

City of Cambridge

Department of Public Works
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Public Hearing Minutes February 16, 2021

The City of Cambridge Planning and Zoning, Historic Preservation, and Housing Division held a public hearing for the City of Cambridge at 4:30pm on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 via video conference and/or phone. **Pat Escher**, Division Manager; **Dale Price**, IT Manager; and **Jeannie Bellina**, Housing Specialist, were the only full-time City staff present at the Council Chambers at 305 Gay Street, Cambridge, Maryland. Cambridge City **Mayor Andrew Bradshaw** was also present. Others in attendance are noted below:

Staff and/or representatives:

Patrick Comiskey – Cambridge City Manager
Jameson Harrington – Cambridge Council Commissioner – Ward 3
Chad Malkus – Cambridge Council Commissioner – Ward 5
Carol Richardson – Cambridge Director of Economic Development
Brian Roche – Cambridge Council Commissioner – Ward 1

Representative of grant sub-recipient Habitat Choptank:

Rhodana Fields – Neighborhood Revitalization Manager

Members of public:

Jermaine Anderson – Alpha Genesis DC
Lance Cephas
Adrian Holmes – Alpha Genesis DC
Sheila Jones – Jones Mini-Mart
Greg Meekins
Angela Pinder
Sharon Smith
Veronica Taylor
Lynette Wongus
Carol Richardson – Director of Economic Development, City of Cambridge - acting as a 3rd Ward Resident

Housing Specialist Jeannie Bellina started the public hearing at 4:30pm.

Business

- ***Grant Submission:*** City of Cambridge (“City”) staff submitted two (2) Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) grants on January 22, 2021 to the State of Maryland’s Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) (“State”): \$540,000 for Pine Street neighborhood revitalization (Phase 2) and \$260,000 for an ADA accessible elevator for old City Hall, a public building, to become compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Both grants totaled \$800,000.
- ***History of CDBG Grant Phase 1 back in 2017-2018:*** The City originally requested \$200,000 for a home repair program, which Habitat Choptank as its grant sub-recipient, would have completed. Due to its good working relationship with the City and the City’s competence in past planning and administrative matters, the State increased this requested grant funding to \$500,000. Additionally, there were some funds remaining (~\$147,953) from another grant on Route 50, that was diverted to the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization. This then increased the original ask from \$200,000 to \$647,953. State funding, combined with other funding sources, came to an overall total contribution for the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization of ~\$1.2 million. Here is a breakdown of CDBG Phase 1 funding sources:
 - State DHCD: \$647,953
 - Habitat Choptank: \$460,800
 - City of Cambridge: \$150,037 (\$20,000 in-kind project administration by City)
 - Maryland Energy Administration (via Habitat Choptank): \$25,000
 - **TOTAL FUNDING: \$1,283,790**
- ***\$500,000 Grant Funding discussed in Fall 2020:*** With respect to the current grant cycle for the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization, City and Habitat Choptank staff as well as the State representative discussed the amount of the grant based on the staffing and resources capacity of our non-profit grant sub-recipient Habitat Choptank within the grant’s limited timeframe of two (2) years. This \$500,000 amount was confirmed by Council Commissioner Spuffy Cephas and Mayor Andrew Bradshaw, both who had direct conversations with our State DHCD representative. Since the second grant application for the ADA accessible elevator was for \$260,000, an additional \$40,000 was added to the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization grant...thus the \$540,000 total grant funding requested for CDBG Phase 2.
- ***Grant Funding allowed for:*** According to the State training workshop materials, CDBG grant funding can be used for the following due to the Uniform Relocation Act:
 - Acquisition, rehabilitation, or demolition of real property for federally funded projects
 - Rehabilitation or renovation for conversion of existing property, different use, and causing displacement (City has signed an Anti-Displacement Plan)
 - Creation of permanent easements and
 - Applies regardless of funding source.
 - In addition, applicants (City) can submit on behalf of non-profit organizations, which Habitat Choptank is our non-profit grant sub-recipient in this neighborhood revitalization process.
 - CDBG funds can be used for slum and blight areas. For activities that would eliminate slum and blighted conditions in an entire area:
 - Local government must officially designate area as blighted;

