CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #51

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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Normally I am not able to tell you what goes on during closed sessions of City Council. However, when we make decisions that are then made public, I can share them with you. That is what happened at our November 26th meeting.

We met early for the purpose of having closed meetings to receive advice of counsel on one matter and to make a personnel decision on a separate matter. We began at 4:30 p.m. for the session for receiving legal advice. The matter involved a legal memo from Bond Counsel regarding Sailwinds that had been provided to the City Council in June of 2014. As Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. (CWDI) is now leading the city effort to develop the property, the City Attorney felt that sharing the memo with CWDI would be appropriate and helpful to them. After discussion about the confidentiality of the memo and the need to continue to maintain that confidentiality, City Council approved sharing the memo with the Board of CWDI conditioned on it remaining confidential.

The personnel issue that needed to be discussed involved the search for a finance director to replace Ginger Heatwole Jenkins, who had resigned as finance director this past summer. After an extensive search, the city manager and his recruitment team recommended a candidate that City Council approved. I will leave it to the City Manager to provide the official announcement but want to assure you that she comes with excellent credentials, broad work experience in public and nonprofit sectors, and strong recommendations.

When the regular City Council meeting began at 6:00 p.m., there was only one member of the public present, Rhodana Fields, representing Habitat Choptank. She comes to many of the City Council meetings due to the ongoing successful collaboration that the city has with Habitat Choptank.

The Agenda was approved with one minor change, and there were no comments from the public nor scheduled requests from the public. On the consent calendar the following items were approved on a vote of 5-0:

1. The Meeting Minutes from the November 13th meeting
2. Holiday Schedule B for 2019 that includes July 5th (a Friday) in addition to July 4th
3. The City Council Meeting Schedule for 2019
4. The city staff request to apply for the JP Morgan Advancing Cities Grant in partnership with Habitat Choptank and others and to provide a letter of support from City Council

Resolution 18-011 was then considered. This was brought on the request of Commissioner Cannon, who is the Council Liaison to the Americans with Disabilities Act Committee. Commissioner Cannon wanted to update the ADA Committee, its rules and regulations, and its membership. He and I met with the City Attorney to redraft the Administrative Standard Operating Procedure (ASOP) that addressed ADA issues to become the Proposed ASOP No. 46, which was adopted on a 5-0 vote. I am attaching it to this report due to its importance to our community.

There being no Old Business, City Council then addressed four items of New Business all of which were approved on votes of 5-0.

1. $274 in proceeds from the Cambridge Police Department (CPD) Auction were allocated to the CPD Equipment Account
2. The $7,000 donation from the Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT) for CPD training was appropriated, and the CPD Police Budget was increased by that amount for Fair and Impartial Police Training.
3. A State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Operating Assistance Grant in the amount of $24,948 was awarded to Lisa Sturtevant and Associates (LSA). This will support the efforts of the city to improve housing conditions within the city.
4. The appointment of Jerry Burroughs, Patty Kaczmareck, and Tom Puglisi as new members of the City of Cambridge Citizens Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities replacing Anne Whaples and Louise White and filling a vacant position.

Before the meeting ended, Mona Smith and members of her family arrived at Council Chambers. She used the Public Comment time at the end of the meeting to raise a concern that she had regarding the damage done to 622 High Street as the result of an automobile accident about three weeks ago. The porch of the house was severely damaged as were additional parts of the house. She indicated that the owner of the property who rented the property to her family would not fix the house until he had received a check from the insurance company of the driver of the car.

Odie Wheeler, Director of DPW, explained to the Commissioners what had happened since the accident. While it appears that the house could have been condemned, he was concerned that in doing so Ms. Smith’s family would be required to leave the property. Unbeknownst to Mr. Wheeler was the willingness of the Red Cross to provide alternative housing for the family but only if the property was condemned.

After a full airing of the problem and possible solutions, a motion was made and seconded by members of City Council to direct Mr. Wheeler to condemn the property. As I listened to all the information, I argued against the motion. I felt that it was not our place to do that, even if we felt it was the right decision. We did not have all the information about the property and the decision was not within our purview as Commissioners but was within Mr. Wheeler’s responsibilities. After discussion and advice of the City Attorney, the motion was defeated. Mr. Wheeler then advised everyone that he had directed staff to condemn the property effective November 27th.

There being no further business to undertake, the meeting adjourned.