

Cambridge Matters
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It has been a while since I have reached out to you. It has been a busy summer and fall for all of us (including me for a number of reasons), so I thought it was time to reconnect.

While I understand and appreciate the many challenges that we face here, at times we need to take a step back to take a look at where we have been and what has been done to address our issues. Some of us too often focus on the bad things that are happening and ignore the positive changes. That, then, helps the world outside of our community to hear about the negative and provides them with an incomplete message about us.

I have had the opportunity to work with and/or observe those who are working to make a difference here and would like to share a few stories. A week or so ago I was able to be at one of those positive events.

It was a fundraising event for MidShore Meals Til Monday, a nonprofit founded by Leslie Bishop, who over the past six years has refused to give up on her vision of providing food for children here during those times when food is not otherwise available for them – after school, weekends, holidays, and school vacations.

I watched her in those early years trying to work with other groups that were feeding the hungry in an effort to develop a collaboration that would feed even more people, including the children. While she has not been fully successful in that effort, she and her team have built a collaboration that includes the school system that is having a significant impact on the lives of children here. It needs to be supported by everyone in our community either with money or with their time. To learn more about them, here is their website - <https://midshoremealstilmonday.org/>

A week or so ago, I was contacted by Valerie Davis and Jack Saum about a concern that they had for the homeless and the need to have a safe and warm place for them to go during the day. While it is apparent that there are not enough shelter beds here in a community that is A.L.I.C.E. (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) see www.uwles.org, what is available in some cases requires that the clients be out of the facility during the daytime hours.

So, where do they go? The library, a friend's home, out on the street? There are at least three organizations that provide some daytime warm space but not every day of the week. They are the Salvation Army, the Overflow Café, and One Mission Cambridge. They and representatives of Delmarva Community Services, which also provides shelters, and some local churches met to talk about what might be done to make a daytime facility available every day of the week during the winter.

Valerie Davis also gave a presentation about this issue to the Cambridge City Council on Monday Evening. You can hear what she had to say on www.townhallstreams.com at the November 13th meeting if you want to know more about this particular challenge. Contact me if you would like to help and be part of the solution.

There has been much talk about the changes to the Maryland law regarding juveniles and how those children under 13 years of age are causing trouble in our community and elsewhere in the state and are not being held accountable. While the focus has been on blaming the legislature or Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) or the police, that does not address what may be the solutions to the underlying challenges of a small portion of our youth that are impacting our community – fights in schools, stolen and/or ransacked cars, burglaries of homes.

With any new legislation such as the Juvenile Reform Act, the implementation of the new law is not always easy and seamless. While the new law makes changes to how things have always been done, I see most of the policy and philosophy for the Maryland changes as being sound and consistent with keeping children out of the court system when possible. The law, when implemented well, is consistent with community safety, holding kids accountable, and providing needed services.

The law does not suggest that children under 13 years of age should be free to do what they want and not held accountable for their behavior. It does mean, however, that those called upon to implement the law need to be trained on it and how their policies and procedures need to be adjusted to help make their systems work better. That training and system change should have happened as soon as the law was passed so that the state and local agencies were ready to address its implementation when the law came into effect. From news articles and other reports that I have seen that training was not implemented in many parts of the state.

For instance, there has been a focus on and news stories about how nothing can be done to children 12 and under. Well that is just not so. There is a process that has been in place for years, is standard procedure around the country, and has not changed by passage of the new law that allows the police, agencies, or citizens to file complaints with the DJS regarding younger children who are in need of supervision. These are not delinquency cases. These complaints are a way to get services to a child or family that needs them. They can be provided or supervised by DJS or, when appropriate, petitions can be filed with the court to obtain the help with parent and child compliance.

During my time on the bench, these cases were very helpful and effective in our community in providing prevention and early intervention services to children and families that helped prevent children from becoming delinquent and getting those that were truant back in school. The assertion that the courts are not able to do anything to the child or family in these kinds of cases is just not accurate.

