CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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The Monday City Council meeting had its ups and downs with a large public attendance in support of Food Trucks and Anchor Point nonprofit, a group of young men who came with Mike Bryan and led the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of the meeting, some decisions and differences of opinions amongst the members of City Council that made it at times interesting but also at times disappointing. I am always happy to see a large group of people attending City Council meetings as that means that people are engaged and interested in an issue before the Council, and that is a good thing. I, for one, would like to see more people more often; as this is your city and your money that helps to make it run. You need to be invested in how it is being run.

The meeting began with a moment of silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. The Agenda was approved as presented after which Public Comments were received from the many people attending. Mr. Foxwell spoke about the dead trees that he sees at Great Marsh Park that need to be taken down with replacements being planted. He also offered an idea for funding to fix the potholes that have appeared around town and asked why the road between Jenkins Creek Road and Washington Street was not open.

Commissioner Sydnor and Mr. Wheeler provided the answer to the last question. The road was started as part of the creation of a housing development that was not completed. The intersection of that road with Washington Street requires an acceleration and deceleration lane to be installed by the state, and the city has declined to accept the road in its current condition due to the fact that the city would then have to pay to pave it and put in the acceleration and deceleration lanes on Washington Street.

Most of the group of people that appeared to support Food Trucks in Cambridge also supported the request of Anchor Point to allow it to use its Metro Building in Dorchester Square for county approved bingo twice a week. Speakers included Candy Callaway, who also spoke on code enforcement issues, Judy Slaughter, Cheryl (last name unknown), Kay Karminski, Hope Lee, Adrian Holmes, Dudley Parr, Jermaine Anderson, Shane Foxwell, Jeanie Wilson, and David Murphy. Most spoke about the importance of allowing Food Trucks as another way to create businesses in the city and provide food to residents at lower prices than brick and mortar restaurants are able to do. With Anchor Point’s request, everyone spoke of the ministry of Alan McRae, who leads Anchor Point, the good that Anchor Point does in the community, and its need to raise money in order to help others.

Of the two requests from the public, the first came from Henry Van Dyke, who wanted to know if the permission that city council gave him at the last meeting to run his food truck in the city was in effect. He was advised that it was based on the conditions that the Planning and Zoning Commission established at its last meeting. He was not required to obtain a license from the city at this point until the final legislation is passed and a licensing process can be set up. Between the request of Mr. Van Dyke and that of Alan McRae, there was a lengthy and freewheeling discussion among the city commissioners and the city attorney about what was being proposed in the way of legislation; why it was being proposed that way; and what was the best way to move forward.

Without any decisions being made at that time, Alan McRae then spoke briefly about his request to be provided a waiver from any city enforcement efforts to cease and desist from holding bingo in the Metro Building twice a week pending his appeal to the Board of Appeals from the cease and desist notices that had been issued by the City Director of Planning and Zoning. On a 5-0 vote, Anchor Point was granted the requested waiver that allowed it to engage in its philanthropy work and in particular hold bingo events twice a week under the terms of the license issued by the Circuit Court Clerk. In addition, the commissioners directed the issue of any needed text amendments regarding the use of the Metro Building at Dorchester Square be taken up by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

The Consent Calendar was then taken up and approved on votes of 5-0 for items 4-10. They included the following:

* Approval of the City Council Meeting Minutes of July 9th
* The request of the Richardson Museum for a number of in-kind services when the Maryland Dove visits Cambridge September 7-10
* The request of Habitat for Humanity for a letter of support for its grant application to the Rural Maryland Council for up to $25,000 with the bulk of those monies to fund two full-time AmeriCorps positions
* The request from the Mace’s Lane Community Center Steering Committee for a letter of support for their application to the Rural Maryland Council for a $40,000 capacity building grant to hire consultants
* The request from Milton Walls, New Beginnings Covenant Ministries for a noise ordinance variance during their Crusade on the corner of Greenwood Ave and Washington Street from August 29th through September 3rd from 5 pm to 9:30 pm each evening
* The request from the Dorchester County Office of Tourism for a banner across Race Street from August 27-September 10 advertising the Cambridge Community Supper
* The request to approve the City of Cambridge & Habitat for Humanity Block Party on August 22nd from 3-7 pm in the Pine Street Neighborhood

The two ordinances regarding Food Trucks or Mobile Food Establishments were then read. During the discussion about them earlier in the evening, Commissioner Sydnor asked why the ordinances were needed. The City Attorney explained that Ordinance 1128 was needed because under the current law of Ordinance 11-10 no sales of any kind from vehicles are allowed in the city. Ordinance 1128 when passed will exempt Food Trucks from the mandates of Ordinance 11-10.

I also pointed out that when the food truck ordinance was previously defeated no further direction was given to staff regarding the proposed Food Truck Ordinance so nothing was done on it until recently. At that time, I reminded the City Commissioners of the requirements of Ordinance 11-10, but City Council did not direct any further action to be taken by staff. I had erroneously thought that that legislation was defeated in January of 2018. Upon doing some research, I discovered that the legislation was defeated over a year ago on May 8, 2017. The assertion by some members of city council that it had been referred back to the Planning and Zoning Commission is not supported by the meeting minutes of the May 8, 2017, meeting.

