

Unofficial CAN Notes on City Commission Meeting Monday, January 27, 2025 - 6:00 pm

Attendees: Mayor and Commissioners from Ward 1, 2, 4, 5 are present. Frank Stout, Ward 3 is absent.

Agenda

1. **Mayor and Commission to approve or amend agenda as presented.**
 - Spuddy Cephas wants to add Discussion about Alpha Genesis project to New Business.
 - City attorney says that Discussion will be 3b under New Business.
Motion raised to accept amended agenda and seconded. Commissioners vote is 4-0.
 - Spuddy Cephas wants to add a discussion about litigation to the closed session.
Motion raised to add a discussion on litigation to the closed session and seconded. Commissioners vote is 4-0.

Presentations from the Approved Guests

2. **Mayor's Presentation of Key to the City to:**
 - a. Mark Lewis, Former Chief of Police for 30 Years of Service
 - Commissioners thank Mr. Lewis for his years of service.
 - b. Oliver Freeman, Public Works Foreman for 30 Years of Service
(Mr. Freeman is not at the city council meeting so there was no presentation at this time).
3. **Adrian Holmes, President and Program Director, Alpha Genesis Community Development Corporation** (Detailed documents attached to agenda for 01/27/25 city council meetings)
 - a. Updated city council on the progress of the Viewing Area at the Harriet Tubman Mural at 428 – 432 Race Street.
 - b. Alpha Genesis has been working on this plan for the last 3 years.
 - c. Plan highlights include:
 - Creating 5 new retail spaces (3 storefronts on Race, 2 store fronts facing the mural).
 - Office will be located on the second floor of 428 Race Street.
 - Exhibition Deck off the second floor and restaurant.
 - Overhang Harriet Tubman Pavilion with solar panels.
 - Repositioning of the brick wall(owned by city) to open up space for visitors,
 - Re-creating Harriet Tubman's father's cabin, Ben Ross, on Cannery Way.

Architect Maurice Ngwaba, continued with presentation.

- a. Highlights include:
 - Will have to remove trees to re-position the brick wall. Will plant 11 trees in place of the trees removed.
 - Community Garden will be part of the display area.
 - There will be 4 panels used for education in the Harriet Tubman Pavilion.
 - Water tank system for the community garden.
 - North Star Station will contain 2 non-gender bathrooms for visitors and a community room.
 - Trying to make the community space more spiritual and reverent for the visitors.

The Mayor thanked Alpha Genesis for the presentation. (3b. Discussion on project moved to New Business).

Consent Agenda

4. **Meeting Minutes**
 - a. December 9, 2024, Legislative Work Session
 - b. December 9, 2024, Regular Session
 - c. December 16, 2024, Council Work Session
 - d. January 10, 2025, Special Meeting
 - e. January 13, 2025, Swearing in Ceremony, Regular Session

5. Michael O'Connor will hold "**Cubmobile Derby 2025**" on **Sunday April 6, 2025**, from 10am to 5pm on Court Lane. Please see the application for additional details.
6. Harvey Hill will hold "**Community Day**" on **Saturday September 13, 2025**, from 12pm-5pm in the 600 block of Cross Street. Please see the application for additional details.

Motion raised to accept consent agenda and seconded. Commissioners vote is 4-0.

Ordinances for First Reading

7. ORDINANCE NO. 1244 AN ORDINANCE OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND TO AMEND THE CITY'S UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE (UDC) FOR THE PURPOSES OF: 1) PROVIDING THAT RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTAL, TESTING LABORATORIES SHALL BE A PERMITTED USE WITH CONDITIONS IN THE INDUSTRIAL ZONING DISTRICT, ESTABLISHING CONDITIONS FOR SUCH USE, AND AMENDING TABLES 1 AND 2 OF THE UDC FOR CONSISTENCY THEREWITH; AND 2) AMENDING MINIMUM YARD REQUIREMENTS AND MAXIMUM BULK STANDARDS FOR INDUSTRIAL LOTS; PROVIDING THAT THE TITLE OF THIS ORDINANCE SHALL BE DEEMED A FAIR SUMMARY AND GENERALLY RELATING TO ZONING IN THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

Council Agenda Report from Director of Planning, Brian Herrmann

- There was a discussion about this at the last city council meeting, 01/22/25. Proposed changes to the UDC code concerning height, form and design of a building to accommodate a business that is re-locating to Cambridge's Industrial Park.
- City Attorney read Ordinance 1244.