- Must meet state or local law definition of slum, blighted, deteriorated, or deteriorating area; and
 - Must have substantial number of deteriorated buildings.
 - NOTE: The City's Pine Street neighborhood qualifies for funding due to the City's definition of blight.
- ***Ineligible Grant Activities include:***
 - Improvements to buildings (***ADA exception***) used for general conduct of government/city halls, administration buildings, police stations, political activities, furnishings, maintenance/repair of public facilities/works State chooses not to fund
 - State chooses not to fund:
 - Fire stations and related community spaces
 - Police sub-stations
 - Libraries
 - No general administration; and
 - No indirect costs.
 - As a result of the ***ADA exception*** (noted above), the ADA accessible elevator for the old City Hall is an allowable grant activity for CDBG funding.
- ***Public Hearing Notices:*** As set forth by the State guidelines and in concert with the City's attorney, public hearing notices met its requirements for a 5-day minimum posting in the newspapers for public view, indicated below with asterisks (*). In addition, the following communication means were used to advertise these two public hearings:
 - **January 20 Public Hearing**
 - City of Cambridge website – January 12
 - City of Cambridge Facebook page – unsure of date posted, but draft grant application shared over 800 times
 - *Dorchester Star newspaper – posted January 14
 - Large e-mail distribution list (85 people) – January 12, 14, and 20
 - Pine Street Facebook page (2,475 Friends) – January 12 (twice), January 13 (twice), January 14 (3 times), January 15 (twice), January 18 (once), January 19 (twice), and January 20 (date of actual public hearing - 6 times)

TOTAL POSTINGS: 24 times (NOTE: Earliest posting was on January 12, up to and including the date of the actual public hearing)
 - **February 16 Public Hearing**
 - City of Cambridge website – February 8
 - City of Cambridge Facebook page – unsure of dates posted
 - *Star Democrat newspaper – February 10
 - Large e-mail distribution list (100 people) – February 8, 10, 12, and 16
 - Pine Street Facebook page (2,677 Friends) – February 5 (once), February 6 (once), February 7 (3 times), February 8 (twice), February 9 (3 times), February 10 (3 times), February 11 (2 times), February 13 (4 times), February 14 (3 times), February 15 (4 times), and February 16 (3 times)

TOTAL POSTINGS: 36 times (NOTE: Earliest posting was on February 5, up to and including the date of the actual public hearing)

- ***CDBG Phase 1 and Phase 2 Comparisons:***

<u>CDBG Grants</u>	<u>Phase 1</u> (Housing activities that occurred between 1/1/2020-12/31/2020, with most occurring between 7/1/2020-12/31/2020)	<u>Phase 2</u> (<i>If granted</i>)
Funding	\$647,953	\$540,000
Acquisitions	19 NOTE: 14 City-acquired and 5 Habitat-acquired properties	8 NOTE: Based on County land availability and prices
Demolitions	6	4 NOTE: Demolitions cost more due to increased costs/contractor bids
Newly constructed homes (home mortgages are based on 30% of gross income)	3 NOTE: 1 homeowner has moved in, while 2 qualified homeowners are awaiting final home construction	1 NOTE: Home construction being funded by Habitat as a demonstrated match to grant funding
Owner-occupied home repairs (for extremely low-income (up to 30% area median income (AMI)) to moderate low-income (50-80% AMI) homeowners)	5 NOTE: 2 have been completed; 3 in process pending additional funding and/or required documentation	6
Rehabilitated homes (must meet income-qualifying requirements via documentation)	1 NOTE: Rehab scheduled to start in February/March	1

- ***Habitat Home Repair Work:*** As noted from the January 20 public hearing, Rhodana Fields of Habitat Choptank indicated that owner-occupied home repairs have included: weatherization, roof, structure, plumbing, HVAC, drywall patches, energy efficient appliances and/or windows. If you wish to apply to have your home repaired and you meet low- to moderate-income qualifications, please contact Rhodana Fields at rfields@habitchoptank.org, and copy Jeannie Bellina at jbellina@choosecambridge.com on that same e-mail.

