Unofficial CAN Notes for City Council Meeting

City Commission Meeting Monday, April 28, 2025 6:00 PM

Agenda Mayor to Convene Commission in Regular Session

Mayor present, All Ward Commissioners present

***Agenda***

1. Mayor and Commission to approve or amend agenda as presented.

Council Action

*Motion to amend agenda to add discussion of city budget was raised and seconded. Commissioners voted 5-0.*

*Motion raised and approved to limit Public Comment to 2 minutes. Commissioners voted 4-1. (Ward 1 voted no).*

***Presentations from the Approved Guests***

2. Owen Bailey, Director of Land Use and Policy for Eastern Shore Land Conservancy Presentation Topic: Urban 3 Tax Analysis Presentation, Tax Value Per Acre

* Focus on farmers and efficiency of measuring productive acres of land.
* Walmart was used as an example. Most of the land Walmart owns is parking lot which has no value \*producing properties. Low profitability.
* Value divided by acre. $200,000/acre for single home.
* Apartment buildings have big parking lots that are not productive.
* Commercial box stores - the big parking lots dilute value.
* Gave comparatives over the Eastern Shore.
* Monte Carlo is most valuable land on Eastern Shore.
* Second is downtown Salisbury.
* 163,000 acres have been developed on the Eastern Shore at half the value. That is far less than we need to thrive.
* What will sea level rise do to land value?
* Less infrastructure if we develop how we did up to 1952.
* We must be focused and deliberate in how we develop our land going forward because of sea level rise.

1. Derrick Craig, Governmental Relations Manager for Chesapeake Utilities.

* This business started on the Eastern Shore in Dover, DE. Business has been around for 160 years.
* Provide natural gas and propane to MD, DE, OH, PA and VA.
* Provides food insecure services to communities and hurricane support.
* Scholarships are given out to employees’ children annually.
* Wants to continue to be environmentally friendly.
* Cambridge MD is very important to the Eastern Shore and to our company.
* Ships natural gas and propane overseas. Provides renewable natural gas and propane (chicken litter, manure, landfill). There is a facility in MD that is doing that now.
* One of the cleanest energies available.
* The vapor from natural gas is an emission we capture and is efficient, odorless and tasteless. Cleaner than burning wood.
* The “rotten egg” smell is put into the natural gas because it is odorless. It is important to know when there is a leak.
* Propane and natural gas can be a solid, liquid or vapor; has to be controlled with safety measures. Propane will replace oxygen in the room so it must be controlled.
* Getting into solar in their Florida territory. Looking for other alternative fuels to heat homes other than natural gas.
* I am here today to share with you what Chesapeake does for the community and we are expanding. We are well established.

***Consent Agenda*** (for more details, see Agenda packet for 4/28 city council on city webite.)

4. Jason Chance, TCR Event Management, will hold the following events:

a. Six Pillars Century Bike Ride on Saturday May 10, 2025, from 6am-3pm at Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh.

b. Cambridge Crab Run on Sunday May 11, 2025, from 7am-12pm at Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh.

5. Allen Nelson will hold the following events:

a. Cambridge Classic Powerboat Regatta from Friday May 16, 2025, to Sunday May 18, 2025, from 5pm-9pm on May 16th and 10am-6pm on May 17th and 18th at Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh.

b. Thunder on the Choptank , Saturday July 19, 2025, and Sunday July 20, 2025, from 10am-6pm at Gerry Boyle Park at Great Marsh.

6. Lisa Peters, Food Service Manager for Dorchester County Public Schools will hold “Summer Meal Handout for Students” on Tuesday’s only, from 12:30pm-1pm on June 24, 2025, through August 19, 2025, in City parking lot on Race Street.

