CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #30

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

swrideout@aol.com

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City Council did not meet on the 14th as we were attending the fall conference of the Maryland Municipal League that was held at the Hyatt this year. I went to a few workshops and want to give you some information on two of them that I think will be helpful.

The first workshop was about Bond Bills and the grant process that the Maryland Legislature goes through each year to provide grants for Capital Projects that are sought by counties, cities, and nonprofit organizations.

There were two presenters from the legislature that helped the attendees understand the process. Each year the state will issue a bond or bonds that will total approximately $15 Million for local capital projects. The Senate will determine $7.5 Million and the House will determine the other $7.5 Million.

In order to be considered by either or both houses of the legislature, there are some basic ground rules.

1. There is a 50% match required from the community or nonprofit resources or from a gift from an individual, foundation, or other source.
2. The organizations seeking the funding must be governmental or nonprofit.
3. As there are many seeking this funding, the grants are not large, probably $100,000 or less.
4. The application can be to either the House or Senate or both.

The request will need to have the support of local legislators and the elected bodies of the city and/or county where the project is planned.

 the year that the grant is made. The project needs to improve the community in some way or address an unmet need. Having grants carry over to another year is frowned upon at the very least, so the project needs to be ready to go. Also, if the legislators who are promoting the project are also promoting many projects, all their requests will probably not be approved.

There was much more to the presentation than I can provide here, but if you are a member of a nonprofit and have a private funding source for your project or some of it, you might want to be in touch with one of the local state legislators to obtain more details on how your organization might seek some extra assistance with a capital (building) project.

The other presentation that I attended was about promoting civic life through public space design. The Knight Foundation funded the development of Civic Design Guidelines that was done by the Center for Active Design. You can find their web site and the Design Guidelines at <https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly>

While I will try to provide some overview on the project and some of its findings, if interested, you need to go to their web site and do some in depth reading on what they found. On page 8 of the Design Guidelines, four key civic life outcomes were identified to help structure their research:

* Civic Trust and Appreciation – residents feel they are part of a collective civic identity
* Participation in Public Life – residents regularly use public spaces and attend public events that promote regular interaction among neighbors and strangers
* Stewardship of the Public Realm – residents feel invested in and take responsibility for public spaces in the community
* Informed Local Voting – residents understand the role of local government in shaping their communities and contact local officials, express support for issues, and vote in local elections

To give you a flavor of the 8 chapters of the Guidelines, I will provide a very brief summary, to, hopefully, pique your interest to take a more in depth look at them.

1. Enhance Community Connections by addressing pedestrian needs, expand transportation options, and diversify land use.
	1. “Research indicates that connectivity provides an essential foundation for civic life, ensuring that all community members can take full advantage of their local parks, libraries, polling stations, and other civic assets.”
2. Prioritize Maintenance by mitigating litter, cleaning up vacant lots, and maintaining what matters most.
	1. “The cleanliness of streets, the state of trees and greenery, and the condition of vacant lots can shape people’s civic perceptions and behaviors”.
3. Incorporate Nature by having more trees and plantings, encouraging community gardening, and celebrate unique natural assets.
	1. “… urban parks have been shown to support civic trust and participation in public life by providing opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational interaction.”
4. Celebrate Community Identity by using local arts to inspire and engage, connecting diverse local cultures, preserving and repurposing historic assets and showcasing local food.
	1. “Among other benefits, design that captures local identity can bolster community pride and trust in one’s neighbors – both key components of civic life.”
5. Make Public Spaces Welcoming by creating welcoming entrances, using positive messaging, and making navigation intuitive.
	1. “… research suggests that small changes in design and messaging can dramatically influence people’s sense of welcome – and shape civic life.”
6. Make Public Spaces Comfortable by providing seating options, illuminating public spaces and building, providing water and restrooms, and tailoring design to the local climate.
	1. “Comfortable public spaces encourage visitors to stay longer and return more often.”
7. Make Space for Activity such as programming and events and by supporting informal interactions and reclaiming underutilized infrastructure.
	1. “The key to sparking activity, …, is to plan from the perspective of the pedestrian.”
8. Foster Local Democracy by improving voting access and awareness, increasing access to community information, elevating the visibility of local government, and supporting community-driven design processes.
	1. “Fruitful engagement with local government is at the heart of civic life. While political involvement is a core value of the American tradition, disconcerting trends indicate not everyone feels empowered to participate fully in local democratic processes.”

As you consider the above and possibly read the guidelines book from which I have quoted, think about what is happening here to achieve these aims and what might we as a community or a neighborhood or a block do or do more of that could make Cambridge an even better place to live.

Throughout the presentation on Monday and the guidelines, we heard and saw how life could be improved:

* Slowing traffic improves the likelihood of pedestrians avoiding injury or surviving from being hit by an automobile.
* Human Dimension Streets discourage speeding, encourage safe use, and provide access to everyone.
* Roundabouts improve pedestrian safety
* Railroad and track conversions to bike and walking paths improve community connectivity
* A variety of safety barriers are available to separate cars from bikes and pedestrians
* Planting flowers, picking up trash, and working with neighbors can make where you live or a nearby park more attractive

There are many here who are doing much of what is discussed in the guidelines, but I think that there are many more of us who could also be part of the picture of Cambridge that we are painting every day.

Thanks for reading.