Ordinances for Second Reading - None

Old Business - None

New Business

- 3b. Discussion on Alpha Genesis project (added to New Business)

Brian Roche, Ward 5:

- Referred to the American Institute of Architects' report of the Regional/ Urban Design Assistance Team (AIA R/UDAT) which pioneered the modern-day charrette process by combining multi-disciplinary teams in dynamic, multi-day grassroots processes to produce community visions, action plans and recommendations. These recommendations say that Cambridge projects near the water should allow a view of Cambridge Creek if that is nearby, which it is.
- Mr. Roche was concerned that items within the Alpha Genesis project may obstruct the view of the water. He wanted these concerns to be heard and wanted the team to think creatively about keeping the view of the water as open as possible.

Alpha Genesis:

- More work will have to be done to preserve the view of the water, possibly taking parking spaces from the parking lot or possibly making North Star Station smaller.

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4:

- Asked city manager if these "asks" are even feasible?
- Will the area and bathrooms be maintained by Alpha Genesis or the city?

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- The area is going to be surveyed.
- Agrees that the brick wall should be re-positioned. Doesn't know how neighbors on either side will react. The city does own an easement back in that area.
- Always concerned when public bathrooms go in. Choose something very durable and will last for years; must be easy to clean.
- City staff will have to be available on the weekends. There may be times that the area is not open. We will have to continue to discuss.

Alpha Genesis:

- The maintenance could be a shared responsibility between the city and Alpha Genesis.

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- The North Star Station will have to be staffed and maintained. How did you envision this to be done?
- The plans you shared with us tonight are part of Phase 2? Have you gone before the Planning Commission and Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with Phase 2 plans?

Alpha Genesis:

- Phase 1 was just approved by the Planning Commission and HPC. Yes, what we showed you tonight is Phase 2. We will go before the Planning Commission with Phase 2 for approval next month. We were modelling (the bathrooms) after the set-up at Long Wharf. As was said, we could help with staffing.

Brett Summers, Ward 1:

- I think your plans will add a lot to the space in front of the mural.
- Re-positioning the brick wall will open up Cannery Way.
- There is an old art deco sign on your building that is obsolete and should be taken down.
- Unsure about the community garden. It will be nice in the summer but what about the rest of the year?
- There is no lighting system shown back there. It seems it should have some lighting.
- For Phase 2, do you have to be approved by the Planning Commission and HPC?
- You said you were starting in the spring '25. Is Phase 1 fully capitalized?

Alpha Genesis:

- The community garden is a teaching tool. It will have herbs, teas and plants used for medicinal and other purposes and other things that Harriet Tubman used back in her time.
- We did not include lighting. We are waiting to hear back about the wall.
- Yes, we need approval from the Planning Commission and HPC for Phase 2. We came to the city council first to share with you.

(WITHDRAWN – SEE BELOW) Motion raised to direct city staff to solidify answers to questions and concerns about the Alpha Genesis project with assistance from Commissioner Roche and another commissioner and report findings to city council for action and seconded.

Discussion

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- I would like to understand better how things must go through the channels of approval in the city. What things need to be in place and what documents need to move forward.

Brian Roche, Ward 5:

- I need a checklist of what still needs to be turned in and done on this project. It seems like a lot.

Brett Summers, Ward 1:

- You need approx. \$1.5 million for Phase 2 of the project. Phase 1 is totally capitalized. You have about 60% of the money raised for Phase 2 and are still waiting to hear back from grant applications for the remainder of funding.

Alpha Genesis:

- Yes, Phase 1 is fully capitalized. Phase 2 has most of the capital raised.

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- (To City Manager) Alpha Genesis wants to begin this spring. How does this fit in with other project timelines that are already approved?

