CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

swrideout@aol.com

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This week there was no city council meeting because starting on Sunday June 11th, the Maryland Municipal League held its annual summer conference in Ocean City. My report this time will be about what was learned from our 3 days of training.

On Sunday afternoon I went to learn more about the various structures of city government in Maryland. Most Maryland cities do not have a strictly defined “Strong Mayor” or “Weak Mayor” form of government but rather have a combination of duties of the mayor and commissioners that suit their community. The form that showed the most positive qualities and strengths was the “City Council/City Manager” form of government. During this training, I learned that the citizen group that advocated for a city council/city manager form of government for Cambridge did it the right way.

The group did its’ research; reached out to the Mayor and Commissioners to show what it learned; reached out to the community to help it understand what was the goal of the group; made public presentations to city council; spoke with people in the community; drafted the proposed changes to the City Charter and then engaged in discussion and negotiation with city council regarding the proposed changes; worked with a committee formed by the city council to finalize the proposed language; and brought the final product that was completed by the city attorney for consideration and vote by city council, which passed it on a 4-1 vote.

I learned that the other way to change a city charter by public referendum is rarely, if ever, done. We were told that the primary reason for this is that the residents of a community have lives filled with so many other things that they rely on their elected leaders to make good decisions on their behalf. That is why they were elected. As we know, under the law, if city council changes the charter, the public has the right to petition for a referendum on the issue. That effort was made here after City Council passed the Charter Change but was not able to collect enough signatures to cause a public vote.

Monday was a busy day with a number of trainings. Commissioner Hanson attended the session on “Effective Records Management” to be sure that the policies that we passed this year were appropriate and sufficient. He indicated that they are. I attended a session on Keeping Municipalities Beautiful - Waste Reduction Solutions. I am told that the Power Point presentation for this and other training sessions will be on the MML website shortly.

I learned that Marylanders create on average 6.1 pounds of trash per person per day and that approximately 2.6 pounds of it is able to be recycled. Food is the largest portion of this trash. Over 76,000 tons of trash are bulk items such as chairs, tables, and couches that can be recycled.

In 2016 the recycle rate for Maryland was 42.9%. An area of recycling that can improve this percentage is composting which will be the next big push by the state. The presenters urged the attendees to look at local options, evaluate them, set realistic goals, and plan for the future. One website on this topic that I have not yet checked out is <http://compostcrew.com/>

The Town of Somerset, Maryland, a small community in Montgomery County diverted 70 tons of unused food and saved $5,000 in tipping fees at the county landfill. Here is the link to their website on recycling, etc. <http://townofsomerset.com/2171/Refuse-Recycling-Yard-Waste-and-Composti>

As we know Cambridge and the county came together to place recycle bins on Leonard Lane. I know from my personal experience that they are being well used. I am hopeful that the city or county is keeping data on the amount of tonnage that is being recycled from those bins.

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development explained that Maryland is a state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful that is found on the web at <https://www.kab.org/>. The department collaborates with a number of other state agencies to address beautification efforts in Maryland. There are clean up and green up grants available to communities and nonprofits that are offered in the fall each year and funded for the following spring.

They provide education opportunities in school systems and partner with Sustainable Maryland, which is a “certification program for Maryland municipalities that want to go green, save money, and take steps to sustain their quality of life over the long term”. <http://sustainablemaryland.com/>

The Community Legacy Program provides “local governments and community development organizations with funding for essential projects aimed at strengthening communities through activities such as business retention and attraction, encouraging homeownership and commercial revitalization”. See <http://dhcd.maryland.gov/Communities/Pages/programs/CL.aspx>

 Some interesting grants that were mentioned include the following:

* Big Belly Trash Cans – They are solar powered compacting bins for in town trash collection that have a WI Fi connection that will notify DPW when the bins are full and ready for pick up. They also are a WI Fi station for downtown use by visitors or residents.
* Litter Reduction and Graffiti Control – ATV litter vehicles that can augment the regular cleanup process
* Park Clean up – Construct green space in cities that may have small parts of the city that are overgrown and trash filled.

While no match is required, community buy in is.

