CAMBRIDGE MATTERS – January 2023

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Happy New Year to everyone.

As I thought about what I might talk about this month, I reviewed the Dorchester Banner 2022: Year in Review and felt that they had done an excellent job in providing a retrospective of what has taken place in this past year and some indications of possibilities for 2023 for Cambridge, Dorchester County, and our public school system. In particular, they noted the passing of Shirley Jackson and what she means and meant to this community by an excellent article by Dave Ryan. Those who attended her funeral service also heard it through those who spoke during what was a true celebration of her life this past Saturday at Waugh Chapel United Methodist Church. She is someone that we should all use as a guide in how we try to live our lives.

Another item of importance both about the history of Cambridge and its future can be seen in a documentary called “Unpacking Cambridge” that will be shown on Maryland Public Television on January 2nd at 9:00 p.m., again on January 5th at 9:00 p.m., and again on January 14th at 7:00 p.m. A preview of the program can also be found at <https://www.mpt.org/unpackingcambridge/>. I have taken a look at some of the program and think it is very well done.

For Cambridge much about the coming year and where the city will focus its efforts will be considered at a scheduled full day City Council Retreat next Saturday led by facilitators. On Monday the 9th, prior to the scheduled City Council meeting, we will be meeting with our state legislators to talk about identified needs for Cambridge and how we can continue the past support of the Hogan-Rutherford Administration as we transition into the Moore- Miller Administration.

Following the legislative meeting, the regular City Council meeting will take place where, among a number of other things, the proposed Curfew Ordinance should be finalized and voted on by the Commissioners. If approved it is scheduled to go into effect February 1st on a temporary basis until the end of June with the possibility of being extended beyond then. What, if any, litigation may result from its passage is yet to be determined.

With the arrival of the new City Manager, Tom Carroll, this past Spring, he and the council have worked on a number of initiatives and projects that have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. Those include the Short-Term Rental legislation, the continuation and modification of Chesapeake Waste contract for trash pickup, the increase in Municipal Utility fees over the next two years to address the anticipated costs to the city for modifying and improving the storm water and sewer systems. In addition the Cambridge Shoreline Resilience Project continues to seek state and federal funding for its plans to address the impact of sea level rise in the city and the current challenges the city faces with flooding and storm water runoff. We should hear more from them this Spring.

While much of the above might be considered dull and uninteresting, it is all part of the important infrastructure issues that City Council has undertaken in 2022 and will undertake in 2023. Something that is important but is a constant challenge for our city that we see every day and that residents can help address is the trash that accumulates, especially during the winter, in our yards and on our streets.

Some years ago I wrote an article about this issue as well as the need for us to pick up after our dogs and had some success in engaging some of our community in helping with the clutter that detracts from the quality of our lives. Chief Todd, the Cambridge Police Department, and Rev. Jerome Tilghman have been leaders in these past few months holding neighborhood cleanups. In just a few hours with groups of neighbors and volunteers, lots of trash has been removed from some of our neighborhoods. What about your planning a clean-up day for your block and maybe a couple of blocks nearby?

Another part of our community that is critical to the quality of life, are our nonprofit organizations, churches, and individuals that are doing good work with little notice. They need our support as volunteers, financial contributors, and advocates. Without them, the burden of addressing many of the social issues that face our community fall on government that often is found to be lacking in resources or staffing. That is the case with Cambridge. Last year, City Council awarded almost $1 million from ARPA funds to various nonprofits and religious organizations that work here. Despite being a lot of money, the work of those nonprofits does not come close to addressing the many and varied needs found here from feeding children and families and addressing and advocating about mental health challenges, housing, and homelessness.

With the movement of the Local Management Board under the direction of Nancy Shockley to be part of Moving Dorchester Forward (MDF), there is an opportunity for more nonprofits to have resources available to help them do their good work. They need to reach out to Chris Wheedleton and MDF (cwheedleton@gmail.com) to see what help might be available. I was member of the MDF Board until recently but felt the need to resign due to potential conflicts of interest and my need to be available to focus my attention on my work as Mayor.

As part of efforts to increase community support for local nonprofits, the Mid Shore Community Foundation supported a new online initiative called Mid Shore Gives <https://www.midshoregives.org/> that brought together over 100 nonprofits from the Eastern Shore counties in which it works to help them raise money to support their work. For a first-time effort I see our nonprofit community will have resources to do more for those here who are in need.

This coming year has great potential for significant improvements. With a new County Council, I anticipate that we will once again have a joint committee to discuss mutual issues of concern and possible solutions. I have already spoken with members of the County Council about a couple of matters to discuss. With a new School Board and new leadership by Susan Morgan and Mike Diaz, I see other opportunities for improving outcomes for our students. Our residents collaborating together with the Cambridge Police Department efforts to address community policing will bring us even more positive possibilities.

As things progress, I hope to share them with you.

Thanks for reading.

Steve