CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #26

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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City Council had several important matters to address as we held our last regularly scheduled meeting of the year. The 5:30 p.m. meeting that was closed according to the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act was for the purpose of consulting with the City Attorney to obtain legal advice. As that occurred and no action was taken, there was nothing to report.

The regularly scheduled meeting began as scheduled at 6:00 p.m. After the Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance, the agenda for the meeting was approved as presented on a unanimous vote on my motion that was seconded by Commissioner Hanson.

Carol Richardson, the new Economic Development Director for Cambridge, was introduced to City Council and the residents attending. She provided everyone with a brief explanation of her background. I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Richardson earlier in the week and learning about her extensive experience in economic development at the federal, state, and local level that will serve the city and its citizens well in the coming years. I am pleased that we were able to have her join city staff.

A citizen whose name I did not hear commented positively about the new lights on Pine Street and thanked the city for those improvements.

Julie Gilberto-Brady spoke to the city about the new 50-year time capsule that the county is pulling together. Everyone is encouraged to think of something that could go into the new capsule. She also mentioned that they have recovered over 100 items from the time capsule opened earlier this year and had three items that were directed to the current city council. The Mayor accepted and opened them at the end of the meeting. John Petito of Delmarva Power spoke about the power line and power pole replacement project that will start next year. He provided a Power Point presentation that is included with this report that gives details regarding the plan.

Finally, Valerie Brown, the President of Cambridge Main Street, and Katie Clendaniel, their Executive Director, presented their annual report on how they had spent the money that the city had given them for FY 2018. It includes monies spent and in the process of being spent to improve the appearance of the Downtown and Pine Street Areas.

The Consent Calendar was then taken up and approved on a vote of 5-0 on my motion that was seconded by Commissioner Hanson. The items that were approved were

* The November 12, 2019 City Council Meeting Minutes
* The request from Katie Clendaniel to hold the Boat Drop on December 31, 2019 from 7:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.
* The request of the Rotary Club to use the City Wharf to hold the Rotary Oyster Roast on March 21, 2020 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
* The request of the Dorchester Chamber of Commerce to have the Boat Docking Competition at Long Wharf on June 6, 2020 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and to have the Crawfish Boil and Muskrat Stew Fest on March 1, 2020 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

No Ordinances were offered for introduction, and one Ordinance, number 1159, was offered for 2nd reading, public hearing and possible passage. During the public hearing several people spoke supporting and opposing the ordinance that, along with Resolution 19-013 that was taken up next, would establish the requirements for placing and removing residential trash cans before and after pickup and where the cans are to be placed between trash pick-ups.

When the city moved to private collection of residential trash, the old rules that were in place were no longer applicable. The new rules that closely followed the old rules along with some more liberal notice requirements in the event of chronic noncompliance by a homeowner or renter were being proposed to help make the city more attractive and to encourage residents to be good neighbors regarding their trash.

After the public hearing and comments by some of the Commissioners, I was able to explain that the intent of the legislation was to achieve more voluntary compliance by residents and to allow staff to make reasonable decisions when a home had challenges regarding where the can might be placed. A copy of the Resolution is attached for your convenience.

On my motions for both the Ordinance and Resolution that were seconded by Commissioner Hanson, they passed on votes of 3-2 with Commissioner Cannon joining in the majority and Commissioners Foster and Sydnor opposing.

Next on the Agenda under old business was the request by staff to reestablish the revolving loan account with Provident Bank. Because of the change in city staff, new signature cards were required to be signed. During questioning of the reasons for this request, we learned that the city often needed to make payments on projects in advance of funding being received such as through grants or state funds being paid to the city. I moved that we approve the request on condition that the City Council receive a report when payments were made from the account and when receipts were deposited into the account so that we were aware of how this account was being used. On my motion seconded by Commissioner Hanson, this request was approved on a vote of 5-0.

The next item was a draft proposal for the creation of the Mayor and Council Compensation Advisory Committee based on a motion that had been passed several months ago. With two changes, the City Attorney was directed to finalize the document that gives the committee direction on its task. This was approved on a vote of 5-0 on my motion that was seconded by Commissioner Hanson. The changes are that the committee will be made up of 5 members based on recommendations by each commissioner. The other change from the proposed document is that the committee will report back to the City Council its recommendations within 60 days of the appointments by the Mayor and the approval of the Commissioners. Commissioners are to have the name of their representative to the Mayor prior to the first meeting in January of 2020.