The Plenary Session on Monday had an excellent presentation by Shannon Huffman Polson, who was one of the first women to fly Apache combat helicopters in the U.S. Armed Forces. She served in Korea and Serbia and told compelling stories about her challenges and successes during her military career and after. She shared her lessons learned and leadership strategies based on her experiences in the Army. More about her can be found at [www.shannonpolson.com](http://www.shannonpolson.com)

In the afternoon I attended a session on the Opioid Crisis in Maryland and how it is impacting communities. Much of what I heard, I had learned during my time on the bench when it was related to the Crack Cocaine crisis that we faced in the 1990’s that included the “crack babies” who were born exposed to crack cocaine. The Opioid Crisis is different in that more people are dying due to the mixing of Fentanyl and other drugs. I hope to be able to speak with one of the presenters from the conference to discuss other possible solutions to this challenge that are more long term.

The next presentation provided tips on good internal financial controls for cities. I am attaching the Power Point presentation to provide information on that presentation. We saw some news footage about the city treasurer of a town in Illinois who stole over $53 million from the city and was only caught because she was away from the office showing her horses one day when the city clerk found a bank account that was previously unknown.

One Tuesday I attended two sessions about recruiting, managing, and keeping the next generation of staffers. There are two Power Point presentations that I hope will be posted on the MML website soon. Those attending these sessions were asked so many questions for which most did not have answers:

* How many employees are eligible to retire?
* What succession plans are in place?
* Where and how should cities be looking for new employees and what do we need to do to keep the good ones?
* Do cities have summer intern programs for high school and college students to help us find the best employees and try to ensure that the good ones come back to work for the city?

While the challenges are there, so are the opportunities to find and keep quality employees such as we now have working for the city.

Matt Thornhill, who is a futurist, was the plenary speaker on Tuesday as well as the presenter that afternoon about locating, recruiting, and keeping staff that are generally Millenials. The information contained in his Power Points is very interesting. His website is found at <https://www.sirhq.com/matt-thornhill>

The final session on Tuesday were discussion groups for representatives of large, medium, and small cities where we were able to share our challenges and successes and ask questions about how other communities have addressed issues that went anywhere from the Opioid Crisis, cell towers in cities, and water issues.

I returned to Cambridge on Wednesday morning to attend a ceremony opening the regional veterans’ treatment court. Below is the news release regarding the court for your reading. It appears that they are looking for mentors for those involved in this court if you are interested and available.

District Court in Dorchester County launches regional veterans treatment court

CAMBRIDGE, Md. - The District Court in Dorchester County has launched Maryland’s first regional veterans treatment court, which will serve Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties. The regional veterans treatment court will provide treatment, accountability, and mentoring to former military service members, while helping connect veterans who are involved with the justice system with the benefits they have earned.

The District Court in Dorchester County Regional Veterans Treatment Court is a court-supervised, intensive treatment program that assists veterans who have committed crimes as a result of substance abuse or mental illness. Through the program, veterans can resolve outstanding criminal offenses, obtain the treatment and services they need, and stabilize their lives. The goal of the regional veterans treatment court is to reduce recidivism and help veterans identify resources available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and local organizations.

“Sentencing is one of the most difficult and important responsibilities assigned to judges, so when appropriate, our primary goal is to rehabilitate the offender for the benefit of not only the defendant but also the community,” said First Circuit Administrative Judge Brett W. Wilson and Dorchester County District Judge Melvin J. Jews, presiding judge for the regional veterans treatment court. “Now, as we encounter more men and women in court who have served our country, particularly over recent decades, it is time for us to respond with court-ordered and supervised treatment and services to serve the particular needs of our veterans, just as they have served all of us to ensure our safety and freedom.”

“The District Court in Dorchester County Regional Veterans Treatment Court will increase access to justice for military veterans on the Lower Eastern Shore,” said John P. Morrissey, Chief Judge of the District Court of Maryland. “I commend Judge Jews for his commitment to ensuring veterans in these locations receive the proper treatment when they are involved with the criminal justice system.”

The Circuit Court for Prince George’s County and District Court in Baltimore City offer dockets specifically for veterans. Since the 2015 establishment of veterans court programs in these jurisdictions, approximately 120 veterans have been served.

That is it for this report about Cambridge Matters.

Our next scheduled City Council meeting will be June 25th .