

**Unofficial CAN Notes on City Council Meeting
Special Meeting
Wednesday , January 22, 2025 @6:00 pm
Commission Chambers - 305 Gay Street**

Attendees: Mayor Cephas and all commissioners are present.

Agenda

Motion raised to approve Agenda and seconded. Approved by all commissioners present 5-0.

1. Topic 1- Declaration of a State of Emergency in the Event of a Winter Storm.

a. Council Action

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- The Mayor must give the Declaration of a State of Emergency to the public.
- How much notice does the mayor give the public about a snow emergency? When is a state of emergency called?
- A lot of institutional memories have left the city with people retiring. Now, we will chart a course for the city, commissioners and Mayor to follow when there are significant snowfalls.
 - Emergency snow routes are plowed first. Then the priority routes are done. (Please refer to the **City Maps on choosecambridge.com** city website).
 - When you are getting 1 ½ inches snow/hour, as we had in this big storm, you must do them multiple times.
 - People don't wait until their streets are plowed before they drive on them. This causes ice which is difficult to remove with plows and can only be addressed with sand and salt. Ice doesn't melt under certain temperatures.
 - We had multiple trucks go down with plow issues or salt spreader issues. At least one truck was in the shop the entire time we were out plowing, at one time or another.

Wayne Suggs, Director of Public Works:

- Have 4 large trucks with significant age on them.
- There are 2 brand new, smaller dump trucks used for side streets.
- The trucks are loaded up with salt and put on the emergency routes and priority routes.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- We are going to look at our budget and will investigate upgrading our equipment.
- We are looking to the mayor and commissioners for how to proceed.
- Would you like us to provide recommendations?

Lajan Cephas, Mayor: We should discuss it.

Brett Summers, Ward 1: Were there complaints as to how the storm was addressed?

Wayne Suggs, Director of Public Works: Yes

Brett Summers, Ward 1: What were the complaints?

Wayne Suggs, Director of Public Works:

- People were complaining that we did not plow their street. We had but the street was covered in ice. At a certain temperature the ice will not melt even if salted.
- One mailbox was knocked down during this storm by accident.
- In some cases, we had not gotten to the streets people were complaining about.
- In most cases, we had plowed but the streets were not cleared.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- On those streets that were not clear, we should have done 2 passes instead of just 1 pass.

Wayne Suggs, Director of Public Works: Yes

Brett Summers, Ward 1:

- What can be done to correct this situation?

Wayne Suggs, Director of Public Works:

- We must keep the 6 trucks that we have on the roads full time.
- We have smaller 350 trucks that can be equipped with shovels to do side streets.
- The bigger trucks require a Commercial Drivers License (CDL). We need to send people to training. The training now is a much bigger hurdle than it used to be. It costs \$5000 and longer school time. The people that have been with Public Works for 30 years, and have a CDL, are retiring.

Frank Stout, Ward 3: How long does it take to mobilize?

Wayne Suggs, Director of Public Works:

- The trucks are loaded with salt during the normal workday before the snow comes.
- It's just a matter of getting the drivers in (about 15 minutes), topping off the trucks with fuel and getting out on the roads.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- The police department also plays a role. They tell Public Works when they feel that they should get out and start salting the roads.
- We are looking to do better with response. Mr. Suggs salted the streets before the smaller secondary storm and there was no need to mobilize anyone. The salt melted the snow that came down.
- (Asked commissioners) How many calls did you get from constituents? The city got more calls than expected. These complaints were forwarded to Mr. Suggs.
- Mr. Suggs and I met before the storm to decide on what we were going to do. We did have a plan.
- We need to decide when to declare a state of emergency. How many inches of snow must be on the ground to call for a state of emergency?

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- We should declare a state of emergency when the state calls a state of emergency.
- How do we inform the public of the emergency snow routes?
- Locust Street is an emergency snow route. I heard from someone who was called at 2:30 AM to move their car off the road. They did not know that Locust Street was a snow emergency route.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- I know that a lot of our streets are well marked as snow emergency routes because I checked this.
- I talked to the Chief of Police about dealing with cars parked on emergency routes. Instead of towing the car, which the code allows the city to do, the police were calling people or knocking on doors to get people to move their cars. The license plates were used to contact them. I was glad that Cambridge took this approach because I have done this in other communities. No one likes to bring in a tow truck.
- How do we communicate with the public about moving a car? 4 hours before or 8 hours before? We did put it on the city website and county website but we will never get everybody.
- An unnamed "gateway" street to the community is currently not an emergency snow route. We are adding it to the list.

