CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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The Tuesday night meeting was even shorter than the agenda would have indicated. After having a moment of silence to start the meeting along with the Pledge of Allegiance, the City Council amended the agenda by removing from the agenda Ordinances 1134, 1135, 1136, and 1137 that were on for first reading and Ordinance 1131 on for second reading, public hearing and adoption.

The action was taken regarding these matters due to the concerns that some of the Commissioners had as to the content of the proposed ordinances and the concerns from residents of the Historic District about the proposed rezoning of the School property and the property owned by Jeanne Winterbottom Wright and Hubert H Wright at the intersection of School and Mill Streets. At the end of the meeting a discussion took place regarding Ordinances that come from the Planning and Zoning Commission and those that are otherwise brought forward for consideration. More about that later.

City Council then approved the agenda and heard public comment from two individuals. Officer Foster of the Cambridge Police Department asked that the 400 block of Race Street be closed for two hours from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. on Monday October 29th to allow the police department to hold its annual trunk or treat event. He apologized for the lateness of the request. As this was an annual event and had been held in prior years, the request was approved on a 5-0 vote. He also invited the Mayor and members of city council to the Police Athletic League opening at Maces Lane Middle School on the 12th of October.

Michael Wheatley then spoke on his wish that all of us be kinder to one another and continue to work together to improve Cambridge. Divisiveness and speaking ill of one another can only divide us and prevent us from achieving a goal that everyone wants, which is an even better Cambridge.

As there were no request from the public, the Consent Calendar was then read and approved on a vote of 5-0. Those items approved were

* The Meeting Minutes of City Council from September 24, 2018
* The request from the Pauline F. and W. David Robbins Family YMCA to hold their annual Turkey Trot 5K on November 22nd from 8:00 – 9:30 a.m. starting and ending at the Y
* The request from the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay to display fireworks on October 12th in place of the already approved October 13th event if rain is predicted for the 13th

The next items were two proposed Ordinances for second reading, public hearing, and possible adoption. The public hearing for Ordinance 1132 was held and no one from the public asked to speak. This Ordinance deleted specific signage requirements for medical cannabis facilities in the city to make the requirements for their signs the same as that of other businesses.

Ordinance 1133 then had its public hearing where no one from the public asked to speak. This Ordinance established where accessory buildings were to be placed on corner lots within the city and limited the percentage of the space of the side yard that they could occupy in the rear of the primary building footprint.Both Ordinances passed 5-0.

As there was no Old Business, City Council took up the few remaining matters under New Business. The first item was the appointment of the City Fire Chief and two Assistant Fire Chiefs. Adam Pritchett was appointed City Fire Chief. Brad Walters is 1st Assistant Chief and Ben McCarter is 2nd Assistant Chief. They were appointed on a 5-0 vote of the Commissioners.

Lorraine Nye’s request for approval of the installation of a six-foot memorial bench in honor of her sister was approved for installation at the Cambridge Marina with the cost of the bench, shipping, and installation to be paid for by Ms. Nye. She will work with the Department of Public Works to select a bench that is consistent with the other benches currently in the Marina area and an appropriate location for the bench.

Two financial matters were also approved on 5-0 votes. They were

* The appropriation of $4,185 to the FY 2019 Employee Training Budget to increase that budget by that amount for S.W.A.T Training. These monies came from a Byrne – Justice Assistance Grant.
* The appropriation of $7,000 to the FY 2019 Employee Training Budget to increase that budget by that amount for Fair and Impartial Police Training. These monies came from a donation by the Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT)

Prior to the close of the meeting, there was no further public comment. The City Attorney then started a discussion about what the law requires regarding proposed legislation coming to City Council. If it comes from the Planning and Zoning Commission, he indicated that City Council needs to take the proposed legislation up in the ordinary course of council business rather than have conversations and make decisions prior to the meeting. We may then approve it, reject it and return it to the Planning and Zoning Commission for suggested modifications, or make minor amendments to clarify language.

The challenges that we faced with some of the matters that came on for first reading on October 9th involved reports provided by staff that were confusing and contained information that was inconsistent with what was being proposed in the Ordinance and in one instance appeared to propose legislation that impacted a property that had not been noticed when the hearing was held before the Planning and Zoning Commission.

In reading the materials prior to the City Council meeting, I had concerns that were echoed by several residents in the Historic District, as they were unaware that the matter being raised at City Council had ever been discussed at the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

The result of the conversation Tuesday evening is that there have been and will be meetings by interested city commissioners with staff, the City Attorney, and the City Manager to determine how to avoid confusion in the future and provide the residents of Cambridge with adequate notice of what issues are going to be discussed at meetings of the Planning and Zoning Commission so that those who are interested or impacted can attend to provide their input to the process.

As we learn more, I will let you know what is happening.

Thanks for reading.

Steve