CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #16

Commissioner Steve Rideout

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While the agenda was short for our City Council meeting, there were several matters of importance that were discussed and about which decisions were made. Once again, our city council meeting was a virtual meeting with the Mayor being at City Council Chambers, the Commissioners being at their homes, and the public watching on Town Hall Streams.

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m. on call of the Mayor, who asked that we think about and be thankful for all the people working for us in the community and placing themselves at risk for us. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the agenda was unanimously approved on my motion and second by Commissioner Cannon.

Following a public comment period where members of the community were able to call in, but none did, Sandra Tripp-Jones made a presentation on behalf of Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. (CWDI). The purpose of the presentation was to bring city council and the community up to date on what CWDI plans to do moving forward with the development of Sailwinds Park and the adjoining area that includes the Dorchester Hospital.

She first let us know that CWDI would not be seeking any funding from the city during this budget season unless it was necessary. She then discussed the proposed Transfer Agreement related to the Cambridge Port Property that contains about 10-11 Acres of land, the Wharf and Promenade, and Governors’ Hall and the potential transfer of the Gateway Property that faces on to Rt. 50 next to Maryland Avenue.

A draft transfer agreement for the Port Property had been prepared and provided to us prior to the meeting. I had a chance to review it in detail and posed some questions earlier in the day to the city attorney for clarification, which he answered to my satisfaction.

At this point there are three businesses interested in portions of the Port Property. They are Yacht Maintenance on Cambridge Creek that is looking to expand to be able to work on larger vessels, RAR that is considering a larger location on the Creek, and a company from the Midwest that is interested in developing a senior living and assisted living facility on the Sailwinds property that is adjacent to the Port Property that the city owns.

The reason for doing the transfer of the Port Property now is to give CWDI some flexibility as it seeks other developers and negotiates with interested businesses. The transfer of any of the property is subject to approval by the State of Maryland pursuant to the agreement that the city reached with the state in 2014. As part of the transfer agreement, the wharf and public land along the waterfront that is currently owned by the city will remain in city ownership.

One of the issues of concern raised by Commissioner Sydnor is having written assurance that as monies are paid to CWDI by developers that some of those monies are returned to the city pursuant to the state agreement in order that the city have resources to make improvements to the Port Property and, if necessary, be able to create a replacement for Governors’ Hall, in the event it is changed as part of the development process. Part of this discussion resulted in an agreement that there would also be a separate MOU between the city and CWDI on some of these related issues.

Next was the discussion of a possible transfer agreement for the Gateway Property that was intended to be part of the Sailwinds development in the sense that it would provide a more welcoming entrance to the city that would, hopefully, bring visitors off of Rt. 50 to explore our community and all that it has to offer. Also, as part of this discussion, CWDI asked that Commissioners Hanson and Sydnor be part of an ongoing group that would meet and discuss next steps for this project. Both agreed to participate.

After a full discussion of these issues and questions being asked and answered, on a motion of Commissioner Sydnor properly seconded, the Commissioners voted 5-0 to approve moving forward with the proposed transfer agreement with some changes, a separate MOU between the city and CWDI, and to draft up a separate transfer agreement for the Gateway Property with those being brought back to city council for final approval.

On the Consent Calendar, the April 13th meeting minutes were approved unanimously on a proper motion and second. With Old Business, the commissioners were presented with a report on the proposed purchase of 18 pieces of land and properties in the Pine Street Area that had been foreclosed on by the county. State funds would be used for that purpose, and the city would be waiving any taxes or monies owed on those properties. Included in the proposal was the negotiation of the purchase of 414 Pine Street subject to final approval of the commissioners. On my motion and second by Commissioner Cannon, the proposal was approved 5-0.

Under New Business there were three matters dealing with amending the budget. They included the following:

* Increasing the budget to accept $84.84 of soft drink proceeds at the police department to go to the Police Event Fund. This passed 5-0 on my motion and second by Commissioner Cannon.
* Increasing the budget to create a Virus Care Fund Account for up to $3,000 from donations from the public but not city funds for special care packages for distribution to households in Dorchester County. This passed 5-0 on Commissioner Hanson’s motion and my second.
* Increasing the budget by $25,000 to purchase supplies for firefighters and police personnel for safety gear for preventing Covid-19 virus infection and subject to the city seeking reimbursement through the county for state and federal Covid-19 funds made available to the State of Maryland and localities. This passed 5-0 on my motion and second by Commissioner Hanson.

The final matter on the agenda involving a change in the Eagleman Agreement for June was postponed to our next meeting to make sure that all the agreements are corrected to the right date. The City Manager and Angie Hengst are working to confirm the September date.

With no further business, the Mayor spoke about the many calls that she has been on almost every day about the Covid-19 virus. She mentioned that Dorchester County had 55 confirmed cases and that 2 individuals had, unfortunately, died from the virus.

I thanked Anne McAnulty, Shannon Thorpe, and Barbara Knepp and all of those who had sewn masks for people at the request of the health department. I believe that over 1200 were requested and made by this group of volunteers.

Commissioner Sydnor asked the Police Chief if any of the officers had come down with the virus, and we were all informed that none had been infected so far.

Commissioner Foster raised the issue of people with second homes here coming for short and long stays and what obligations did they have to isolate themselves if they were from elsewhere in Maryland or from out of state. She and I had talked about this issue earlier in the day, and I had sent an email to the city attorney asking for assistance, which was provided as follows:

“The Governor’s March 30, 2020 Executive Order requires all persons living in the State to stay in their homes or places of residence except under limited circumstances, which do not specifically include an individual traveling between multiple residences that they own (e.g., a primary residence on the Western Shore and a second home in Cambridge).  Unless such travel falls under one or more of the limited circumstances, then then it is likely not permitted.  With respect to people living outside the State, Governor Hogan announced on March 30, 2020 that anyone having traveled outside the State must self-quarantine for 14 days.  The State Office of Legal Counsel offered interpretive guidance stating that the 14-day quarantine does not apply to persons who regularly commute into the State from an adjacent state or vice versa unless they should otherwise self-quarantine under CDC or MDH guidance. This exception appears geared towards people who commute for work purposes, not for recreational purposes.

The Executive Order further states that “each law enforcement officer of the State or a political subdivision shall execute and enforce” the Order. Accordingly, the City Police must enforce its provisions within the corporate limits of the City. The Executive Order also states that “the effect of any statute, rule, or regulation of an agency of the State or a political subdivision inconsistent with this order is hereby suspended.” Accordingly, the City Council cannot pass an ordinance or other legislation that conflicts with the Executive Order, such as imposing greater travel restrictions than set forth therein.

Chip and I have discussed this issue. Based upon the foregoing, we believe it is a matter for local law enforcement and the local health department.  I am coping Chief Lewis on this e-mail so that he is aware of the concerns expressed below.  Enhanced public awareness of the stay-at-home order and quarantine requirements may be beneficial as well. “

As there were no further public comments at the end of the meeting, the meeting was adjourned on Commissioner Sydnor’s motion and my second.

Thanks for reading.

Steve