CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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A lot was accomplished during the City Council meeting of August 13th all of which was passed on unanimous votes by City Council, but the most important issues raised were those brought forth by members of the public during the Public Comment portion of the meeting. In particular a matter that should concern all of Cambridge and cause some response by the community and city government was one raised by Dante, president of the Mayor’s Advisory Council.

At 5:00 p.m. the Mayor and 3 members of City Council met, with Commissioner Sydnor being absent as he was on vacation and Commissioner Foster arriving shortly after the meeting began. City Council went into closed session to discuss the acquisition of real property for a public purpose and continued the matter over to the public meeting to consider the matter in the public forum and make a decision. A second issue that was considered during the closed session involved the city’s negotiating strategy concerning a matter that would impact the city but would be harmful to the city’s ability to negotiate if discussed in public. No votes or final decisions were made regarding that matter.

At 6:00 p.m. the Regular Session of City Council began with Dante leading those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance after a moment of silence that began the meeting. One item was added to the agenda regarding street paving issues that had been continued over from the last meeting and one item regarding an update on the Cambridge Market Place was removed from the agenda at which point the Agenda was approved 4-0.

During the time for public comment and requests from the public a number of matters and concerns were raised.

* Mike Starling spoke first about Dorchester County and the City “Going Purple” as part of a campaign to raise awareness of the Opioid Crisis in Maryland and in Dorchester County and the City. Mike spoke of his family’s experience with the issue that came when his mother began using too many pain killing drugs that had been prescribed for her and the efforts to help her address her addiction successfully. September will be “Going Purple” month in Dorchester County as well as a number of other counties on the Eastern Shore. The Iron Man event later in September will also show its support.
* James Bromwell then spoke of an incident on Phillips Street at his home involving teens and preteens being rude, violent, and abusive to him, the police, and others in the neighborhood that included the throwing of rocks at his home. James raised his concerns about the fact that these youth, who may be gang wannabes, showed no respect for persons or property. Later in the meeting at the closing public comment section, he praised the Cambridge Police officers who showed a great deal of restraint in addressing the youth involved in this incident.
* Alan McRae of the Anchor Point nonprofit talked about the need for the business and nonprofit communities to work with the city government and city government to work with them to make Cambridge even more business friendly and to work through problems facing the community. He also spoke positively about the Food Truck Ordinances that were going to be proposed later in the meeting.
* Dudley Parr of the Overflow Café spoke about substance abuse in Cambridge and the sale of drugs near the café at Muir and Academy Street and the hope that the Cambridge Police Department will help address his concerns about the drug sales that are taking place. He also talked about the 7 AA meetings and 2 Recovery meetings that are held at the Café each week and the importance of the “Going Purple” campaign and the need to reduce drug addiction and dependence in our community. He pointed out that this was not a problem that city government could solve alone but rather was a problem that the entire community must begin to address, if we are going to make Cambridge a better and safer place to live.
* Cheryl Dayton then spoke on the City Charter and the Unified Development Code (UDC) and her reading them to fully understand them. She also discussed the apparent contradictions in them and the different way that she believes the city enforces what appear to be the same rules depending on who the business owners are. She asked the city to consider how to uniformly enforce the rules and laws with regard to everyone.
* Dante then spoke about the problems that he was having in the community being bullied by other youth when he has been walking home and about the fights that he is seeing among youth near Bradley Ave. He too is concerned about groups of youth that appear to be members of a gang. Dante was followed by Jania who spoke about a gang she called the “Street Runners” who were bothering Dante and asked that the city help make the community safer for the children.
* The final item during this portion of the meeting was the recognition of the “Parent Factor” Team and designating August as “Child Support Awareness Month”. Johnette Lanham, who works for Dorchester Department of Social Services, spoke on behalf of the efforts of the team to work in a two generational approach with families to address issues concerning financial stability, child education and support, parent education and career support, and strength based whole family services and support families in our community. On a vote of 4-0 City Council approved the requested Resolution that the Mayor read and signed.

City Council then took up the Consent Docket with all items being approved 4-0.

* Approval of the City Council Meeting Minutes of July 23rd
* The request of the Dorchester Chamber of Commerce to hang a banner across Race Street highlighting “Dorchester Goes Purple” for 3 weeks starting September 10th.
* The request of the Dorchester County Health Department for permission to hold the Heart of the Shore Wellness Expo on Saturday September 22nd from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Race and Cedar Streets.
* The request of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority to hold an International Day of Prayer Event on Sunday August 26th from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on the city lot at Maryland Ave and Rt. 50.