Brandon Hesson, Asst City Manager:

- We announced a state of emergency an hour and a half before the state did. We have the burden of knocking on doors and getting people to move their cars and the state does not.
- We could make an argument that the state of emergency could have come at dinnertime.
- The state will just do what they must do because the burden on them is different.

Lajan Cephas, Mayor:

- It is a collaborative declaration of an emergency between the county and the city.
- Isn't there a group of emergency folk who know about this? If there isn't, there should be so when there is snow, we can have a zoom meeting ready to talk about where we are and what the forecast is.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- It is up to the county to call the zoom meeting. Particularly in the event of a hurricane or catastrophic forecast.
- We need direction from the city council for when to notify people that live on snow emergency routes to move their cars. Should Department of Public Works start notifying people when there is 4 inches of snow predicted? I want to make this a clear directive.
- Mr. Suggs and I have talked about this. It should be clear that if there are 3 inches of snow predicted, people on snow routes must move their cars as soon as forecast announced. We already know that our signage needs to be improved.

Frank Stout, Ward 3:

- So what you are saying is that if the forecast is 3 inches of snow, people living on snow routes have 3 hours to move their cars before the snow is predicted to begin. Answer: Yes

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4:

- There are alerts for tornadoes and tornado watches. Is there such a thing as a snow emergency alert?

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- I would want to talk to the staff again to make things clear about snow warning, snowstorm alert, etc.

Brian Roche, Ward 5:

- A snow warning is 6 inches within 12 hours or 8 inches in 24 hours. A winter weather advisory is 3 – 5 inches in 12 hours. These are from the National Weather Service.
- Thank-you, Mr. Suggs and Mr. Steckmann for looking up what was done in the past. There must have been a good reason to pick 2 inches as a defining moment in the snowstorm to have people move their cars from emergency snow routes. Once you stack 2 inches of snow into a pile, it is about 6 inches which is something a car could go over in an emergency.
- Upgrading the signage is a great idea. It hasn't been done for a long time.
- I think it is important to publish the plow route and schedule and make it accessible to the public. Also, GPS tracking can show where the plows have been and are headed next.
- I know it was done inadvertently, but the city plows should not stack snow at the handicapped intersections of the streets. The state plows did it too and we should send them a letter about that. Put it in a parking spot or something similar. People that are unhoused, don't use their car much or walk everywhere, should not have to go into the street to get around piles of snow. That snow will be there for 2 weeks. It should be protocol to not block pedestrian pathways.
- I got a complaint about an industrial park out on Woods Rd that is the responsibility of the county to plow. It was not plowed. However, there should be a defined protocol to make sure it is done. Maybe the city should be doing it and notify the county as such.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- We do have the equipment to do the GPS tracking. We must get it installed into the trucks.

Brian Roche, Ward 5:

- The GPS tracking should eliminate the massive amounts of phone calls you received from the community about plowing streets.

Lajan Cephas, Mayor:

- I follow other municipalities and some of them will post on social media the amount of streets that were plowed that day and the number of cars dug out. If a report could be given to the council before the end of the day, that can be shared with the public and it can be something celebrated.
- Maybe the police can put out the paper "No Parking" signs in the snow emergency areas as well.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- Those "No Parking" signs are governed by state regulated rules and protocol. That would not be an option.

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4:

- Would you consider bringing in a third party contractor(s) to help plow during big storms?

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- Yes. We are considering hiring a third party vendor(s) as an option. There is no sense in purchasing a lot of new equipment that will just sit because we won't get snow in the next 3 years.
- A lot of the third party vendors are hired by the state so their availability is not known.
- We will come back to the city with recommendations that will need to be voted on. We will be talking about snow for a long time to come.

Lajan Cephas, Mayor:

- Thank you (to City Manager and Director of Public Works) for all your great work. Please let your staff know we appreciate your hard work.
- Also thank-you to the police department that was out knocking on doors.

Brandon Hesson, Asst City Manager:

- There is a red bar on the city website. Choose "City Maps". It is up to date and identifies state owned snow routes and city snow routes and other parking restrictions on those roads.