While the court cannot detain a child in a Child in Need of Services (CINS) case, it can take other actions to hold the child and parents accountable. These cases can be, however, some of the most difficult cases that Juvenile and family courts have to manage, and judges and magistrates need to use their training and imagination to achieve successful outcomes.

One example from my experience was my ordering a truant teen mom to read to her infant every day. She both bonded with her child and learned the value of education to the extent that she no longer missed school. Another child who had done well under a court order and could have had her case dismissed asked that the

order remain in effect as she was able to use it to keep youth gangs from recruiting her to join them.

Judges and Magistrates can set curfews on children. They can order the child before them to perform services in the community or at home. The options for meaningful sanctions that can teach lessons are numerous.

Another part of this challenge includes the lack of resources at DJS and in most, if not all, Maryland communities to bring services and programs to those children and parents that need them. A solution for this challenge is for the state to consider a different, more consistent, and more locally driven approach for these services and programs with state funding. I am speaking with representatives of the Governor's office and the legislature in hopes of having the state government begin to make this idea a reality.

Housing has been a challenge here for years with little or nothing being done to address the problems that some of our citizens face. During this past year, the city has seen some significant progress in its efforts to make a difference.

Thanks to the work with Habitat Choptank, a nonprofit that you can support financially or help as a volunteer, beautiful homes are going up on Wells Street and elsewhere in the Pine Street Area. The city also has grant funding to build 8-12 houses on Chesapeake Court off of High Street that will provide home ownership opportunities for some in the community. I just signed the agreement with the builder for that project that the city council approved recently.

A grant application to HUD that the city submitted earlier this year was not successful, but the city has learned how to make that grant request better, and we are going after it again to provide resources to fix up some of the more rundown houses with lead paint and other health hazards. In addition, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has been very supportive of Cambridge and its efforts over the past few years to make a difference in the lives of those living here and continues to work with us.

Earlier this year, and in many past years, we heard about the poor condition of the Bradford House on Race Street. The owners of the property made promises to correct unhealthy conditions there without any follow-up. The Altair Apartments, an apartment complex on Greenwood Avenue, recently came to the attention of the city and the community about the poor management and living conditions that existed there.

In the past, Cambridge, for a variety of reasons, did not have the staffing and resources to undertake some effective action against landlords such as at the above properties. This year, however, we did. While all of the problems have not been solved, the city along with our entire state and federal legislative delegations contacted HUD and the property owners to complain and engaged with HUD to press for solutions.

With both properties, the owners of the properties sent representatives to meet with city officials. They committed to undertake solutions to the multiple challenges that exist in the properties. With the Altair Apartments, the ownership and the city have just entered into a no cost agreement for the Cambridge Police Department to have a substation in the complex.

With the Bradford House, I understand that the ownership of that property has agreed to have private security at the building in the evening hours to help reduce criminal activity that has been taking place. While all of the problems with these two properties are not yet solved, we are on the road to solving them; and city staff has developed relationships with representatives at HUD and in state government that will make it easier for us to have a faster and more effective response when and if other similar situations arise at other properties in the city.

Can I go on about the positive that is happening here? I can, but this report could go on for many more pages. I will conclude by saying that

- The community is starting to step forward in new and different ways to be part of the solutions that we face.

- The Cambridge Police Department and its leadership are looking at different ways to reduce crime in some of our high crime areas and to engage the community.
- CAN is growing its membership and is working on helping the police to start Neighborhood Watch programs around the city. Sign your neighborhood up to be part of the solution.
- The City Manager and City Staff are working hard in all aspects of city government to continue to improve providing city services in a more consistent, effective, and efficient manner.
- I have started a Mayor's Citizen Committee to reduce gun violence and have over a dozen citizens who know the community or have experience in addressing this and other crime related issues that are helping to make a difference.
- We had a summer youth jobs program this past summer for the first time in many years, which is funded for continuation for at least another four years.

What we need in order to continue the above and other efforts is for you to help in any way that you are able. If you have ideas or want to help but do not know where to go, contact me.

Thanks for Reading.

Steve