing the proposed motion.

Based on that vote, the City Manager will modify the proposed budget to include that funding. The issue that remains unanswered at this time is what will be the requirements placed on Main Street by City Council in order for them to receive that funding.

For me, I want to be able support the request if it will be part of new or additional efforts to assist businesses downtown. To do that I will need to understand what their plans are to reduce their deficit this Fiscal Year and to have a balance budget for next Fiscal Year. If that happens, I will be able see more clearly how the $20,000 of funding from the city will expand the capacity of Main Street to help support more businesses and the ongoing events including Pine Street.

That’s it for now. Please remember that we have another City Council Meeting scheduled for next Monday where more discussion of the Budget will take place.