CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #39

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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What was anticipated to be a long meeting was able to be concluded quickly and efficiently with most matters being resolved without controversy. Prior to the regularly scheduled meeting, city council held a closed meeting pursuant to the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act where matters were discussed regarding personnel and land acquisition issues in a closed meeting as permitted under the Act.

At 6:00 p.m. the regularly scheduled meeting began with a moment of silence where the Mayor asked that we offer thoughts and prayers to the many people of our country in the Midwest who are experiencing dramatic weather-related storms, tornadoes, and flooding. The Pledge of Allegiance was then led by a group of young people who were attending the meeting.

The agenda was amended on two issues. Item 10 regarding Ordinance 1147 did not require a public hearing, as that had taken place at the previous meeting. The Ordinance was up for approval after some of the original language in the proposed Ordinance was modified. Item 14 involved a proposed Beer Fest Event that was removed from the council agenda at the request of Cambridge Main Street.

With those amendments, the agenda was adopted. During the public comment section of the meeting, Chuck McFadden spoke on the issue of health insurance for the Mayor and City Commissioners that was included in the proposed city budget. He indicated that the only compensation that the elected officials are entitled to receive was the compensation of $12,000 for the Mayor and $10,000 for each of the Commissioners. By allowing some Commissioners to receive additional compensation by way of city provided health insurance, they were receiving greater compensation than allowed by law.

Sandra Tripp-Jones, the volunteer Executive Director of Cambridge Waterfront development, Inc. (CWDI) then provided an update on what has been happening with their efforts to move the development of Sailwinds forward. She identified the goals that had been set that included hiring a permanent Executive Director (ED), introducing the site to potential developers, finalizing and RFP for the project, and negotiating with the City, County, and Shore Health for an acquisition agreement for the hospital property.

A search was done for the ED, but none was selected from the applicants. Ms. Tripp-Jones will continue in her volunteer capacity with the aid of a part time staff person. The site was introduced to potential developers, and the feedback was that there was insufficient demographics to support development. This response will be analyzed moving forward while CWDI focuses on how to make the site more attractive and marketable. Ms. Tripp-Jones closed by indicating that CWDI needs some assistance from the City that includes letters of support for potential grant funding from the State. On my motion properly seconded, the city council voted to approve conceptually the request for letters of support subject to their being presented at the June 10th meeting for final vote by the Commissioners.

The Consent Calendar then saw the approval of the following items on a vote of 5-0:

* The Meeting Minutes from the following:
  + Council Meeting of April 8th
  + Special Meeting of April 22nd
  + Council Meeting of April 22nd
  + Council Meeting of May 13th
* The Request to celebrate the Silver Anniversary of the Skipjack Nathan of Dorchester at Long Wharf Parking Lot on July 4, 2019 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.
* The Request by Alpha Genesis CDC and Harvesting Hope and Family Wellness to use Cornish Park to host a Youth Engagement Summer Kick-Off Event on June 15th; a “Father’s Connection- African Drum Circle” on June 16th; and the Harriet Tubman African Drum Circle – a Workshop in Cannery Way on July 14th
* The Request to have the “Kite Festival” at Sailwinds Park on October 27, 2019
* The Request from Cambridge MultiSport to hold a Firecracker Kids Triathlon at the YMCA on July 4th
* The Request from the Chamber of Commerce for a noise ordinance variance on June 7th for an event at Sailwinds celebrating the life of Gerry Boyle.

The next matter taken up was the vote to approve Ordinance 1147 that had been heard at the last meeting of city council but needed some clarifying language. That was read by the Deputy City Attorney and was approved on motion that was properly seconded by a 5-0 vote.

