CAMBRIDGE MATTERS #9

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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Well, we only have 8 more City Council meetings to go until the next elected City Council takes their seats in January 2021. Our August 10th meeting was a little bit disjointed with several disagreements scattered throughout the meeting. We got through it, however, and I will try to give you the short form of what was accomplished and what was continued over to our next meeting for decision.

We again met virtually and started with a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was amended to move item 8 from Old Business to New Business and was approved unanimously on my motion and second by Commissioner Cannon.

There were no public comments and Mr. Batson’s request, which was hard to hear and understand, to reactivate the Cambridge Housing Task Force was continued over to the next meeting for the Mayor to obtain more information from Mr. Batson about his idea.

During the time that this was being discussed, Commissioner Sydnor raised concerns about his difficulty in understanding Mr. Batson. I likewise had difficulty understanding. That resulted in a conversation about how we might find a way to better understand those speaking to us by phone. Commissioner Foster suggested going to Governor’s Hall and having public meetings there with people being socially distanced. I suggested that the speakers be allowed to call in on the designated line that can be used for our virtual meetings that appeared to provide an opportunity for us to hear the speaker more clearly.

Either Commissioner Sydnor or Commissioner Foster moved to move the meeting to Governor’s Hall. I raised the issue that such a motion under section 1-15 of the City Code required four votes. Upon the vote being taken, the motion was denied on a vote of 2 -3 with Commissioners Hanson and Cannon joining me.

The Consent Calendar was then approved on Commissioner Hanson’s motion and my second on a 5-0 vote. The matters that were approved were the following:

* The July 27th meeting minutes
* Dri-Dock Recovery and Wellness Center’s request to have a “Walk thru Recovery Works Event 2020” at the parking lot of 524 Race Street on September 9, 2020 from noon to 4 p.m.
* The Awaken 48-Hour Worship Service event that had been continued over for more information from our last meeting.

Ordinance 1164 regarding a zoning matter had its first reading and was continued to the August 24th meeting of City Council for 2nd reading, public hearing, and possible passage.

Ordinance 1166 that addresses parking for residents in the 600, 700, and 800 block of Radiance Drive and either side of Rambler Road between Maryland Avenue and Radiance Drive had a public hearing and was passed on motion of Commissioner Hanson and second of Commissioner Cannon on a vote of 5-0.

With Old Business two matters were addressed regarding the Pine Street Neighborhood Revitalization project. The first involved the purchase of 4 lots along Douglas Street from Ms. Akisha Reed for $32,000. The report on the purchase indicated how the purchase amount was determined after discussion with county and state representatives but without an appraisal.

Commissioners Sydnor and Foster wanted an Appraisal to be done as well at an additional cost. After discussion and on motion of Commissioner Hanson and my second the purchase contract was approved 3-2 with Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and me in favor and Commissioners Foster and Sydnor in opposition.

The next issue was the request to approve the amended demolition bid to include asbestos testing and removal from 4 buildings and proper disposal of the material. This was the matter that City Council had approved at an earlier meeting where Charles Rideout (no relation) had been approved on a vote of 4-0-1 for the tear down of the 4 buildings. I had recused myself due to the fact that I have a brother named Charles Rideout, and while the matter before City Council did not deal with my brother, I wanted to avoid any confusion and so had recused myself.

When the matter returned for the amended bid that included the extra costs for the asbestos testing and removal, Mr. Rideout was still the successful bidder, but the cost of the bid had increased due to the added work involving the Asbestos. After discussion, the vote was taken on the matter.

As I had previously abstained on the first vote, I decided to abstain again. I anticipated that the matter would easily be approved. Unfortunately, Commissioners Foster and Sydnor likewise abstained which prevented Mr. Rideout from being awarded the amended contract. Despite explanations, it appeared that Commissioners Foster and Sydnor would not change their minds.

At that point I changed my vote to approve the contract as amended in order that Mr. Rideout who everyone wanted to have the contract on the earlier vote would again be awarded the contract. At that point Commissioners Foster and Sydnor changed their votes to approve the amended contract, which was finally approved on a vote of 5-0.

Under New Business, the first matter was Resolution 2020-15 that addressed the Residency Requirement regarding Commissioner Foster in order that there be a formal basis upon which Commissioner Foster is put on notice. After much discussion and argument, on my motion and second by Commissioner Hanson, the Resolution was passed on a vote of 3-1-1 with Commissioners Cannon, Hanson, and me voting in favor, Commissioner Sydnor voting in opposition, and Commissioner Foster abstaining. That matter is scheduled to be heard on August 24th.

The next matter was Resolution 2020-16 that was a $250,000 Waterway Improvement Fund Grant Agreement and Budget modification to accept the funds from the State of Maryland. This is a grant for helping to fix portions of the Marina and Long Wharf and to seek solutions to some of the challenges to the marina including slips that are too large and are thus unused. As this required a budget amendment to accept these monies with no contribution from the city, it required a four-vote majority.

On my motion and second by Commissioner Hanson, the vote of the Commissioners was 3-2 with Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and me voting in favor and Commissioners Foster and Sydnor voting in opposition. I then asked the mayor to cast her vote based on the written opinion of the City Attorney that he had provided in June of this year to the Mayor and all Commissioners.

It appeared that the opinion that allowed the Mayor to vote in this and related supermajority budget votes had not been read by some of the elected officials. The Mayor voted to abstain and to continue the matter over to the next City Council meeting for a decision. The City Attorney was asked to provide that opinion to the Mayor and Commissioners once again, which he has done. As this is money coming from the state at no cost to the city that will help repair some of the deteriorating docks and address other matters of need, I am hopeful that we will have a different vote when this matter is considered next meeting.

The final matter on the agenda were the reappointments of currently serving members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Historic Preservation Commission. On Commissioner Hanson’s motion and my second the following individuals were reappointed:

George Breig – Planning and Zoning – July 2020 – July 2024

Hubert Trego – Planning and Zoning – July 2020 – July 2024

Sharon Smith – Historic Preservation Commission – July 2020 – July 2023

As this concluded the agenda, public comment was then permitted along with comments from the elected officials and staff. All the reports were of interest but would make this report too long. The one of high importance is the condition of the Bradford House. Apparently, the level of upkeep of the property has declined. A meeting was set for Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. I did some investigation on my own and received some staff reports that helped me to see how I could try to help address the problems. Hopefully, I will have more and better news about this situation in my next report.

Thanks for reading.

Steve