7. Appointment to the Mid-Shore Regional Council, Mayor Lajan Cephas

Council Action

*Motion to accept Consent Agenda was approved and seconded. Commissioners voted 5-0.*

***Ordinances for First Reading*** - none

***Ordinances for Second Reading***

8. ORDINANCE NO. 1245 AN ORDINANCE OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND FOR THE PURPOSES OF APPROVING THE PURCHASE OF ALL THAT REAL PROPERTY SHOWN AS LOT 1 ON A SUBDIVISION PLAT RECORDED AMONG THE PLAT RECORDS OF DORCHESTER COUNTY AT LIBER A.J.C. NO. 70, FOLIO 107, CONSISTING OF 1± ACRE OF LAND, BEING A PORTION OF THAT REAL PROPERTY LOCATED AT 201 MILL STREET, SHOWN ON TAX MAP 301, GRID 10 AS PARCEL 124, HAVING TAX IDENTIFICATION NO. 07-173814, AND DESCRIBED IN A DEED RECORDED AMONG THE LAND RECORDS OF DORCHESTER COUNTY AT LIBER A.J.C. NO. 1727, FOLIO 405, FOR THE SUM OF $177,500; AND AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR AND THE CITY MANAGER, OR SUCH OTHER CITY OFFICIALS AS MAY BE APPROPRIATE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, TO EXECUTE ALL DOCUMENTS AND TAKE ANY AND ALL OTHER ACTION NECESSARY TO EFFECTUATE THE FOREGOING PURCHASE; PROVIDING THAT THE TITLE OF THIS ORDINANCE SHALL BE DEEMED A FAIR SUMMARY AND GENERALLY RELATING TO THE PURCHASE OF REAL PROPERTY IN THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

a. Second Reading – Read by Patrick Thomas, City Attorney

b. Council Agenda Report from City Engineer Carl “Bucky” Jackson, P.E. dated March 20, 2025

Presented previously.

On February 10, 2025, Mr. Jackson presented to the City Council the background leading up to the purchase of this property. To summarize, the City has received appraisals averaging $177,500 to purchase a 1.0 acre vacant lot directly behind the old Academy School at 201 Mill St. The City also received a grant from DNR in the amount of $183,000 for the purchase and closing costs. The City intends to use the property to design and construct a stormwater management area and public open space, regrading the site to capture stormwater. Initially, the City secured $98,000 in grant funding to design the Nature Way, stormwater retention areas, and a concept plan for managing runoff leaving the site. *However, implementing the off-site stormwater management portion required access agreements from affected homeowners.* Since not all homeowners agreed, that portion of the grant was removed, reducing the funding to $70,100 for designing only the Nature Way and on-site stormwater management. While not required, managing downstream runoff would have helped alleviate stormwater (non-tidal) flooding issues affecting some properties near the Choptank Avenue and Water Street intersection. Upon completion of the design of the Nature Way and stormwater retention areas, the City plans to submit for grant funds through Maryland DNR, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Trust, and other organizations. An estimate for the construction project has not yet been calculated. On May 10, 2024, the City received a letter that the full $183,000 DNR grant will be awarded to the City. After going through the State clearinghouse and the board of Public Works, we received the formal award on September 13, 2024. Mr. Davis then recorded a subdivision on December 5, 2024, which legally separated the 1-acre parcel from the 0.86 remaining area containing the old Academy School. There are no structures on the property.

*Motion to open a public hearing was approved and seconded. Commissioners voted 5-0.*

c. Public Hearing

*No comments or questions from the public*

*Motion to close a public hearing was approved and seconded. Commissioners voted 5-0.*

Council Action

*Motion to approve the Ordinance 1245 and seconded.*

Discussion

B. Summers, Ward 1 – I am in favor of this ordinance and seeing the Mill Street School renovated. There will be a small park behind the renovated building that will be part of the Nature Way and handling run off storm water. Mr Davis. who owns the property. has said he is going to renovate the school. I will be closely monitoring this project to watch its progress.

F. Stout, Ward 3 – Question to Mr. Jackson. How long will design and construction take? Answer: Will take at least a year.

B. Roche, Ward 5: We are taking a very positive step in dealing with our storm water run off in a natural way. I am pleased with this ordinance and the city purchase of the land for Nature Way.