Ordinance 1130 was then introduced for a first reading. This Ordinance will establish the new Historic District Design Guidelines that had been brought to City Council earlier this year for approval and forwarding to the Maryland Historic Trust for final review and approval. The Guidelines had been reviewed and approved with some minor technical corrections by the Maryland Historic Trust and are now back before City Council for final approval. After the 1st reading, the Ordinance was continued over to August 27th for second reading, public hearing, and potential passage. The public has had a number of opportunities to make comments regarding these Guidelines over the past several months, and August 27th will be the last opportunity to do so before City Council will vote on them.

Ordinances 1128 and 1129 which are related to one another were then read by title only and a public hearing was then opened for comment by the public. Henry Van Dyke had a number of specific questions regarding how the proposed ordinances would impact his business such as whether he could display his menu on a television screen. To the extent possible his questions were answered with the suggestion that he meet with the Director of Zoning to iron out any issues or concerns that he had.

The Original proposed Ordinance 1129 was amended after its initial reading and was also amended on motion of Commissioner Hanson to have a review of the implementation of the Ordinance within one year of its going into effect. Some of the other changes to Ordinance 1129 came from the Ordinance Committee working with the director of Zoning and the City Attorney to create a pilot Food Truck Program to iron out any of the issues or concerns since this was the first time such a project was considered by the city.

Upon the completion of the public hearing and other public comments and at the request of the City Attorney, Ordinance 1128 and 1129 as amended were adopted separately on 4-0 votes.

Under Old Business the street paving plan was returned for an update. Mr. Wheeler advised that the proposed pavings in 3 of the Wards had been reviewed and approved by the Commissioners in those Wards and that plans were in place to review the plans with the other two commissioners for their Wards. As there was no change in the amount of monies being spent in any of the wards, he asked that City Council approve the proposed expenditures for each ward with the possibility of different streets in Wards 2 or 3 being paved but the amount of money proposed to be spent remaining the same. On motion property seconded, that request was approved 4-0. This will allow the city to move forward more quickly with starting the bid process for street paving.

Under New Business the matters raised were quickly addressed and approved, once again on votes of 4-0.

* Council appropriated $11,575 that is a Federal Grant through the city to be shared equally between the city police and county sheriff for police equipment.
* Council appropriated $2,700 from a Body Armor grant to go to the police department for their budget.
* Council approved $15,000 in appropriated city funds to be used by the Good Shepherd Association as matching funds for a MHAA grant on condition that it receive such a grant in which event the previously appropriated funds would be used to match that grant to help move the Maces Lane Community Center project forward. City Council was advised by the Mayor that progress was being made with this project which was a condition for the use of the city funds.
* City Council approved the MOU between the city and county for the establishment of a Joint Emergency Operations Center and its shared use of common space in the City’s Edward E. Watkins Public Safety Complex.
* City Council took action on the matter raised in the earlier closed meeting regarding the purchase of real property by the city for public use when it approved the purchase of approximately 1.8 acres of property next to the Department of Public Works at Washington Street and Leonards Lane for $30,000 plus $5,000 toward closing costs. This property would not need to be used immediately but could be a location for a future well and pumping station for this part of the city.

During the time for comments by the Mayor, Commissioners, and staff, the Mayor requested that City Council approve the appointment of Commissioners Hanson and Sydnor to the Board of Saliwinds Park, Inc. pursuant to the agreement for the future development of Sailwinds Park. City Council also unanimously authorized itself to participate in the “Go Purple” awareness campaign.

There was additional comment from the public including some of those who spoke at the start of the meeting. In addition on a 4-0 vote, an additional $2,000 was awarded to the Empowerment Center from the unused portion of the Social Services Fund to help support their work in the community during the coming year.

As an addition to the above unofficial meeting notes, I would ask that you please consider what you might be able to do to help address some of the concerns raised by the public and especially the two individuals who were subject to harassment and attacks here in town. What you can do is volunteer in any number of ways – At your church - at your local elementary, middle, or high school – helping young students to learn to read - at the police department – with local efforts to feed school children on weekends and over holidays – as a CASA volunteer.

If you do not know what you can or want to do, email me at swrideout@aol.com. I know of many organizations that can use your help. While much is going well here in Cambridge, we are not going to be as successful as we can be unless the issues raised by the public at the start of our meeting are addressed. You are someone who can make a difference.

Thanks for reading. Until next time.

Steve