

CAN's Unofficial Notes on the Cambridge City Council

Meeting of September 25, 2023

City Council again met at the Empowerment Center on Pine St. while the City Council Chamber windows are being repaired. For the meeting, the City did make some improvements to the visual and audio systems but it was still difficult to hear some of the comments. That said, the meeting started off with a presentation by Ward Realignment Committee Chair Jim Sicks and Vice Chair Greg Meekins. The purpose of the Committee is to keep the populations of the Wards balanced to within 5% of each other. Cambridge has grown from the last census by 747 people to 13,096 which divided by the 5 wards gives an average of 2,619 people per Ward. Wards 2, 3, and 4 fit into the 5% differential however, Ward 1 had too many people and Ward 5 actually lost people from the last census. The problem the Committee has is that Ward 1 and Ward 5 don't touch each other so the Committee could not just switch some people from Ward 1 to Ward 5. The Committee came up with a plan to move people from Wards 3 and 4 to Ward 5 and to backfill Wards 3 and 4 from Ward 1. While this seems very complicated, the moves only involve 3 % of the City population. The City Council decided to have a listening session so the public could see what streets are involved and ask questions of the Ward Realignment Committee. The session will be held on September 28th at 6pm at City Hall, 410 Academy St. in the Utility Conference Room.

The Council moved on to the Consent agenda which contained some of the usual requests for events in the City but also included a report that the demolition of Club Dujour, a project that has been discussed for the last 12 months, will in fact take place. Also included on the Consent agenda was a decision to pursue a consulting contract to establish the right size for the Police department, a report on reinstating impact fees on new construction, and finally, an agreement between the City and the Packing House on an easement and parking spaces for people using the Rails to Trails bike path. The cost of the parking and easement to the spaces is **\$333,000**. All of these projects are very detailed but the Council had no comments and passed everything on a 5/0 vote.

The next topic was an update on the Charter changes. The City Manager and the City Attorney have compiled changes they made which included

suggestions from the two listening sessions. The proposal which is quite detailed, covering over 17 pages of the Charter and involving over 80 changes is now open again for 21 days for additional public comment. The Council will vote on the changes at the October 23 Council Meeting. Some of the major changes are: 1) Moving the election date from November to May, 2) Allowing the Commissioners to appoint a replacement in the vacant Ward if a vacancy occurs in the last two years of a term including the Mayor's position, 3) If a position is vacant in the last 4 months of the term, it will remain vacant. The Council made no comments on the proposal. *(CAN will do a more in-depth analysis shortly).*

The Curfew Ordinance was read for the second time which means there can be public comment. Three people commented on the Ordinance. The first, a retired teacher, was in support of the Ordinance because it reinforced the need for juveniles to study on weeknights. Dr. Theresa Stafford commented that the Ordinance should include financial penalties and finally, LaShon Foster wanted to know what happens if the police pick up a juvenile who does not live in the City. The Police Chief said the parents would be notified but the enforcement mechanisms in the Ordinance would not apply. The Council then moved out of public comment section of the meeting and accepted amendments from the Council members. The Mayor made a number of changes (10 to 12) which were approved by the Council but they did not allow any public comments on the amendments. The Council then voted to approve the Amended Ordinance.

(The writer's note on the above Ordinance process: In my opinion the City should review its process for Ordinances and consider a revision. The current system has the first Ordinance reading at a Council meeting but public comment is not allowed. At the second reading, the Council accepts public comment that night but then can make amendments after the public comment section is closed. They do not allow public comment on the amendments, so they vote on an amended ordinance without any input from the public. I am of the opinion that they should allow public comment at the first and second readings and if they amend the ordinance at the second reading then the ordinance should be held over to the next meeting to allow the public to comment on the amendments.)

In the New Business Section of the meeting, the Council heard about "Policing by Environmental Design Concept". This is a long title for allowing the Police to close streets or limit access to Parks or other areas that are known for criminal activity. The Police Chief wants to try it out on the Calvin Mowbray and Stephen Camper Park. The Chief wants to be able to talk to the neighborhoods

before taking any action and has a meeting set up on October 18th at the Park to discuss his ideas.

The Council also received a report from Assistant City Engineer Bucky Jackson on traffic. It contained two proposals and recommendations from the Traffic Committee. The first involved traffic calming on Somerset Ave. and the second involved removing six traffic lights in the downtown area and replacing them with stop signs. The Traffic and Safety Committee is meeting on October 12th to discuss these issues. The meeting is virtual and can be seen at <https://meet.google.com/etm-gcko-xxp?hs=224>

Upcoming meetings on the City Council agenda for 9/25/23 but not mentioned:

- Police Board meeting, Sept 27 at noon at the Public Safety building, 8 Washington St.
- Planning and Zoning meeting, Oct 3 at 6pm at Council Chambers.
- Historic Preservation meeting on October 18th at 6pm in Council Chambers
- Cambridge Police Department Town Hall Meeting Oct 3 at 6pm at the Empowerment Center at 615B Pine St
- Council Work Session to review registration for non-owner-occupied property, including rental registration, short term rental registration, vacant properties and more. October 23 from 5-6pm at the Council Chambers, 305 Gay St.

The open session ended at 7:15 and the Council went into closed Executive Session to discuss legal and personnel matters.

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