CAMBRIDGE MATTERS # 12

 Commissioner Steve Rideout

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What a week it was. Each year at this time, because we do not have a City Council meeting due to our being at the annual meeting of the Maryland Municipal League, I provide you with a hopefully short summary of what the city council has been able accomplish for Cambridge during the past Fiscal Year. We started this past week with two days of the Maryland Municipal League Virtual Conference that provided us with excellent presentations on a variety of topics that will help us elected officials and staff, to do our work better to serve the residents of Cambridge. This week I was also able to participate in the development and showing of the excellent interview by Omeaka Jackson of Ken Kozel, the CEO of the University of Maryland Shore Regional Health.

The link to get you to the interview is<https://www.whcp.org/cambridge-community-conversations/>. Ken Kozel provides us with a great deal of information about the Emergency Room and Medical Building being built at Cambridge Marketplace, the capacity of the hospital to address Covid-19 medical challenges, and how he sees Shore Regional Health providing new and better health care to Dorchester County. Do not miss the opportunity to learn everything that they are doing for the community.

And now for my summary, that will be incomplete but will give you a snapshot of Cambridge City Council’s work for the past year:

The first half of the year was addressed in my late December 2019 report that is attached. Staring with the New Year, the following has taken place:

**January 2020 –** The Charter Amendment allowing elections for Mayor and Commissioners in October 2020 and every four years thereafter was approved unanimously. Most of the names for representatives on the Mayor and Council Compensation Committee were provided to the Mayor as requested. The others were provided soon thereafter, so that all were appointed at the next meeting in January. Funding was set aside for support of the Development of Building F on Dorchester Avenue in the way of sidewalk and sewer funding and for support of the ongoing effort to plan for the Maces Lane Community Center. The request of the Police Chief to set aside some funding for a hiring bonus for already trained officers was approved. A $510,000 grant from the state for Cannery Park was announced.

**February 2020 –** We received a report from Habitat Choptank on the Pine Street Project. A quick summary is that this is an excellent collaboration among the State of Maryland, the City of Cambridge, and Habitat Choptank each of which has put in play significant resources to help improve housing through repairs of homes, replacements of deteriorated housing, and new housing all of which will help to improve our community and increase the value of property in the city.

The Commissioners established Chesapeake College’s Cambridge Center on Race Street as the City Election Polling Site for the city election on the 3rd Saturday of October 2020 and, if a run-off is needed, on the 1st Tuesday in December. The space for those dates would be at no cost to the city, and the City Manager had reported that he had met at the location with a representative of the county election office, a prospective election vendor and three citizens experienced with city elections. They were Portia Johnson-Ennels, Jerry Burroughs, and Michael Wheatley. They were all agreed that the Cambridge Center would be a good place to hold the election.

The city received state funding to help address inspection and repair of the breakwater at Long Wharf and the City Marina.

**March 2020 –** The $510,000 grant MOU between the city and the state for Cannery Park work was approved by City Council. We also approved staff seeking an additional $50,000 from the state for Cannery Park for draft construction documents to guide the design implementation of the park, demolish and clear debris in the park, grade the land, and do other things to the great lawn area and the overlook improvements. The commissioners voted unanimously to direct the city attorney to move forward with placing a lien on 507 Race Street to help in the repayment of some of the almost $117,000 in city funds used to tear down the collapsed building that was determined to be a danger to the public. Later in the month the city attorney was directed to undertake negotiations to see if the matter might be resolved in some way. The TMG Group was hired to be the city finance director under a contract as a private provider and not an employee. The City Manager’s proposed reorganization plan for staff and city department divisions was approved on a vote of 3-2.

**April 2020 –** The Mayor and Council Compensation Committee provided its report and recommendations on what it felt the compensation for the next city council should be. Most of it was the same, but the committee recommended unanimously that the elected officials not receive life or health benefits through the city insurance plan. To accomplish changes from the current compensation and benefits, the city attorney recommended a Charter change first that would allow the Commissioners to make future changes by ordinance. The Proposed changes were not adopted on a vote of 2 in favor and 3 abstaining, so the matter was put over to another meeting to determine next steps. A formal state of emergency was declared by the city because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Virtual meetings were approved while the pandemic continues and emergency declarations exist that restrict the number of people allowed to be in the same place together.

**May 2020 –** IronMan and Eagle Man Events are moved to September 2020. The first and second readings of the Tax Rate Ordinance and the FY 2021 Budget were read with a later public hearing and adoption. The tax rate was reduced due to the increase in the city assessments and it passed 4-0-1 with Commissioner Sydnor Abstaining. The Budget then passed on a vote of 3-0. The state offered a grant to the city for Pine and Race Streets that would reimburse the city $117,000 for monies expended to tear down 507 Race Street and $263,000 in grants to help improve housing on Pine, High, and Race Streets. This was approved on a vote of 3-2. After much argument and legal opinion being provided by the city attorney on a 3-2 vote the drafting of A Charter Amendment was approved that would allow the city to change compensation of elected officials by ordinance. The long standing Bayly Road sidewalk project was finally funded, and the Mayor was authorized to sign the agreement. The 4th of July Fire Works were postponed until next year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the recommendation of the county health officer and police chief.

**June 2020 –** The emergency ordinance allowing Al Fresco dining and the closing of Poplar Street was approved for 3 days a week after much discussion and negotiation among the Commissioners. It was not all that the business community wanted but was all that could be accomplished due to the need to have 4 votes by the Commissioners for this emergency legislation. The Working Waterfront Plan as proposed by P and Z was adopted unanimously by the Commissioners. The private trash collection contract was amended and extended for a year. The contract for the city attorney was approved for one year. Anne Roane was chosen as a member of the HPC with the other position being continued for consideration at the July 13th meeting. The Maces Lane and Harriet Tubman grants that were previously sought by the city and approved by the state were presented and accepted by the Commissioners.

Thanks for reading.

Steve