CAMBRIDGE MATTERS – 2022-09

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Earlier this month I wrote about the City Council considering our current trash collection contract and the possibility of bringing the service back into the city as the manager. I did not realize that City Council had made some decisions the night before I wrote my earlier Cambridge Matters that impacted what our new city manager would be called upon to do and how quickly council wanted him to do it.

I provided the members of City Council and Mr. Carroll copies of the documents that the prior city council had considered in determining the need to move to a private contractor. The issue for me is not that the city should not spend the gift from the federal government but how city council might spend it the most wisely.

There are several places where I think the money could be better spent or put in reserve for future spending. In no particular order, the first is the police department. In an earlier article, I suggested that another way to get and keep good officers is to provide housing for some of them based on criteria that the city council could establish in conjunction with the police chief. Using some of that money to purchase homes that could be rehabilitated that are on the tax sale list would be one good way to do that and then rehabilitate them for some of our officers either new or long term.

Another place where the city must step up, and appears to be planning to do so, is to help fund programs for nonprofits here in the city. Helping to fund on a long-term basis programs for children and families is critical to improving the lives of the people who live here. That is a much better investment than buying trash trucks. Just remember what has happened in the past few years in the way of tragic deaths of children and adults as the result of fires and gunfire. Putting money into effective programs for children and code enforcement for safe homes can help ensure that children are given things to do, jobs as they get in their teen years, and safe places to live. They are more important than spending more money than is needed to bring trash collection in house when there will still be complaints from some homeowners or businesses.

The final place where this money could be better spent is to fund a long standing but, to my knowledge, never used program that is imbedded in our city code to address improving and maintaining our sidewalks. City Code Section 3-36 - <https://library.municode.com/md/cambridge/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTITHCH_S3-36SI>

And Section 16-21

<https://library.municode.com/md/cambridge/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIITHCO_CH16STSIPUPL_S16-21SICOGE>

are relevant here. I will let you read them for the details, but they lay out how the city can require sidewalks to be build, maintained, and repaired and includes the ability to create a fund that can be used to repair or replace sidewalks where property owners fail to do so and then assess the costs against the property owner. In the time that we have lived here, I have never seen the city either fund that program or repair sidewalks when property owners fail to do so. I have seen the city place some property owners on notice about the need to repair the sidewalks on their property. While there are some additional ways to make these code sections even more effective, I will leave that for another day.

While trash pick up is an important part of the responsibility of city government, we now have even more important and long-term problems and challenges that need to be addressed. I think that it would be prudent to give the newly hired city manager the opportunity to fix what may be a problem with the current trash company, which could be resolved more quickly and much less expensively than what the city commissioners appear to want to do.

If you agree with me and others that may be supporting other uses for the available monies that the city has, please let your commissioner know. Your silence could tell them the wrong thing. It is usually those who have complaints that are heard. Now is the time for the rest of us to speak out.

Thanks for reading.

Steve