CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #35

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

swrideout@aol.com

July 22, 2019

In the absence of the Mayor, Dave Cannon stepped in as Acting Mayor for our meeting. After our moment of silence and Pledge of Allegiance to begin the meeting, the agenda was adopted as presented.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, Angie Hengst and Tom Hutchinson spoke. Angie has been named as the new Race Director for IRONMAN Maryland and EAGLEMAN, held annually in Cambridge. Angie provided some of her background here in Cambridge and relayed her vision of the opportunity to take the leadership of this effort. She indicated that IRONMAN Maryland would have 2200-2300 participants this fall. Tom then spoke about the economic value of IRONMAN and EAGLEMAN to Cambridge and Dorchester County and his taking leadership of the IRON CLUB booster group that will lead fundraising efforts to support these two important assets to our community that receive very high approval marks from the competitors who come here to participate.

Tom reported that over $2 million was brought into the community as a result of IRONMAN and that the IRONMAN organization contributes significant monies back into the community nonprofit organizations. He asked that City Council provide a letter of support for a new related initiative that has the support of the State of Maryland. On my motion, the Commissioners approved such a letter for which Tom would provide the details and bring to the Mayor for signature.

Matt Pluta, of Shore Rivers, then provided City Council and the residents in attendance with the report card on the health of the Choptank and other rivers on the Eastern Shore. By separate attachment, I am providing some of the details for you. Please take a look, as these are important assets to the quality of life here.

Lou Hyman then spoke about the agenda Item regarding the job description for the Economic Development Associate Director position and suggested that we change it to be the Director position.

Ms. Crystal Johnson and Ms. Elliott then spoke about an incident this past Saturday evening when Ms. Johnson’s son was arrested. She complained about the behavior of the Cambridge Police and what was asserted as racial profiling. Ms. Crista Camper also spoke on a similar issue recounting some experiences that she and two of her children had with police in the city that caused some concerns. Commissioner Foster asked that a committee be formed to investigate these issues and asked that she and Commissioner Sydnor be appointed to the committee. That motion passed on a vote of 5-0. The other Commissioners raised some questions and asked the police chief to investigate these matters further including the opportunity to view any available police camera video. He indicated that those would be made available.

Next came several requests from Adrian Holmes, President of Alpha Genesis Community Development Corporation regarding a planned daylong event on September 7th at which three ambassadors from African countries are planning to attend. The requests involved city approval of noise ordinance variances at different times and at different locations in the city on the 7th and help with parking restrictions and traffic control for movement of people moving from one event to another. The event is called “A Day of Resilience” and will occur at the County Courthouse, the Harriett Tubman Mural at Cannery Way, and at Long Wharf along with a processional from the Courthouse to the Harriett Tubman Mural. All attending the meeting and the public are invited to participate in some or all the events that day. These requests were approved unanimously on the motion of Commissioner Foster that was properly seconded.

The Consent Calendar was then adopted on Commissioner Sydnor’s motion that was properly seconded on a vote of 5-0. The items adopted were the

* July 8th Meeting Minutes
* The request of the Visitor’s center for a noise ordinance variance for the Uprizing Concert at Sailwinds Park on August 30th
* The Agape Temple of Praise and Ministries request for a street closure on Washington Street to Center Street and Robbins Street for a Tent Revival on August 7, 8, and 9 from 4 p.m.-9 p.m.
* The request of Awaken Hearts to have a Christian Concert with stage and Praise Band at the Gerry Boyle Park at Great March on October 12th from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.
* The Pine Street Committee request for an Enrichment Camp Fundraiser at the Corner of Greenwood Ave and Cosby Ave on August 2nd from noon to 8 p.m.
* The Meeting Minutes of May 13th

The next item was the first reading of Ordinance 1155, which was read and continued over to August 12th for second reading, public hearing, and possible passage. It is proposed to allow the conversion of commercial property to residential property in the general commercial zoning district as a permitted use with conditions.

Under Old Business the following took place:

