CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #46

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

swrideout@aol.com

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The City Council meeting began at 6:00 p.m. with the call to order by the Mayor and with a moment of silence, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the approval of the proposed agenda.

Only Michael Wheatly spoke during the Public Comment time where he congratulated the Mayor and Commissioners on how professional we were during our meetings. He also let City Council know that Cambridge Main Street and its Executive Director were working hard to improve downtown Cambridge and urged us to support the funding request of Main Street.

Brian Ambrette, the Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Eastern Shore Climate Adaption Partnership (ESCAP), filled in City Council on the work that it had been doing over the past year. Brent Jett, a city staff member, represents Cambridge in this informal group, which is working to formalize its status subject to the approval of the participating communities. This group “promotes learning and collaboration among Eastern Shore communities to prepare for changes in weather patterns, flooding, and other environmental conditions”.

Their 2018-2019 work plan includes a Sea Level Rise planning project and tools and products for that project are available at <https://tinyurl.com/ES-SeaLevel>. They also provide Nuisance Flood Planning guidance in House Bill 1350 that can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/MD-HB1350>.

Mr. Ambrette plans to return to City Council in approximately 6 months to provide an update on what ESCAP has been doing. For those interested, he can be contacted at 410-690-4603 x 151 or at BAmbrette@escl.org.

The Consent Calendar was then taken up with 5-0 votes in favor of the following:

* The Meeting Minutes from the January 28th City Council Meeting
* The request from Jason Chance, TCR Event Management, to hold a running event starting and finishing at Great Marsh Park on Saturday April 20, 2019 between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and Noon along with a noise ordinance variance
* The request from the American Legion Post 91 for a letter of support to the State Highway Administration to have the corner parcel of State Property adjacent to the Legion building turned over to the Legion for a nominal price.

Ordinances for first reading and continuation over to March 11th for 2nd reading, public hearing, and possible adoption were read. They included Ordinance 1139 dealing with the height of fences that may be erected in front of and behind the Primary Rear Building Façade of a property and Ordinance 1140 that addresses the potential replacement of existing nonconforming multifamily structures within the city’s residential district that are damaged or destroyed by accidental or natural causes beyond the control of the property owner.

Ordinance 1138 was taken up for second reading, public hearing, and possible passage. It dealt with the allowance of Bingo as a Permitted Use with Conditions in the General Commercial Zoning District. No one asked to speak at the Public Hearing, and the Ordinance passed on a 5-0 vote.

Next on the agenda was the Old Business of the Main Street Funding request. This had been continued over from the prior City Council meeting to allow Main Street representatives to meet with Commissioners Cannon and Foster to iron out some issues that were raised at the earlier meeting. The proposal that was made included the city funding Main Street for $20,000 for FY 2019 with Main Street using $3,500 for a Pine Street event and paying the city $5,000 for the installation of a light pole on Pine Street and the remaining $11,500 being unrestricted monies.

I raised the issue of what I thought was a waste of resources and time to have the city provide $5,000 of the $20,000 to Main Street for them to simply turn that back to the city for the Pine Street light pole project. I also felt that the city was seeking to micro-manage what Main Street was doing and suggested that the city simply provide the funding to Main Street and then evaluate for FY 2020 if they had used the money wisely in the view of the Commissioners. On a vote of 4-1 the motion to fund Main Street with the requirements mentioned above passed, with me voting in the negative.

The New Business that came before City Council included a request that the city revise its General Fun to add $10,800 to the Banquet and Awards Fund for the purposes of supporting the Fire Department Annual Banquet with $6,000 and contribute $4,800 to the Fire Department retirement fund. This matter was approved on a vote of 5-0.

The final matter on the agenda was my request that we appoint either the Mayor, a Commissioner, or Herve Hamon to be on the board of the Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage Area. This request had been pending for some time, and the Mayor had only received one response from any of the Commissioners. As a result of no elected official being available to serve, Herve Hamon was appointed to the board on a vote of 5-0.

During the time for the Mayor and Commissioners to speak, I talked about the impressive event held on Sunday at the Bethel A.M.E. church on Pine Street. Congressman Elijah Cummings was the guest speaker/preacher at the event that also recognized 10 leaders from the Cambridge African American community. The two most important points raised in Congressman Cumming’s talk were that we need to do a better job educating the children of this community; and whatever we do, we must work together to have the greatest chance for success.

Commissioner Cannon introduced Stephanie Hollowell and asked her to say a few words about her interest in being on what has been called the ADA Committee. Upon proper motion, Ms. Hollowell was appointed to that committee.

Mr. Wheeler then gave an update regarding the work on the 300 Block of High Street. He also indicated that he would provide weekly updates to the City Council so that it could be shared with the community.

Construction has started. Placing slip lines in the Sewer Line has been completed, and new lateral connections from the buildings to the main line will be done this week, weather permitting. The goal is to finish all the work in the 300 block before Memorial Day. For most days 1-way traffic will be allowed, and the street will be open in the evenings and on weekends.

The Mayor reported that she had attended a meeting of the MML legislative committee regarding the small cell tower legislation that is pending in the state legislature. It has a large potential impact on Cambridge and other Maryland cities, and it is important for us to stay in tune with what is happening in Annapolis regarding this issue.

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During the time for Public Comment at the end of the meeting, Officer John Foster asked that the City Council approve holding the Easter Egg Hunt at Great Marsh Park on April 13th. This request was approved on a 5-0 vote on the condition that future requests be made in the ordinary course of City Council business as other people and organizations are required to do.

The meeting then adjourned.

Thanks for reading.