Council Action

*Commissioners voted yes on the motion raised for Ordinance 1245. 5-0.*

***Old Business*** – none

***New Business***

9. RESOLUTION NO. 25-08 A RESOLUTION OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND REQUESTING THE STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION TO CONSTRUCT A ROUNDABOUT AT THE INTERSECTION OF MARYLAND ROUTE 16 AND STONE BOUNDARY ROAD INSTEAD OF INSTALLING TRAFFIC SIGNALS.

a. Commissioner B rian Roche – wants to preserve the scenic quality of the roadway. Roundabout is safer than traffic light.

Council Action

*Motion raised to approve roundabout of Route 16 and Stone Boundary and seconded.*

*Discussion*

Brett Summers, Ward 1 – in favor of roundabout

Shay Lewis-Cisco, Ward 2 - in favor of roundabout

Frank Stout, Ward 3 – in favor of roundabout

President Sputty Cephas, Ward 4 - has gotten a lot of calls about this intersection. We are not in charge but we are doing our best to persuade state highway officials.

Council Action

*All ward commissioners voted yes for the roundabout to be installed at MD Rte 16 and Stone Boundary Rd, 5-0.*

10. RESOLUTION NO. 25-09 A RESOLUTION OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND REQUESTING THE COUNTY COUNCIL OF DORCHESTER COUNTY TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT AN ANNUAL TAX DIFFERENTIAL OR REBATE MODEL TO EQUITABLY ADDRESS THE COUNTY’S REAL PROPERTY TAX BURDEN UPON OWNERS OF REAL PROPERTY IN THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

a. Mayor Lajan Cephas and Commissioner Brian Roche

The county council proposed ending the differential as part of its efforts to come up with revenue for its fiscal 2026 budget.

The city council introduced a resolution at Monday night’s meeting asking the Dorchester County Council to “fairly address the county’s real estate tax burden on owners of property in the city of Cambridge.”

Dorchester County commissioners introduced their proposed budget last Tuesday. Among other things, it abolishes the tax differential which Cambridge and Hurlock property owners have always been afforded. The removal of the tax differential would mean the property owners are essentially being taxed twice. Cambridge and Hurlock property owners pay for an abundance of services through city taxes levied on them.

Eliminating the tax differential means city residents would pay in full for county services that they never get.

Mayor Lajan Cephas pointed out that the city of Cambridge only represents 2% of the land in Dorchester County but Cambridge property owners provide 33% of the revenue to Dorchester County.

If the abolishment of the tax differential prevails, the Dorchester County tax will go up 11.15% for Cambridge property owners. Hurlock property holders will pay 12% more on their county tax bill. Meanwhile, unincorporated areas of Dorchester County, such as Algonquin, will only pay 3% more to the county.

The ordinance that the city commissioners proposed on Monday night, acknowledges what Cambridge and Hurlock save Dorchester County by providing and paying for city services through their own taxes.

Council Action

*Motion to adopt resolution 25-09 concerning the development and implementation of an annual tax differential was approved and seconded.*

Discussion

Brian Roche, Ward 5 commissioner, said that the abolishment of the tax differential is fundamentally the biggest issue that Cambridge faces. Cambridge and Hurlock property holders are prepared to pay an increase in county taxes but want back what they have already paid, he said. Roche said that removing the tax rebate sends a message that it is arbitrary and discourages people from purchasing a home or setting up a business in the city.

Brett Summers, Ward 1 commissioner, suggested the city hire a consultant to figure out the best taxes for the city to pay. He said that it is a disincentive to take away the tax rebate for city resident property owners.

City Manager Glenn Steckman suggested that it was appropriate for Mayor Lajan Cephas to speak to the county at their proposed budget hearing on Tuesday, May 6.

Council Action

*Motion on the table about Resolution 25-09 voted on. All commissioners voted for it, 5-0.*

*Motion raised and approved to have Mayor Lajan Cephas speak with the County Council at their Proposed Budget first hearing on Tuesday, May 6. All commissioners voted for it, 5-0.*

11. Request for Permission to hold Sidewalk Chalk Coloring Contest, Cambridge Yacht Basin

a. Council Agenda Report from Dockmaster, Scott Fitzhugh

Council Action

*Motion raised to approve chalk coloring contest and seconded. Commissioners voted 5-0.*

