

**CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS**

**UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS**

***All Board Meetings will be held at 7:00 pm in the WHCP Meeting Room  
516 Race Street, Cambridge, MD 21613***

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Thursday, May 14, 2020

Thursday, July 9, 2020

Thursday, September 10, 2020

Thursday, November 12, 2020

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**ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING**

**JANUARY 9, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**Board Members Present:** Chuck McFadden, Judd Vickers, Tom Puglisi, Michelle Barnes, Greg Boss, and Dave Thatcher (constituting a quorum of the Board with 6 of 9 members present).

**Board Members Absent:** Mary Ellen Jesien, Roman Jesien, Sharon Smith

**CAN members present:** 25.

- 1. Opening Comments.** CAN President Chuck McFadden opened the meeting at 6:37 pm at 516 Race Street in Cambridge, MD. Chuck welcomed those in attendance and handed out fliers about the rain garden evening to be held on January 30, 2020, at Saint Luke Methodist Church at 712 Bradley Avenue, in Cambridge (see attached).
- 2. Nominating Committee.** Judd Vickers reported that, pursuant to Article III Section 3 and Article VIII Section 1 of the CAN Bylaws, the following CAN "members in Good Standing" as of the close of nominations on December 10, 2019, appear on the January 2020 ballot for positions on the CAN Board of Directors: Roman Jesien (Vice President), Tom Puglisi (Secretary), Sharon Smith, Beth Kline, Andre Duerinckx, Jane Weeks, and Rick Klepfer (Members at Large). Judd reminded members that the Board had previously decided to formalize the procedures outlined in the Bylaws for the conduct of CAN elections (see CAN website at <https://cambridgecan.org/welcome/about/bylaws/>).

3. **Board Election.** Current Board Members Judd Vickers and Michelle Barnes verified the membership status of each attendee, distributed and counted ballots, and announced that 25 ballots were cast, with all candidates (listed in Item #2 above) being elected unanimously.
4. **Presentation by Susan Webb.** Chuck McFadden introduced Cambridge Building Safety Services and Code Enforcement Director, Ms. Susan Webb. Ms. Webb has worked in code enforcement for 24 years, and most recently worked in Salisbury.

Ms. Webb observed that when she came to Cambridge to fill the new Division Manager position that she now occupies, Cambridge had only one full-time code enforcement officer who was responsible for approximated 10,000 properties. No internal inspections were being conducted and the office could barely handle nuisance inspections. Customer service was lacking, and personnel needed training in working with the public. She indicated that Salisbury has an aggressive code enforcement program, and her goal is to develop a rigorous, but reasonable, code enforcement system in Cambridge.

Ms. Webb indicated that her office now employs two, full-time code inspectors, and that an inspection team consisting of herself and two code inspectors currently conducts roughly one internal housing inspection each day. In her work in Cambridge, she has found some of the most deplorable housing conditions that she has seen in her entire career. Many rental houses that she has inspected in Cambridge have literally been in "condemnable" condition that was unsafe for occupancy. She noted that she recently had to condemn a boarding house. She has found it necessary to devote significant effort to working with Legal Aid in educating tenants about their rights and has developed and/or distributed various materials outlining tenants' rights. Ideally, Cambridge should have at least two additional code inspectors, and she is exploring block grant opportunities to fund such positions. Ms. Webb described how her office is using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to map the City and has divided the City between the two inspectors now in place. When a complaint comes in, it is logged and coded by type into GIS, and it immediately goes to the inspector for follow-up.

Ms. Webb distributed handouts (attached) to illustrate her goal of ensuring that all properties in Cambridge, including rental properties, are safe and meet property maintenance standards, as well as increasing property values of distressed structures; educating tenants, landlords, and homeowners about housing codes and tenant rights; and providing increased customer service. Some accomplishments in the short time she has been in Cambridge include re-writing enforcement letters in understandable language, developing a Tenants' Rights Lease Addendum, and using door tags to "thank" residents when the City has noticed significant property improvements. She also noted that her office has had increased success in court, where the judge has ordered internal

and external inspections in response to complaints and where tenants have begun to win judgments against landlords. She explained that with the 2018 threshold to install sealed lithium battery smoke detectors now well past, violations of this requirement now result in an immediate \$1000 fine, which the judge has been upholding.

Maryland law requires local legislation to enact certain State housing requirements. For example, Salisbury has a mandatory license and inspection program permitting indoor and outdoor inspections, but Cambridge does not have this program. Landlords in Cambridge have strenuously opposed this approach. Tenants may grant access to Cambridge code inspectors, but many tenants have been afraid of retaliation, even though too many people in Cambridge are living in heartbreaking conditions. Ms. Webb has observed that there is a bottom tier of rentals here that is almost predatory because so many people are afraid of being evicted if they complain.

Ms. Webb would like Cambridge to initiate a vacant building registry that would require fees from owners of vacant buildings. Every corrective action that the City issues costs the City \$140, so the many repeat offenders in Cambridge are costing the City a lot of money. Receivership legislation is also needed to make the City a legal decision-maker for neglected properties. Dorchester County currently has authority to take over properties for non-payment of taxes, which is the only current mechanism for the City/County to get control of substandard or neglected properties. The City needs an additional mechanism to take over properties with many outstanding fines, liens, etc. A typical receivership would list a number of "qualifiers" that would permit a petition to the court for receivership. A regional land bank is also under discussion.

Ms. Webb believes that relationship building with all stakeholders is needed to effect improvement in housing in Cambridge. Ms. Webb indicated that most, but not all, landlords in Cambridge have been receptive to her outreach. One problem is that certain rather large property owners do not employ property managers, so the City is actually doing their work for them in identifying and requiring, or even performing, needed maintenance of their properties. Although the City currently charges fees for grass cutting and other such items that should be a property manager's responsibility, municipal infraction amounts need to be increased, especially for repeat offenders, because the fines are not large enough to deter these owners from neglecting their properties. City Council approval would be needed to implement such increases. Ms. Webb is working with the City Finance Department to determine how many fines are actually being paid.

Questions/comments from attendees resulted in the following discussion/clarification:

- Ms. Webb indicated that there is currently no budget for weekend inspections, but she may consider instituting flex hours for inspectors so weekend enforcement could be implemented. (Judd Vickers noted that CAN tries to

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monitor multifamily dwellings that must, under code, be returned to single use, and that the City enforces this requirement if reported.)

- Tenants can exercise certain rights even if there is no lease.
- A member of the audience suggested that certain real estate brokers operate property management businesses for remote owners, and that it may be worthwhile to drill down to identify and require licensing for these businesses.
- City Manager Patrick Comisky clarified that recycling is a complex problem with high potential costs and that the only real markets are for cardboard, glass, and metal. There is very little market for plastic. It was noted that private companies no longer offer recycling services to Cambridge residents.
- Vehicles must be properly tagged to be stored outside.
- The ongoing sidewalk survey will be used not only for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) purposes, but will eventually be available to inform owners and prospective owners of violations.

Chuck McFadden observed that he was very impressed with Ms. Webb's professionalism. He believes that CAN members will strongly endorse her efforts, including her desire for additional code enforcement inspectors.

5. Adjournment. Tom Puglisi made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Judd Vickers. Upon unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 8:24 pm.