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- I need to have another discussion with Alpha Genesis. I feel the timeline that Alpha Genesis has is very aggressive. Having public toilets as part of the design is a big deal for the city to handle; Plus, there are other events planned for that space.
- There should be no costs for the city, on the building renovations. It is the maintenance long term.

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4, withdrew his proposed Motion stated above.

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4 raised a Motion for city manager to work closely with Alpha Genesis and report back on any constraints on moving the brick wall owned by the city, address any fiscal

concerns for the city, address Brian Roche, Ward 5, comments concerning following the R/UDAT and allow the Alpha Genesis plans to go before HPC (and Planning Commission, which is part of city staff). Motion is seconded.

Discussion

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- This project has been at this level for a long time. We are now getting down into the granular.
- Meeting again with Alpha Genesis and getting other answers to questions raised about moving forward needs to be done.

Commissioners vote is 4-0 on Motion concerning Alpha Genesis project.

8. Award of Contract, Chesapeake Court and Schoolhouse Engineer Carl “Bucky” Jackson, P.E.

- 2 bids sent out.
- Harper & Sons’ bid was selected – they are building the houses on Douglas St.
- Award construction contract to Harper & Sons for \$799,000
- Fiscal Impact: The cost of this work will be covered by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) FY22 funds. Construction oversight will be completed by the Department of Engineering staff, with assistance from the Housing Division.

Motion raised to approve the construction contract to Harper & Sons and seconded.

Discussion

Brett Summers, Ward 1:

- What is the amount of the grant from DHCD? Is there any excess?

Mr. Jackson, Engineer:

- We were told the award can be up to \$800,000.

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- How do you send out RFP?

Mr. Jackson, Engineer:

- Posted on the City website and direct to the contractors.

Lajan Cephas, Mayor:

- (To city manager) Look into making formal policy change to put hiring local contract firms as a priority.

Glenn Steckmann, City Manager:

- The larger projects will discourage local contractors because they don’t have staff.
- Have talked to electrical unions to start having apprenticeship/internship programs for the trades in Dorchester County.
- If you want formal policy, that is a discussion that will have to happen.

Commissioners vote is 4-0 on Motion awarding contract to Harper & Sons for housing.

9. Mayor’s Office of Initiatives, Discussion Topic

- a. Example of Possible Mayor’s Office of Initiatives. Attached to the agenda for 01/27/25 city council meeting is a list of possible groups that could be formed in Cambridge to meet the needs of the citizens and get their voices heard.

Example stated to city council by Mayor Cephas:

- Start volunteer program to help citizens that have English as a second language.
- Some of our residents face barriers in communication when they get communicate from the city.
- Translate city regulations, documents, etc. into Spanish.
- (To City Attorney) Does this require a charter change?

City Attorney:

- It would depend on what we were creating. if a charter change or another appropriate instrument.

Brian Roche, Ward 5:

- I read through the list. Those are things you have an interest in bringing forward and actively working on. It makes sense because we meet with department heads in March that you would want to bring this up with them.

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4: Agree with Ward 5 comments.

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2:

- I would want to understand the scope of these initiatives and their purpose. Recently, there were committees dissolved because they were not active. There was some push back on certain committees' demise from residents.

Brett Summers, Ward1:

- I would not want to create another government entity that has power.
- If it is more of an advisory group to the Mayor, that is a good thing.

Lajan Cephas, Mayor:

- I did envision this as being more of an advisory group.

City Attorney:

- (To the Mayor) We will have to talk about it some more to flesh out the details of what you are envisioning and the scope of it.

Meetings

(All posted on choosecambridge.com)

Motion raised to accept meetings and seconded. Commissioners vote is 4-0.

Public Comment

Dilly Johnson, Choptank Ave, Ward 1:

Appreciates the Mayor's Initiatives project and thinking about the Latino/Hispanic members of the community. Hispanic members of the community do not participate and join into things because they can't. Often, they know very little English and cannot read in Spanish either. The education they get in their countries is limited. The cost to file documents in English, to become a citizen, is exorbitant. Volunteer programs to help these members understand documents/regulations and other things are welcomed. I would like to volunteer for such an initiative. Also, I am a notary public and can process documents for these residents at no charge.