12. 2nd Saturdays

a. Executive Director of Main Street, Christina Wingate-Spence

* Second Saturdays used to be a top profitable event for the businesses in downtown.
* Talked to city manager and asst city manager.
* Has been a goal for the last 10 months, since Ms. Wingate-Spence became director, to listen to business owners. Business owners wanted to resurrect Second Saturdays – profitable for them.
* Merchant meetings are held and street closures were presented. Communication goes out to all merchants about what was decided.
* Have talked about collaborating with Groove City and Pine Street merchants.
* Participated in meetings that were conducted by Department of Tourism. Pine Street merchants are included in those meetings. This also includes business owners from the Hispanic community.
* Has made it part of her job to educate the public that Main Street does not end at Poplar and Race. Should extend to other corridors.

Discussion

S. Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2 – Wants to be sure that business owners that are part of MainStreet are heard and acknowledged. Are all merchants invited to these meetings? Answer: Yes. Publicized and communicated. Offered at times that the merchants are available.

S. Cephas, President and Ward 4 – Has heard from many merchants in the Pine Street area that they have not been visited by the Main Street Organization. Emails and letters are only one form of communication. Main Street Organization officials must go to these merchants on Pine St. that are part of Main Street. Their concerns and ideas must be heard.

B. Roche, Ward 5- appreciate the work you are doing. He knows that the “Maple Street District” (Pine Street)

Brett Summers, Ward 1 – on the board of Main Street. Sold out tickets on Spring Fling. Big advocate for Second Saturdays and paid for bands that will be playing on Second Saturdays.

Talking to Pine Street about having events in other areas like High St. Additional businesses have been participating recently.

Groove City is a non profit that is located in the Main Street district. Main Street organization has reached out to partner with them.

Mayor Cephas – Have you thought about asking for a noise variance, not just for the Race and Poplar corridor that is closed off, but the whole shopping district? Would you support a merchant on Cedar having a celebration on Second Saturday on Cedar Street? Answer: Yes, we would support that.

S. Cephas, President and Ward 4 – so does Main Street insurance cover all the business in the Main Street District

S. Lewis-Sisco, Ward 2 – What is the protocol of the city to approve any public gathering on Second Saturday.

Brendan Hesson – All depts need to be aware of events – Fire, CPD noise variance, street closures. Needs are gone over and made ready for these public gatherings.

Council Action

*Motion amended to approve Second Saturday events as proposed by Main Street and includes any business who would like to celebrate (off the main Poplar/Race) in Main Street District amended to include noise variance throughout the city from May – October 2025 and seconded. Vote 5-0.*

13. CWDI Update

a. Gaver Nichols and Natalie Chabot, City Board Representatives

* Gaver and Tim Crosby have been working with Planning Commission.
* Wants open space/green space on waterfront to be trash -free space. Will get out signage.
* Tough finances. Looking at available grants. There will be a combined meeting for city council and county council to update them on progress in May.
* Interviews next Monday on city appointment vacancy.
* Promenade federal funding came through (EPA grant). Was paying the contractor upfront and then getting reimbursed.
* Hotel - Design consultants told the board that they can do better than the hotel developer onboard.
* RFP will be sent out to find a broker to find developer by the end of the year.
* CWDI is meeting with city staff from different groups every other week.
* Natalie - Wants assurance from the city that CWDI is in compliance with the transfer agreement. City and County managers have met with CWDI and have been supportive and helpful.

Questions

B. Roche, Ward 5 – Promenade is coming along and happy to see that.

S. Cephas, President and Ward 4 – Stated that he is against YMCA going to the waterfront. I want it welcoming to all Cambridge.

F. Stout, Ward 3 – Likes the new board make up.

S. Lewis-Cisco, Ward 2 – Glad you are meeting more often and at the city chamber, Streaming service of meetings,

B. Summers, Ward 1 - Thanks for coming. If there are design issues with the hotel developer, we should be meeting with him to work through these issues. Hotel developer and planning architect want a sustainable hotel – Hotel developer should have the attitude that you will give him your ideas and he will build it for you. CWDI should give him a chance to produce a suitable design. City manager said it will take time.

