CAMBRIDGE MATTERS # 3

 Commissioner Steve Rideout

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Dear Readers:

During the City Council Meeting of November 9th , it became clear that we are fast approaching the end of the current term of council and anticipating the new one that will have several people who have not previously served as elected members. Following the Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance, the City Manager asked to add a matter to the agenda. It was a request for a bike rodeo for youth in the community that would be put on by the Cambridge Police Department at Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh. On my motion and second by Commissioner Hanson, it was added to the agenda that was then approved on a 5-0 vote on motion of Commissioner Cannon and second by Commissioner Hanson.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, Lajan Cephas asked when the Housing Task Force would be established. The Mayor indicated that it would start in January. Later in the meeting, the Mayor indicated that the members would be appointed at the December meeting of City Council.

Dormaim Green then asked about the structure on Poplar Street that is placed in front of her real estate office. The structure was permitted as part of the Al Fresco dining initiative requested by Cambridge Main Street months ago, but she was not consulted about it prior to its installation. She wanted to know when it might be taken down or moved to be in front of Ava’s Restaurant and no longer blocking the front of her building. She was aware of the challenges of Covid-19 and how it impacted restaurants but has found that the structure has also impacted her business. The City Manager will work with her to resolve the issue.

Sputty Cephas then spoke on his concerns about recent violence in the city and the need of everyone including the community to support the Cambridge Police in their efforts on behalf of the city and keeping us safe.

The Consent calendar was approved on a 5-0 vote on my motion and second by Commissioner Hanson. The matters that were approved were the following:

* Main Street’s request to close Poplar and Race Streets for Holiday Outdoor Night Markets on Saturday November 14th and December 12th provided they obtain approval from the County Health Department
* The request of the Dorchester Chamber of Commerce to have the Dorchester Santa Car Parade on December 5th from noon to 2:00 p.m.
* The Mayor and Council joining the Maryland Municipal League in declaring November as Municipal Government Works Month in Cambridge

The police chief then spoke about the Bike Rodeo and the plans to hold it on November 21st with registration at 11:30 a.m. and the Rodeo taking place from noon to 2:00 p.m. The Chief believes that he will have some grant money to help buy lights for bikes and that 3 bikes will be given away by a raffle. On Commissioner Sydnor’s motion and second by Commissioner Cannon, this was approved 5-0.

The next matters were introductions of ordinances 1169 and 1170. Their titles were read, and the matters were continued over to December 14th for second reading, public hearing, and possible passage. Ordinance 1169 provides a definition of a ditch and differentiates it from intermittent and perennial streams. Ordinance 1170 corrects an error in the zoning code and allows a Community Center Multi-Family building as a permitted use in the Institutional Zoning District. This was to correct an error regarding property owned by Delmarva Community Services (DCS) that they are in the process of building at the Cambridge Beltway and Chesapeake Ave.

Under Old Business was one matter. It was the request by the Planning and Zoning Commission to increase their meeting stipend to $250 per quarter starting in January 2021. This matter had been pending for months and had been on and off the City Council Agenda a couple of times. Commissioner Sydnor suggested that we place this over for the new City Council to consider. As money is in the budget for the increase and the matter had been continued several times, I urged City Council to address their request now rather than passing it on to the next Council. On Commissioner Hanson’s motion and Commissioner Cannon’s second, the motion to increase the stipend for Planning and Zoning passed 3-1-1 with Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and me in favor, Commissioner Syndor in opposition, and Commissioner Foster abstaining.

Under new business, three of the matters were approved on 5-0 votes. They were the following:

* The Resolution amending the City Personnel Policy on Health Insurance for part time employees was continued over to the next meeting for more research by the city manager on this issue. There is a belief that part time employees might be entitled to low cost insurance under the Affordable Care Act.
* The Right of Way agreement with Delmarva Power to place two EV charging stations in the City Parking Lot across from City Hall.
* The updating of the Office Space Lease Agreement with the Small Business Administration.

The one matter that required some discussion was the proposed extension and modification of the Oasis Marina Management Agreement. Due to a variety of concerns with the current agreement and the impact of Covid-19 on the use of the marina, the City Manager had worked with Oasis on modifying the agreement for another 3 year term as the contract is due to end in December 2020. The City Manager was able to reduce the costs of the contract over the next 3 years and increase services that resulted in an overall savings to the city of over $170,000. Also remaining as part of the Contract is the ability of either party to terminate the agreement upon 60 days’ notice.

Commission Sydnor moved to continue the matter over for the new City Council to address when they were sworn in. That motion was seconded by Commissioner Foster. Commissioner Sydnor has complained about the marina for the past several years due to the cost of paying the loan that was taken out in 2006 to expand it. I looked back at the old City Council meeting minutes and related documents. I found the 2006 contract for the marina expansion as well as the meeting minutes in December 2005 that approved the expansion for $7.9 million that required a loan. I also found the FY 2007 Budget document that proudly talked about the expansion of the marina. Interestingly, the meeting minutes and the Budget document showed that both Commissioners Sydnor and Foster voted in favor of the marina expansion and the loan to do that work.

In 2018 when we decided to see if we could increase the income from the marina by hiring Oasis Marinas to run the marina, the May 29th meeting minutes show a unanimous vote to enter the contract that included the votes of Commissioners Sydnor and Foster. As I had concerns that the marina contract would expire between now and when the new City Council could address the matter and saw that we had significant savings in the new agreement, I argued that we should consider the agreement now, and if the next City Council decided to look into the agreement they could make their own separate decision that would include the ability to terminate the contract on proper notice.

On the motion to continue the matter, it was defeated 2-3 with Commissioners Sydnor and Foster in favor and Commissioners Hanson, Cannon, and myself in opposition. On my motion to approve the new amendment to the contract and second by Commissioner Hanson, it was approved on a vote of 3-2 with Commissioners Cannon, Hanson, and me in favor and Commissioners Foster and Sydnor in opposition.

As the above matters concluded the agenda, the Traffic and Safety Committee made a report and planned for another meeting. Commissioner Foster moved to have Dale Price, the City IT director, install a temporary camera where the city council votes will be opened and tabulated on December 1st. That was seconded by Commissioner Sydnor and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Sydnor then ask the fire chief some questions regarding fire equipment. The chief indicated that the ladder truck that the city owns is over 25 years of age and will cost over $1.5 million to replace. He also indicated that there are 3 other pieces of fire equipment that are past their service date and the cost of replacement would be over $1.7 million. I asked the chief if he knew what monies that the city had saved in the past 20 years for fire equipment. He was unsure but did not think that it was much if any. My research of prior budgets found 2 years where $500,000 each year was set aside for fire equipment.

The Mayor announced that Katie Clendaniel is leaving her position as Executive Director of Main Street. The Mayor also reported that Dorchester County was one of if not the highest county per capita with Covid-19 infections in Maryland with 873 cases and 19 deaths with 516 of those cases being in Cambridge. The most popular ages for Covid-19 here are 20-29 and 30-39 years of age with each age category having 144 cases each.

On Commissioner Sydnor’s motion and Commissioner Hanson’s second and unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned.

Thanks for reading.

Steve