CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #45

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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In the absence of Mayor Jackson-Stanley, who had to be away, our City Council Meeting of February 25th was ably led by Commissioner Dave Cannon, acting in her place. Commissioner Foster was also unable to attend the meeting.

Acting Mayor Cannon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and followed with a moment of silence. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Hanson. The agenda was approved on a 4-0 vote and was followed by the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

Donald Gray spoke about several concerns relating to Glenburn Ave. One was excessive speed on the street and the lack of speed limit signs. Mr. Wheeler advised that there was one speed limit sign down near Hambrooks Blvd. He was asked to check for other speed limit signs on the street. Mr. Gray also spoke about a portion of the sidewalk on Glenburn that crosses a private alley and the need to have it repaired.

Mr. Wheeler again spoke to that issue and indicated that he and I had previously spoken about it and that the city would be fixing it once the weather improved. Mr. Gray indicated that he had obtained a quote for the repair at $1,500, but Mr. Wheeler indicated that city staff could do it much less expensively.

Finally, Mr. Gray spoke about the flooding that had occurred in the private alley behind the homes on Glenburn Ave, and again Mr. Wheeler spoke to the issue to remind Mr. Gray and others that almost all of the alleys in the city are private and that it is up to the homeowners who either back on the alleys or, in certain circumstances, own a portion of the alley to take care of them. They are not the responsibility of the City.

Following Public Comment, Sandra Tripp-Jones, the Interim Executive Director of Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. (CWDI) introduced the board members of the nonprofit and made a presentation on steps that have taken place and plans for next steps in the development of the Sailwinds Property. Richard Zeidman, President of the Board also provided some comments. Rather than repeating the presentation, I am attaching the Six-Month Progress Report. Reports to City Council and the public are planned for every 3 months or so as this project moves forward. The meetings of the board are open to the public except when closed for confidential discussions.

The Consent Calendar was then taken up and approved on a vote of 4-0. Those items included

* The Meeting Minutes of the February 11th City Council meeting.
* The request of the Rescue Fire Company to hold the 40th Annual Seafood Feastival on August 10, 2019 from 1:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. at Sailwinds Park along with related matters.
* The request of the Dorchester County Department of Social Services to hold the Family Fun Fest on June 1, 2019 between 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on the city lot at the corner of Race and Cedar Streets along with related matters

Ordinance 1141 was then given its first reading and continuance over to March 25th for public hearing and possible adoption. This ordinance will amend the City Ethics Ordinance to include new provisions of the Public Integrity Act of 2017 as required by state law and clean up some of the terminology of the original Ethics Ordinance that has resulted from the city changing to a City Manager form of government. As a result of that change, for instance there is no City Clerk where there was one before and now there is a City Manager where there was none before. These terminology changes are technical in nature and are not substantive changes to the Ethics Code.

Next on the agenda were items of New Business that were taken up. Chief Mark Lewis began by providing some very good news about the decline in major crime in the city. His full report can be found on the web site of the Cambridge Police Department.

<https://news.maryland.gov/msp/2019/02/26/multi-state-investigation-dismantling-eastern-shore-drug-distribution-operation/>

Some of the highlights include

* Crime reduced in 2018 by 29%
* Robberies were down 11.1%
* Aggravated Assaults were down 25.8%
* Burglaries were down 22.1%
* Thefts were down 30.4%
* Motor Vehicle thefts were down 69%
* Officers responded to over 48,000 calls for service during the year
* Cambridge lost a total of 9 officers in 2018, mainly due to retirement and low officer pay

In the three police districts within the city, part 1 crime (major crimes) was down 62% in District 1 (West Side of the city bounded by High Street and Hudson Road), down 55% in District 2 (South of Washington Street from Teal Lane to Woods Road), and down 21% in District 3 (High Street across Ocean Gateway to Bucktown Road).

For those interested in receiving a scanned copy of the report, please email me or call, and I will forward it to you.

On a 4-0 vote, City Council amended the FY 2019 Budget to add $20,000 for Grant money from the Maryland Criminal Intelligence Network that comes to the city through the County and then accepted those funds for placement in the Police Department Budget.

On a 4-0 vote Resolution 19-001 was approved that replaced former finance director Ginger Heatwole with the current finance director, Crystal Slakes, on the Administrative Committee for the Length of Service Awards Program for the City of Cambridge.

The next item on the agenda was a presentation by Yvette Robinson, the City Housing Specialist, regarding the Housing Market Analysis and Needs Assessment that was done. A copy of that document will be placed on the newly created housing page on the city website. I will also have a copy of the report available for those who would like me to send it to them. As a result of this very thorough and comprehensive report, the City Commissioners will be holding a public work session to help develop some plans to address the multiple challenges facing the city regarding housing issues.

The final matter on the agenda was a request by the owners of the Black Water Bakery for a letter of support for a grant that it is seeking to improve and beautify the parking area and alleyway next to their property on Race Street that connects with one of the city parking lots off Race Street. After discussion of the request and some of the legal issues that need to be addressed regarding this property and the adjoining 12-foot-wide alley, the Commissioners on a 4-0 vote approved a letter of support for the project conditioned on the approval of the lawful owners of the alley between the Bakery and the adjoining property. Another condition was that the rights of the city and the public must be protected to have access to the city parking lot and that there be vehicular access from Race Street to the public parking lot behind the Bakery property. I suggested that the city discuss with the property owners their providing a vehicular easement or right of way over their property that is currently being used for parking and a through way back to the city parking lot in exchange for some negotiated reduction in their real estate tax on that portion of their property.

After a time for comments by the Commissioners and staff, the meeting was adjourned.

Thanks for reading.