14. Review of the 2025 Legislative Session

a. Paul Ellington, City Lobbyist

* Energy regulations are going to be coming down from the state.
* We still have to use natural gas.
* We cannot solve energy needs with just solar and wind.
* Praised Delegate Sample-Hughes for standing up for Dorchester constituents and standing up to her peers.
* Business in Cambridge and wants to expand presence.
* Same program done in other places would like to have the same thing here.
* Rural Maryland Alliance is worthwhile. Can help with federal and state levels. Can find other municipalities to partner with.
* A lot of energy bills coming down and we can help you with the mandates.
* There could be another legislative session in the fall.
* Can help to find money for energy mandates. Listed some of the things coming down the pike.

Meetings (All posted on city website)

Council Action

*Motion raised to approve all meetings and seconded. Commissioners voted yes, 5-0.*

Public Comment

Resident from Dorchester County feels that scooters need to be regulated. He has been involved in a few near accidents in Cambridge with scooters. He belongs to the Lions’ Club and talked about partnering with the police department tody to trin the young people in using scooters safely. Thanked by the Mayor.

City Manager Comments

15. Administrative Report from City Manager Glenn Steckman from April 25, 2025

* Banners will be placed through the city for a coordinated look.
* Transitional Budget from ARPA funds to general fund. Every commissioner got a copy of proposed budget at this meeting.
* Grants are uncertain at this time.
* The city is very stable with projected $8.4m in general fund which is far more than the county has.
* Finance dept sent out requests on personnel needs and financial needs to all dept heads. Meetings with every dept for possible savings or needed funds. Budgeting for $2.1m for 2026.
* Increasing salaries in CPD.
* 3% raise to city staff positions. None to city manager.
* 4 new positions in city government – Housing advisor (tenant advocate), GIS tech expert, public information officer. Code officer.
* Money allotted for study to improve water and sewer. Want to plan funds for needs.
* Highlights - Money set aside for non profits, internships, comprehensive fund, Hyatt Bridge, Cannery Way, CWDI, studies for new infrastructure for sewer system, upgrades for marina, dump trucks for city use (need 4, bring in 1 a year for $60k).
* Have to have another goal setting session. Needs about 3 hours for that.
* City will have to seriously consider borrowing for a bond issuance for $1.5m HVAC system for public safety building.
* City will have to seriously consider borrowing for a bond issuance for $8m for renovations on city hall. Grants will not be available.

Mayor and Commissioners’ Comments

B. Summers, Ward 1 – Excited about the landscaping in the city and the County Council Building being landscaped. Wanted to remember Phil Rice who just passed away and condolences to his family. Phil was a councilman for 12 years. Saw the Lacrosse game between Dorchester County and Queen Ann County on Saturday. Went to boys basketball game on Saturday afternoon. They deserve praise and support. Main Street Spring Fling Saturday night so good day all around.

S. Lewis-Sisco, 2 - Thank-you to the Health Dept that sponsored clean up on Greenwood Ave. Thank you to all that came out to volunteer. I will be sharing some ideas from the meeting I attended, National League of Cities – will meet with city mgr. We will talk to see how we can partner with them.Congratulations to Officer Jenkins at Maces Lane MS named employee of the year.

F. Stout, Ward 3 – Attended the most recent HPC meeting. I appreciate what they do. Congratulations to the Boys’ high school basketball team. Mr. Stout and his father followed LeBron James’ rise to basketball star from high school basketball games in Ohio.

S. Cephas, President and Ward 4 – Great event for the boys on the basketball team which I attended.

B. Roche, Ward 5 – Praised S. Lewis-Sisco for putting the community first. Tried to plant trees at the Richardson Maritime Museum. Could not get a shovel in the ground because solid oyster shells. Will have to find another place for the trees.

16. Seeking Volunteers for the Police Advisory Board and Mayor’s Committee of Accessibility

Mayor said that the city is actively looking for volunteers for the Police Advisory Board and the Mayor’s Committee of Accessibility.

17. **Closed Session**

Council Action

*Motion to hold a closed Session raised and approved. All commissioners voted yes, 5-0*

Adjourn 9:03 PM

*Notes taken by A. Kennedy, CAN member*