With regard to Proposed Ordinance 1129, it attempts to address how the Food Trucks are to be regulated in the city. Commissioner Foster urged that we address those issues through regulations rather than an Ordinance and simplify what is being proposed. The City Attorney explained that the Ordinance was required in order to establish how Food Trucks would be regulated under the UDC, that establishes how and under what circumstances and in which zoning districts of the city businesses are allowed. One of the concerns by some of the commissioners was how to limit Food Trucks so that they could not be in direct competition in the immediate vicinity of a brick and mortar restaurant. Commissioner Sydnor seemed to want to give the Food Trucks free reign in the city so that they could park and do their sales right outside an existing restaurant.

While that may ultimately be the decision of City Council, in order to move this topic forward the motion was made and approved on a vote of 5-0 to refer Ordinance 1129 to the Ordinance Committee for further review and drafting and for return on August 13th for second reading and a decision by City Council. The commissioners and the public are welcome to offer their ideas to the Ordinance Committee.

 As I am a member of the Ordinance Committee, please send me any questions, concerns, or suggestions at swrideout@aol.com so that I can provide them to the committee. The committee will be meeting soon at a date and time to be determined in order to have a report and suggested language back for consideration at the next scheduled City Council meeting on August 13th so your early comments would be helpful.

Under Old Business a number of matters were taken up. The first was a request by Cambridge Mainstreet to be allowed to finish a project for which it had received $650 grant funding from the city later this past Fiscal Year. As the city needed to close out its books for FY 2018, the requested extension was not possible.

Having spoken with the Executive Director of Cambridge Mainstreet, it was my view that they had made a good faith effort to complete the project but were unable to do so due to weather issues and the collapse of 507 Race Street. I also felt that they had used the grant money that was going to be supplemented by some private funding. So, I moved that we find that the $650 had been used and that Cambridge Mainstreet file a report with the city identifying what it had accomplished with those funds. I also indicated aside from the motion that until they finalized the project with private funding I would not support any future funding requests from them.

That motion was defeated on a 2-3 vote with Commissioner Hanson and me voting in favor and the other Commissioners opposed. The motion was then made to deny the request to extend the grant and require a report from Cambridge Mainstreet within 30 days in which it would account for what monies were expended; and if any remained, they would be returned to the city. That motion passed 5-0.

The next item on the agenda involved MidShore ProBono (MSPB). As I am on its board, I recused myself from the discussion and vote. After a report from Mr. Wheeler that indicated that there was no city office space that would be appropriate for housing the project, much discussion ensued. Commissioner Sydnor moved to deny funding to MSPB, but there was no second. Commissioner Hanson then moved to fund the project with the $2,400 grant that the grant committee recommended. There was no second. The motion then was to deny the funding which received a second and was approved on a 3-1 vote. Those voting to deny the funding were Commissioners Sydnor, Foster, and Cannon. Voting in favor of the funding was Commissioner Hanson. I was able to take a look at what happened by going to [www.townhallstreams.com](http://www.townhallstreams.com) where the videos of past City Council Meetings can be found.

In the memo provided with the original request for funding, MSPB indicated that the cost to the organization to provide legal services in the City of Cambridge and Dorchester County for the poor and elderly poor was $72,500. MSPB sought $6,500 in grant monies to help support having an office in the city to meet clients, and the grants committee recommended $2,400. Last year MSPB met with 1,178 participants in the city and provided civil legal services to them. I understand that it anticipated an increase in those numbers this year. I was disappointed that the funding was not provided to MSPB to help continue its work for the poor and elderly here in Cambridge.

Under New Business a number of matters were quickly addressed:

* On a 5-0 vote $3,125 was appropriated to the Police Department for K-9 supplies from a K-9 fundraiser
* On a 4-0 vote with Commissioner Foster abstaining, $483 was appropriated to the Police Department budget from a Walmart fundraiser
* On a 5-0 vote David A. Bramble, Inc. was awarded a contract in the amount of $209,813.50 plus a 10% contingency fund for unexpected issues for the Housing Authority Drainage Improvement project
* On a 5-0 vote the Annual Street Resurfacing Contract proposal was continued over to the August 13th meeting to allow those Commissioners who wanted to provide input to DPW on street paving needs to do so regarding the proposals in their Ward. I advised Mr. Wheeler that I was satisfied with the work that was proposed to be done in Ward 1.

The Mayor and Mr. Wheeler than announced that the contract with the new City Manager, Patrick Cominsky, has been signed and all background checks have been completed. His appointment was confirmed on a vote of 4-0 with Commissioner Sydnor abstaining. Mr. Cominsky will start August 1st ,and the Mayor and Commissioners will welcome him between 3-4 p.m. that day. The public will be able to meet with him on August 2nd between 6-8 p.m. in City Council Chambers. I would urge you to put the public opportunity on your calendar and come meet our new City Manager. He has indicated that he wants to get out into the community to meet as many people as possible and to hear their concerns.

The Mayor then asked that the commissioners reappoint Carlton W. Stanley as a member of the Housing Authority Board with a term to expire June 30, 2023. This was approved on a 5-0 vote.

During the time allowed for comments from the Commissioners, Commissioner Foster moved to change the public comment portion of the meeting from the start of the meeting to the end. I explained that it was important to have it at the start so that people could comment on items up for discussion during the meeting and so that they did not have to wait until the end of the meeting to talk about something that was decided on during the meeting. The motion was then amended to allow for public comment to occur both at the start and end of the meeting so that those who wanted to wait until the end of the meeting could also comment on what happened during the meeting. That motion passed 5-0.

Commissioner Foster raised once again her interest in amending the City Charter but did not make any motion to that effect.

Thanks for Reading.