The next portion of the agenda was for the first reading of Proposed Ordinances that would then be continued over to the June 10th meeting for second reading, public hearing, and possible adoption. They are the following:

* Ordinance 1151 which seeks to reduce the minimum setback from all nontidal wetlands from 50 feet to 25 feet and require the nontidal wetland buffer to be expanded to 50 feet for large-scale development containing over 10 acres.
* Ordinance 1152 which seeks to amend the property maintenance code to clarify the intent of the commissioners to establish the annual registration fee for non-owner-occupied residential dwelling units be established by resolution.
* Ordinance 1153 which seeks to increase the annual rental rate for Fire Hydrants.

The Ordinances that were scheduled for second reading, public hearing, and possible adoption were the budget ordinances for the annual levy for personal property for fiscal year 2020 and to adopt and approve the fiscal year 2020 budget appropriating the necessary funds for the operation of the government and administration of the City of Cambridge. Those ordinances were read, public hearings were held, and votes taken.

Ordinance 1149 that addresses the tax levy for personal property for FY 2020 was approved on motion properly made and seconded on a 5-0 vote.

Ordinance 1150 that addresses the appropriation of the necessary funds for the operation of the city government and administration passed on motion that was properly seconded on a vote of 4-0 with Commissioner Foster abstaining.

One matter was then taken up under Old Business. That was the Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. Yvette Robinson, the city housing specialist, was not present but had met previously with the members of city council to go over the report and answer any questions. I and the Mayor praised the report and her work, and the work of staff and liaison commissioners involved with this effort. The report was received by the commissioners. This work is important in laying the foundation with community engagement and support for the efforts to improve housing in the city.

Several matters were taken up under New Business. The first was an oral request that the Great Marsh Park be renamed “The Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh” in honor of Gerry Boyle, who recently passed away and who was instrumental in bringing IronMan Triathlon to Cambridge and being engaged in many community efforts to promote Cambridge in multiple ways as ably explained by Chad Malkus in his presentation.

After speakers from the audience and some comments by me and other members of city council, a motion to change the name of the park as requested was made by Commissioner Foster and properly seconded and was approved on a vote of 5-0.

The next item was a resolution of the commissioners to amend and establish the schedule of fees for FY 2020. Some had been changed but most remained the same. The resolution was adopted on a 5-0 vote upon my motion that was seconded by Commissioner Hanson.

Next city council on a 5-0 vote on motion made and properly seconded amended the Governor’s Hall Agreement to reduce the required amount of insurance coverage to protect the city from $3 Million down to $1 Million to coincide with the RFP that originally went out regarding the proposed lease agreement.

Three matters regarding the city health insurance plan were taken up and were passed on proper motions that were properly seconded on 3-0 votes with Commissioners Cannon and Foster abstaining. They included

* Approval of continuing the City” Self-Funded” Health Insurance Policy through Chet Williams insurance company
* Amending the city health plan to increase all annual deductibles by $250
* Amending the health insurance plan to change the Emergency Room and Urgent Care Copays. The Emergency Room went up and the Urgent Care went down to encourage staff going to Urgent Care and to Discourage use of the Emergency Room, when possible. While not addressed during the meeting, city staff will receive training on these matters to help them understand what changes have been implemented

The job description for a part time assistant code enforcement staff member was presented and approved on my motion and seconded by Commissioner Hanson on a vote of 5-0.

During the time for comments by the mayor, commissioners, and staff, I asked that Commissioner Hanson and I be appointed to an ad hoc committee that is being formed with the County Council and possibly other local governments to discuss and take action on issues of early childhood education, youth behavior in the community and at schools, and parent engagement in their child’s education. On my motion and seconded by Commissioner Hanson, we were appointed to the committee on a vote of 5-0. We will be meeting with the two representatives of the County Council that have likewise been assigned to this committee- William Nichols and Lenny Pfeffer.

I also asked that the commissioners consider a resolution that I planned to develop Katie Day that responded to the action taken by the Secretary of the Treasury to delay the placing the picture of Harriet Tubman on the $20 bill until 2028. This resolution was approved in concept with me drafting and returning the resolution for consideration and vote at the City Council meeting on June 10th.

There being no further business to consider, the meeting was adjourned.

Thanks for reading.