The request of the Police Chief to approve the Axon Enterprise contract for police body cameras was approved on the motion of Commissioner Sydnor and 2nd of Commissioner Cannon of a vote of 5-0. The final item under old business was the notification by the City Manager that he had submitted the Brownfield Grant Application on December 3rd for a grant to clear out lead paint, asbestos, and other harmful materials from the old city hall. If the grant is awarded, the city has set aside $50,000 in this year’s budget to contribute its portion of the costs of the anticipated clean up.

Under New Business, city staff requested that city council authorize the expenditure of $25,000 that the city had received from its insurance carrier LGIT to cover the cost of a cyber security attack it had suffered earlier this year. An employee had mistakenly opened an email attachment that raised concerns about whether a virus might have made it on to the city computer system. In an abundance of caution, the city had its computers and main frames reviewed and cleaned by a professional company to ensure no virus lingered, for which the insurance coverage was paid. There was no out of pocket costs to the city for this service. On my motion and second by Commissioner Hanson, this request was approved on a 5-0 vote.

The Care and Share Fund donated $1,000 to the Cambridge Police Department to use toward its shop with the Cop 2019 expenses, and the Cambridge Police Department asked that it be put into its 2020 Community Outreach budget and increase its budget by that amount. On motion of Commissioner Hanson and 2nd by me, that request was approved on a vote of 5-0.

On December 6th, the Cambridge Department of Public Works received a donation in the amount of $2,000 from WBOC “Bless the Child” to fund the 2nd Annual Santa’s Workshop to be held December 20th at Governors Hall. These funds will purchase a toy for each child who visits with Santa. In 2018, 326 children visited. On motion of Commissioner Hanson and 2nd by me, the request to increase the budget by that amount was approved on a vote of 5-0.

The final matter on the Agenda for consideration was a request that City Council approve a grant application to FEMA that requires a 25% contribution from the city either in funds or services. Larry White, a resident and Professional Engineer, offered his services for free to write the grant and coordinate with the county and nonprofit organizations to have the city portion of the grant be addressed through those efforts. As Dorchester County and the City are high risk for flooding, the grant, if awarded, will help the city develop a plan for work to be done in the future through other FEMA grants that would provide 90% of the funding. With this effort, as it progresses, citizens who have flood insurance will not be charged as much as our rating with the FEMA Flood Mitigation program obtains better scores. After a lengthy presentation and opportunity for questions, on my motion 2nd by Commissioner Hanson, the request was approved on a vote of 5-0.

During the public time to comment at the end of the meeting, Raymond Farrar, head of the Lost Kings Organization asked for financial help to support his Christmas Shopping Spree efforts on behalf of children whose fathers are not involved in their lives. Michael Wheatley thanked the City Council for its support of the Train Garden located at the old city hall and fire house.

The Mayor asked that City council appoint me as Mayor Pro Tem for the coming year. On Commissioner Hanson’s motion that request was approved on a vote of 5-0. The Mayor Pro Tem acts in place of the Mayor when the Mayor is not able to attend a city council meeting. The Mayor also asked the City Manager to contact Habitat Choptank regarding a housing issue.

Commissioner Cannon spoke of the ADA Committee and the fact that they had been able to have 14-15 city youth participate in the effort to review the condition of sidewalks around town. One challenge is that they youth need transportation and the school system is unable to provide that. As such there is a need of between $500- $600 for transportation in the coming 6 months.

Commissioner Sydnor asked that the City Manager issue an RFP for an Auditor for next year. Commissioner Foster moved that the city manager address the housing problem at 603 High Street which received a vote of 5-0 in support.

The City Manager indicated that Rosalyn Matthews will be the coordinator for city staff regarding the United Way Campaign.

This is Odie Wheeler’s last meeting as a member of city staff and the head of the Department of Public Works. He expressed his thanks to the Mayor and Commissioners for the opportunity to serve the city and its residents for the 34 years that he has been with the city. Chief Lewis followed up on Odie’s announcement with his thanks for all that he had done for the city as did others that resulted in a standing ovation for Mr. Wheeler.

The finance director then mentioned that it did not appear that the city council had taken any action on the Audit presentation that had occurred November 12th. On my motion 2nd by Commissioner Hanson, the Audit was approved on a vote of 3-1-1 with Commissioner Hanson, Cannon and myself voting to approve and Commissioners Foster and Sydnor opposing and abstaining.

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