CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #47

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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The first City Council meeting of 2019 was called to order by the Mayor at 6:00 p.m. After reporting on the closed meeting that was held at the end of the January 14th meeting where a personnel matter was discussed but no action taken; the Mayor sought the approval or amendment of the agenda. It was approved unanimously.

It was brought to the attention of the Mayor that we had not held a moment of silence to start the meeting nor done the Pledge of Allegiance, so those matters were immediately addressed.

Michael Wheatley was the only person to come forward to make a public comment. He thanked City Council for allowing the Rescue Fire Company to hold its annual train event in the Old City Hall and for supporting and working with Cambridge Main Street.

Two requests from the public were taken up and approved on 5-0 votes. The first was the request from Jane Devlin on behalf of the Richardson Maritime Museum for a letter of support for their Legislative Bond Bill for the rehabilitation and re-purposing of the brick building at 103 Hayward Street to house the complete Richardson Museum collection and administrative office. The current Museum building on High Street has been sold with the Museum leasing it back for a period of time while seeking additional funds from the state to match Museum funds to complete the rehabilitation of the property at 103 Hayward Street.

Tom Krantz then spoke on behalf of the Cambridge Yacht Club’s request to have overnight camping for two nights for up to 20 tents on the front grounds to the right and/or left of Yacht Club Drive during the Admiral Byrd Regatta being held July 19th and 20th. The club will provide port-a-potties. Fires will not be permitted on the ground. Campers and Trailers will not be permitted on the ground nor will alcohol. The Yacht Club will allow those persons camping to use the club facilities for bathing and will provide insurance to protect the city in the event of any liability claims. This will allow participants who are bringing their boats on trailers to attend at less expense.

The Consent Calendar saw four items approved on votes of 5-0. They included the

* City Council meeting minutes of January 14th
* The request from Maces Lane Community Center Steering Committee for a letter of support for a Legislative Bond Bill to complete Phase 1 of the project and begin Phase 2.
* The request from the Maces Lane Community Center Steering Committee for a letter of support for a Heritage Area capital grant.
* The request from the Dorchester Chamber of Commerce for permission to hold the Boat Docking Competition at Long Wharf on Sunday June 2 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., to erect tents, a variance from the noise ordinance, the closure of Long Wharf parking lot, and the serving of alcohol.

There were no Ordinances for reading or adoption. The next items were under Old Business.

The first was a Housing Report prepared by Yvette Robinson, City Housing Specialist. Her oral report highlighted her written report that is included along with other written reports that provide significant detail on all that is happening. A quick summary is that significant progress is being made in several projects that are aimed at improving housing opportunities and the condition of housing in the community. There will be a few community meetings to provide those living in the city with information and ideas about where help is needed and to hear what is being planned. The written reports provide some of those important dates. The next community meeting is scheduled for February 28th at the Empowerment Center on Pine Street from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., and another is scheduled in early April. Homeowners are encouraged to apply for assistance so that a determination can be made as to what, if anything, might be done to help.

There are already homeowners who have applied and are in the pipeline for help with their properties. There are two properties about which some concerns were raised as to their closeness to other properties, and city council has requested that city staff address these concerns at the February 11th city council meeting. The ongoing collaboration that is taking place to help improving housing and housing opportunities in Cambridge is exciting to see. Thanks go to Ms. Robinson, city staff, Habitat Choptank, Maryland DHCD, and 1880 Bank for all the effort going into making these ideas a reality.

The other matter of Old Business involved Cambridge Mainstreet. At our last meeting, City Council indicated that none of the $20,000 set aside for Cambridge Mainstreet would be funded until the organization submitted a budget showing how the monies would be spent. A proposed budget was submitted, and Katie Clendaniel, the ED for Cambridge Mainstreet, appeared to provide some explanation about each of the items submitted.

There were several questions and comments from the Mayor and Commissioners that indicated that there was no agreement on what was proposed. As a result, a meeting was scheduled for Cambridge Mainstreet representatives to meet with Commissioner Foster and Commissioner Cannon to see if the matters of concern could be reconciled.

Before final public comment, several issues were raised by the Commissioners. The first came from Commissioner Sydnor, who asked the Police Chief about how many police officers were on staff. We are funded for 46 but only have 40 currently. If the number is reduced to 38, the Chief indicated that he would need to schedule the officers for 12 hour shifts and cut back on some other successful projects.

Hurlock is recruiting officers at a higher salary than Cambridge is paying, and their officers can take their cars home with them. I asked that city staff provide us with a budget update as to where we stand at 6 months into the fiscal year regarding income and expenses. This might allow us to consider alternatives regarding the level of funding of our officers prior to the FY 2020 budget that will begin July 1st.

Commissioner Cannon asked when the 300 block of High Street was going to begin rehabilitation. Mr. Wheeler indicated that a meeting with the contractor is scheduled for next week, and the plan is to start with some underground work next week as well. The project will probably take until April or May to be finished.

Commissioner Hanson advised that the Governor had declared 2019 as the year to acknowledge veterans in Maryland and a proclamation will be issued February 7th.

Prior to adjournment, the Mayor reported that she has been hearing from many people the good news about Cambridge that is being discussed at meetings and events around the state that she has been attending.

With that very positive information the meeting adjourned.