2. Topic 2: Proposed Text Amendment to the UDC, Industrial Standards

a. Council Agenda Report from Director of Planning, Brian Herrmann

- Recommend that this be forwarded for first reading
- The City's Planning Commission passed this staff-initiated text amendment (7-0) at their December 4, 2024 meeting. The proposal impacts the maximum building height that is permitted for a structure in the Industrial Zoning District.
- Summary of critical issues:
 - When an industrial prospect (especially a significant one) lists the City of Cambridge as a potential "home" for its operations, the city's 50-foot height restriction has the potential to dissuade the prospective tenet.
 - The staff (with the support of the Planning Commission) has made a proposal to increase the height restriction from 50 feet to 70 feet.
 - Many modern industrial sites across the Country now permit a maximum height of 70 feet. This is due to the specified height requirements of the Early Suppression Fast Response (ESFR) sprinkler system.
 - Baltimore County and City of Rockville already have a 70 ft height restriction.
 - Cambridge already has a 70 ft height restriction on residential buildings, commercial buildings and mixed-use development in the waterfront development.
 - Those industrial buildings that front directly on an arterial street, must abide by certain requirements of form and use.
 - The industrial buildings must fit in with the other buildings on the same site.
 - Mr. Hermann commented that there is a very well-respected company that deals with fire that wants to locate their business in Cambridge. They have many collaborations with well-known large corporations.

Motion raised to forward text amendment to UDC, Industrial Standard for first reading and seconded. Approved by all commissioners present 5-0.

Discussion on above topic

Brett Summers, Ward 1:

- Is the name of the company that wants to re-locate here, confidential? Answer: I believe so.

Brandon Hesson, Asst City Manager:

- I can share the name of the company as they appeared before the Planning Commission. The company is *Fire and Risk Alliance*. They perform several functions such as testing things to see if they meet regulatory standards.

- Building a hermetic environment that is like a laboratory.

Brett Summers, Ward 1:

- Why did they choose Cambridge?

Brandon Hesson, Asst City Manager:

- They were originally located in a neighboring state. The place where they planned to build became unworkable.
- They were directed to look at tech parks around Maryland. The 2 principles of the company are familiar with this area. Easton and Cambridge were both suggested. Cambridge had what they were looking for.

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- I know that people that live near this industrial park are not under city governance. Why is this industrial park under city governance.

Brandon Hesson, Asst City Manager:

- The tech park was annexed by the city and is under city laws.

Brian Roche, Ward 5:

- Is there precedent for requiring that the building has standards on form” and design?

Brian Hermann, Director of Planning:

- Many cities throughout the country have standards for form and use of a building. Usually the use of the building is the most important of the two.

Motion raised to approve text amendment to UDC, Industrial Standard for first reading and seconded. Approved by all commissioners present 5-0.

3. Topic 3 Information Regarding Congressionally Directed Spending

a. Council Agenda Report from Grant Coordinator, Steffanie Malkus (Delivered by City Manager)

- City has received word from Senator Van Hollen and Senator Alsobrooks that applications to request Congressionally Directed Spending will be opening within the next three weeks.
- The City needs to identify which projects we will request funding for and the priority of these funded projects.
- Congressionally Directed Spending can promote economic development, infrastructure, public safety, education, health care initiatives, and other worthy investments in our community.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- 2 projects were put forward last year for funding.
 - An application for a new fire truck for the Rescue Fire Company was approved for funding.
 - An application for continued rehabilitation efforts of the Cambridge Creek Interceptor, a vital conduit for wastewater, was not approved.
- Suggests that the City puts forth 2 or 3 items that they want to fund. Prioritize those items.
- Asking commissioners to send emails to the city manager on what projects you would like to be funded.

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- Do we know why the Cambridge Creek Interceptor was not approved? Could it be presented again for approval?

Brandon Hesson, Asst. City Manager:

- The engineering department most likely knows the reason. We can try to reach out to them and get an answer.

4. Public Comment

Alison Kennedy:

- Thanked the city officials for having the discussion about the large snow event we recently had. Commended them for ideas that would help communicate more effectively with the public in the

future. In addition to the ideas mentioned, Ms. Kennedy said that the public cannot be too overinformed about large weather events. She suggested they put important notices to the public on social media, Facebook and Next door. Notices can be put on city and commissioner pages and reposted. She suggested that, if possible, an SMS mass text message could go out to the citizens of Cambridge.

Brandon Hesson, Asst. City Manager:

He responded to inform the public listening to the city council meeting, that anyone can sign up for important city department SMS text notifications on the city website.

Alison Kennedy:

She was suggesting an involuntary SMS notification to Cambridge citizens' cell phones concerning emergency information.

5. **Motion to hold Closed Session** pursuant Md. Code Ann., General Provisions § 3-305(b)(3), specifically, to discuss the acquisition of real property for a public purpose.

Motion raised to go into closed session and seconded. Approved by all commissioners present 5-0.

6. **Reconvene in Open Session**

Lajan Cephas, Mayor: We went into closed session to discuss acquisition of road property for public use.

7. **Adjourn** 7:22 pm

Motion raised to adjourn and seconded. Approved by all commissioners present 5-0.

Notes taken by A Kennedy, CAN member