Linda Harris, Race St, Harriet Tubman Museum: We have gotten grant money as well to renovate the interior and exterior of our building on Cannery Way. We will be getting our architectural plans together and hope we will be able to present to the city council when we are ready to do so. We need to have a community meeting about the changes being proposed by Alpha Genesis and the Harriet Tubman Museum to solidify that we are all on the same page. Last year we had 8600 people come through our door. I did 160 walks, last year, with over 2000 people so we are contributing a lot to downtown Cambridge, tourism and the economy. We want to continue with musical venues to bring in money to the museum. We want to resolve the issues that exist in developing the back area around the mural and continue to do what we have done for the last 52 years.

Michelle Bowle, Choptank Ave, Ward 1: She writes *Cambridge Indivisible*. She is interested in becoming a volunteer for the Mayor's Initiatives to work for the common good. She would like to hear more about the volunteer efforts in Mayor's initiatives.

Charles MacFadden, President of CAN, Ward 1:

- There are 2 new playground/park areas you have already committed to, one in Cannery Park and on the waterfront. Who will maintain these areas?
- Millions were spent on building the pavilion in Cannery Park. Maintenance of it is unfunded.
- The Alpha Genesis pavilion is the 3rd pavilion that is going to be built in the last 3 years. Who maintains it?
- Consider the costs of maintaining these areas and how that is going to be done.
- The maintenance of Cannery Park and the waterfront areas are unfunded currently and are committed to.

- Who will be in charge of maintaining Cannery Way and all of its additions?

Phil Jarmon, High St:

- Never thought the presence of the Harriet Museum would last so long in town. I am thankful that it has.
- The natural area where Harriet Tubman grew up (around Bucktown, Woolford, Madison) is still preserved. The location of Ben Ross's cabin foundation is still preserved. Everyone in Dorchester County should be thankful that we have Harriet's story and thousands of people come here for that reason.

Department/Division Head Reports

10. Quarterly Report – CPD. PowerPoint Presentation from Chief of Police Justin Todd

Highlights include:

- ShotSpotter has made a huge difference in crime prevention involving gun violence.
- Juvenile Curfew continues to have a positive effect.
- Homicides and violent crimes are down.
- Robberies are down.
- Walmart, and other big box stores are taking care of their shop lifting issues after assistance and education from the police department.
- There is a policeman at Maces Lane MS and at Dorchester South high school.
- Always encourage "ride alongs" by Commissioners to witness what we do on a regular basis.

City Manager Comments

11. Administrative Report from City Manager Glenn Steckman from January 24, 2025

- Will be bringing department reports to you, a couple of reports a month instead of all reports quarterly. Departments wrapping up on year-end reports now, just so you know.

Commissioners' Comments

Brett Summers, Ward 1: No comments

Shay Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2: Thank you for bearing with me and all my questions tonight.

Sputty Cephas, Ward 4: Losing Jeff Hurley, who was a past Fire Chief and a friend, recently, was a big loss. We will keep him in our thoughts.

Brian Roche, Ward 5: Respectful mention of the loss of Jeff Hurley.

Lajan Cephas, Mayor: Respectful mention of the loss of Jeff Hurley.

Closed Session

12. Motion to hold a closed Session pursuant to Md. Code Ann §3-305(b)(1); to discuss personnel matters affecting specific individuals over whom the City Council has jurisdictions, § 3-305(b)(3), specifically, to discuss the acquisition of real property for a public purpose and matters directly related thereto.

- Sputty Cephas asked to talk about litigation during the closed session.

Motion raised to go into closed session and seconded. Commissioners vote is 4-0.

Reconvene in Open Session

- Mayor Cephas and Sputty Cephas recused themselves from discussion in part of the closed session.

Motion raised to adjourn and seconded. Commissioners vote is 4-0.

Adjourn 10:00 PM

Notes taken by A. Kennedy, CAN Member