

CAN's Unofficial Notes on the Cambridge City Council Meeting of 1/8/24

The meeting started at 6:01 pm without Mayor Rideout. Ward 4 Council Commissioner Spuddy Cephas chaired the meeting.

The meeting started with a moment of silence for Deborah Cooper, the City's Finance Director who died suddenly on December 29th. She was a great asset to the City who combined all the financial elements of the City into one organization and led the City to a clean audit which is discussed later. She will be missed.

The Council heard a presentation from TKS Auditors who conducted the 2023 audit of the City's finances. The City received a clean, unmodified opinion, which is the highest level of confidence an audit company can give. This is thanks to our City Manager and the late Ms. Cooper's efforts.

The auditors noted that the City's general fund and its three Special funds (the Sewer fund, the Municipal Utilities fund, and the Marina fund) were all in good shape and had the proper reserves to go forward. The City made a change to its accounting system by separating out the Federal and State grant funds (which can vary widely from year to year) from the General fund (which is relatively stable) as to income and expenses. This will allow for a better comparison of the General funds from year to year. This is a good move by the City to be more transparent.

The Council then turned to the meeting agenda and eliminated the discussion of Ordinance 1232, which deals with the removal of and penalties to citizens on City Boards who hold themselves out as representatives of the City after they have been removed from the Board. This is the second time this ordinance has been submitted and postponed.

The Council also postponed for the second time Ordinance 1233 which deals with amending the Zoning Map relative to a property adjacent to the corner of High and Washington Streets, previously slated to be a Dollar General store.

The only new business was the awarding of the contract for the West End Sewer. The contract was open for bids twice, and only one company bid each

time. The first time, a Western shore company bid \$4.3 million, which was \$1 million over budget. The City went out again for a second bid, and a local company with a work history to the City bid \$3.8 million. This bid is still \$500,000 over budget, but the City engineer thought this was the best we could do. The Council approved the \$3.8 million contract. The project should start in 3 months and take 9 months to complete. The project will affect at least 50 homes on Water and Hambrooks Streets.

Upcoming Meetings of note:

1. Arts and Entertainment Committee meeting January 17th at 3pm
2. Historic Preservation Commission, January 17th at 6pm
3. Cambridge Utilities Commission, January 30th at 6 pm
4. Planning and Zoning meeting, February 6 at 6pm

Two people spoke during the Public comment period:

1. Shay Cisco, who is the newly appointed Vice President of CWDI, spoke against Ordinance 1232 (described above). She was worried that the ordinance would dampen citizen participation on City Boards and Commissions.
2. Carlos Estern asked about the timing of the Sewer project which he thought could not come soon enough.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 after one hour and one minute.

Editorial Comments:

Lejan Cephas, the Council President had a sore throat, so Sputty Cephas, Ward 4 Commissioner, took over and did a very efficient job running the meeting.

It should be noted that the Agenda and attachments for this meeting comprised 177 pages. This included the whole audit report, plus three very interesting papers by the City manager about personnel, as well as actions the City has taken on a number of topics including taking over operation of the Marina, the Audit report, Police hiring, the sewer contract, and the City's many accomplishments. With the exception of the Audit report and the Sewer contract, nothing else was discussed by the Council at the meeting.