

CAN's Unofficial Notes on the Cambridge City Council Meeting of June 10, 2024

The meeting started at 6 pm with Council President Lajan Cephas sitting in for the Mayor who was absent for an unstated reason. Commissioner Roche attended electronically. All others were present. In a fast moving start, the Council approved the meeting agenda and the consent agenda which had previous meeting minutes, requests for public gatherings and approval of a “wave fence” at the City Marina. The “wave fence” costs \$495,000 of which \$430,000 of the total is a Md. State grant and the balance is City funded.

The Council then moved to approve Ordinance 1239 which is the fiscal year 2025 budget. The budget totals \$18.7 million of which \$8.6 is for general administration and maintenance, \$7.4 for the Police and \$2.6 for the Rescue Fire Company. The budget passed 5 to 0.

In the Old Business section, the Council approved Perry Peregoy, the new Finance Director, to be placed as a signer on credit cards. In New Business, the Council approved State grant submissions of \$750,000 for renovation of the Old City Hall; \$850,000 for restoration of two burned out buildings at 444-448 Race St; \$500,000 for the Mace's Lane Community Center; and \$50,000 for the Façade Improvement program. Hopefully, the State will fund all.

Continuing in the new Business section, the Council approved the time-line for the City elections as follows:

August 6, 2024 – statements of Candidacy due at the City Manager's office

September 27, 2024 – deadline for voter registration, located at the Dorchester County Board of Elections.

October 19, 2024- Election Day, site to be determined

December 3, 2024 – Run-off election, if needed

Finalizing the New Business section was a discussion of a research report done by Special Projects coordinator, Cheryl Hannan, on City Council compensation. The report compared city council compensations and benefits of Cambridge to 9 other Maryland cities with approximately the same sized budget and population. All agreed that it was an excellent report. The Council delayed action on any ideas in the report until it had a chance to look over the report.

In the public comment section, only Chuck McFadden, President of CAN spoke and made 3 specific suggestions, as follows:

1. The Council should set up a citizens group to review and make recommendations to the Council on any changes to Compensation or Benefits. This was the process that was used previously, and it had very good results. Having public input into the process is much better than having the Council decide its own salary which could be interpreted as self-serving.
2. With the YMCA Newsletter announcing its plan to move to Cambridge Harbor, the Council should check to see if the Y is paying market rates for its site on the harbor or is getting a sweetheart deal. With the CWDI projections for building the harbor coming up \$8 to \$10 million short, does it make sense to put a non-profit, non-tax paying organization in that location?
3. The fact that the City Council and CWDI are in mediation at the present time is the only thing the public knows about that process. The Council should give out the following information – who is on the negotiation teams; when have they met; when are they meeting next; how many items are being mediated; and what is the projected completion time? These are general knowledge pieces that will help the public understand the process and the progress, if any.

During the Division Head reports, Chief Todd, said that 2 new officers are graduating from the Police Academy and should join the force soon which will bring the workforce to 39 officers. An additional person is just entering the Academy and will hopefully pass this summer. Good news for the Police.

During the Commissioners Comments, all thanked the Finance Director, Perry Peregoy for his efforts on the 2025 budget. Commissioner Lajan Cephas then brought up the idea of bringing back the Council Compensation and Benefits committee, as Mr. McFadden had suggested. The City Attorney agreed that there was just enough time if the Council appointed individuals at the next Council meeting July 8th and if the Committee acted by August. There was general agreement by the Council to move forward with that plan by the next Council meeting.

Chuck McFadden,

President, CAN