* The approval of the LSA Cambridge Revitalization Plan on a vote of 3-2 with Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and myself in favor and Commissioners Foster and Sydnor in opposition.
* The adoption of Resolutions 19-009 and 19-010 which changed the beginning date for city employees and city police officers to receive their pay increases sooner than the dates set in the FY 2020 budget passed earlier this year. These passed on votes of 3-1-1 with Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and me being favor, Commissioner Sydnor opposing, and Commissioner Foster abstaining. I had made the mistake of joining the two resolutions in one motion that caused Commissioner Foster to be unable to vote because one included the police financial issue about which she had to recuse herself. When I offered to amend the motion to allow for a separate vote, she declined the offer thus the resulting vote in which she abstained. There is more to this issue that I will address shortly.
* With the passage of these resolutions, Commissioner Sydnor then moved to have a special lump sum payment made to the city staff members and the members of the police department. The city finance director asked that the monies be simply included in the next upcoming paycheck as issuing a totally separate check would require that a form be prepared for each employee to be sent to the state and federal government that would not otherwise be required if it were included in the next regular paycheck. After the first vote was a tie of two to two with Commissioner Foster abstaining, she asked the City Attorney if she was then able to vote. He indicated that she was. As this was a specific directive of the City Council, despite the fact that it should have been within the discretion of the City Manager, on a vote of 3-2, city staff was required to issue separate checks for the additional funds that the staff and police will receive due to the change in the start date of their salary increases. Commissioners Sydnor, Foster, and Cannon voted in favor of this motion and Commissioner Hanson and I voted against it.
* The Fire Department’s request for a Budget Revision of $9,110.36 to pay for the repair of a fire truck was passed on Commissioner Sydnor’s motion properly seconded on a vote of 5-0.

Before going to New Business, some further explanation is required regarding Resolutions 19-009 and 19-010. During the development of the FY 2020 budget negotiations took place to find an accommodation for the clear need for significant increases in the salaries of the members of the Police Department and the burden on the taxpayers to pay additional taxes for that cost as well as other unexpected expenses. As a result, the accommodation reached and explained to City Council prior to the vote on the budget was to increase the salaries as requested but start those increases for the police at the end of July rather than the first of July.

Unbeknownst to this Commissioner and others, it now appears that the city was scheduled to have a surplus, yet to be finally determined, for FY 2019. A significant portion of what appears to be a significant surplus comes from unused funding for police salaries in FY 2019. Had we been aware of this funding availability, the need to balance tax increases with adequate compensation of our police officers would not have had to be negotiated. The new salaries could have been started effective the date that Resolution 19-010 now directs, and we would not have had to raise the tax rate on city taxpayers by as much as we did. Having the ability to know on a regular basis where our income and expenses stand as we move through the year is critically important and something that the City Manager plans to undertake. This is especially important as City Council develops its budget each year.

With New Business, I moved to withdraw the proposed description of the Economic Development Associate Director Position and return with one for the Economic Development Director. Mr. Wheeler suggested that we just change the title of the job description and keep the requirements as written. I felt that was the best solution and so modified my motion to do that. After a proper second, the motion passed on a vote of 4-1.

Next matter was the revision of the Police Department Budget to accept donations of $3,200 for the CPD Event Fund. On motion of Commissioner Sydnor and proper second by Commissioner Hanson, this passed.

The final matter on the agenda was the reappointment of two members of the Housing Board of Review – Jeneen Ford and William Jackson - for three-year terms ending 8/31/2022. This passed on a vote of 5-0 on motion of Commissioner Hanson that was properly seconded.

Before going to comments by the Commissioners and staff, public comment was allowed. Chuck McFadden spoke on two issues. The first was the budget process, where he commented that he had been at the meeting where the budget was passed and that the City Manager had made the Commissioners aware of the delay in the start time of the pay on increase for the city police officers. He also commented that one vote during the evening by Commissioner Foster was, he believed, in violation of the City Ethics law despite the fact that Commissioner Foster sought the advice of the City Attorney who indicated that she could vote in a matter that was tied 2-2 even if she had originally recused herself from voting.

Dr. Stafford also appeared to talk about how the police are doing a better job and are being more responsive to matters in the 600 Block of Greenwood Avenue. She also mentioned that if there are available funds from the FY 2019 budget that City Council should consider providing them to groups that are working with children in after school and summer vacation programs.

During comment time by the Commissioners and staff, I asked the City Manager to provide me with notice of the future Finance Committee meetings as well as documentation that is being provided for those meetings. I also asked that public notice be provided in order to comply with the Maryland Open Meetings Act as there would be at least three (3) Commissioners present at those meetings moving forward.

This met with the misunderstanding and the strong objection of some members of City Council. Commissioner Sydnor moved that the Finance Committee be kept as it currently stands. I misinterpreted that to be a motion to prohibited me from attending the meetings.

His motion was seconded by Commissioner Foster and was passed on a 3-2 vote with Commissioner Cannon joining the other two. As I was and am not asking to be on the Finance Committee but only to be present and observe in order to be more aware of the financial matters of the city, I determined that the motion was of no consequence regarding my attending the meetings. If this exchange is of interest, please look at the video on [www.townhallstreams.com](http://www.townhallstreams.com) starting at approximately I hour and 33 minutes into the meeting.

Thanks for reading.