- **City’s Prioritization of Pine Street Neighborhood Revitalization:** Per the housing study and Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (“Plan”), **the City has and continues to make the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization a high priority** through various funding sources for a **total of \$2,403,790**.
 - **Total funding received to date: \$1,358,790**
 - CDBG Phase 1 (housing-related activities): \$1,283,790
 - Community Legacy Phase 1 (streetscape improvements on Pine Street, e.g. acorn streetlights, ADA ramps, and sidewalk repairs/replacements): \$70,000
 - NOTE: \$75,000 was granted, but ~\$5,000 remaining balance was used to support Mr. Beasley’s small business
 - **Total funding awaiting award notifications if granted (dates indicated): \$1,045,000**
 - CDBG Phase 2 (in chart above) with notification by end of March: \$540,000
 - Cornish Park (recreational amenity improvements): \$400,000
 - Community Legacy Phase 2 (same streetscape improvements, but second phase from Cedar to Muir Street) with notification by end of March: \$100,000
 - Keep Maryland Beautiful (Empowerment Center landscaping, e.g. re-mulching and native plants, bird fountain, and steppingstones) by March 20: \$5,000
 - NOTE: Initially at the February 16 public hearing, a figure of \$2,398,790 was stated. This amount didn’t include the \$5,000 for Mr. Beasley, whose business is within the Pine Street neighborhood and thus is part of economic development.
- **Additional CDBG Funding in Spring:** The State’s normal funding cycle for CDBG grants usually start in the Spring, but due to COVID in 2020, the grant application and submission dates were delayed. The City has been informed that there will be additional CDBG funding in Spring 2021, for which the City may apply for additional funding for the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization. If you know of any Pine Street neighborhood properties that are blighted within and/or near the triangular intersections of Washington, High, and Pine Streets and would like to see demolished (if feasible due to any number of factors), please e-mail Jeannie Bellina at jbellina@chooscambridge.com.
- **Street, Sidewalk, and Lighting Infrastructure:** CDBG grants provides funding for street, sidewalk and/or lighting infrastructure; however, before grant funding is submitted and/or approved by the State, residents must complete an income survey. This requires a 90-95% response rate from residents on the income survey, including financial disclosure information. Collected data must indicate that at least 51% of residents must be low- to moderate-income. If these stats are not met, then the City cannot seek this grant funding. Due to the difficulty of in-person interaction during COVID and the short timeframe between the CDBG Grant Phase 2 application and submission dates, it was too short of a timeframe for City staff to complete due to its 2-person Planning Department. Other means must be used to ensure resident income survey data collection for those whose streets need improvements, e.g. sidewalk additions and/or extensions.
- **Small Area Plan:** Due to current limited staffing levels, it has been decided that the City will seek grant funds to hire a Consultant to progress the Small Area Plan (“SAP”) forward. This person will be funded via a grant. City and Habitat staff, alongside this Consultant (once hired), look forward to active and positive involvement from the Pine Street neighborhood

residents and partners. This SAP will include many different aspects of the Plan, including but not limited to housing, as it is a land use plan that will enable community members to create their vision for the neighborhood.

- **Quality Affordable Rental Housing Units:** While multi-unit quality affordable rental housing units has not been the vision recommended by residents during any prior Community Vision Sessions for the Plan, apparently there have been some recent statements made by residents about having this housing type in the Pine Street neighborhood. If this is in fact the desire of the majority of the residents, then Jeannie will research grant funding through various funding sources.
- **Resident Concerns:**
 - **Economic development should be part of neighborhood revitalization process.** Economic development has always been part of the City's neighborhood revitalization process. However, the City is only in the beginning stages of the urban re-design phase of the Pine Street neighborhood. Blighted homes have been and will continue to be demolished. Once more open green spaces become available, residents can more easily determine which locations would best be served with commercial, residential, senior housing, recreational, community services, etc. land uses.
 - **Landlords are not taking care of their housing units, thus these are not giving a pleasing aesthetic appearance in attracting new residents to the Pine Street neighborhood.** Jeannie is working with the City attorney in finalizing a vacant property receivership ordinance. In addition, she will seek additional funding sources to address this concern. Code enforcement is still being done by its respective City department, and this is the primary mechanism in which this issue is addressed.
 - **Streetscape improvements on Pine Street.** The City is currently awaiting any award/grant notification on the Community Legacy grant Phase 2. Award notifications on this grant have been delayed from its original November/December timeframe now until the end of March.
 - **Residents were concerned that the Small Area Plan ("SAP") process is just more surveying, and that the Pine Street neighborhood has been surveyed and studied extensively.** It is important to residents that all the years of previous studies be incorporated into the creation of the SAP. The SAP is actually an action step. It will identify the zoning changes that need to be made to specify what residents want to see in their community. Areas will be zoned for commercial; entertainment; recreational; and/or single family, multi-family, or senior housing construction, etc. based on the community's feedback. It is important for residents to weigh in on the types of development they do/do not want to see in their neighborhood.
 - **Restoring commercial activity and vibrancy to the Pine Street community is important to make the neighborhood a place that is desirable to live and spend time.** The building next to the Elks has historically been a center for entertainment, and it would be nice to see that space become active once again. Again, this will be up to the majority of residents to decide what to do with this building, based on the SAP.
- **507 Race Street:** Some community members believe that funding was diverted from the Pine Street revitalization for Race Street. To clarify matters, the State has been working with the City on many projects. The State had provided the City with an additional \$380,000 for those projects, one of which was the reimbursement to the City for the demolition of 507 Race Street with the remaining funds to be used for the acquisition of properties in the Pine Street

neighborhood. Below is a DHCD portal screenshot of the project description, which relays the fact that this grant funding was in fact for both the 507 Race Street property as well as the neighborhood revitalization process *from its original get-go*.

EXHIBIT A - SRP-SDF-2020-Cambridge-00662
PROJECT DESCRIPTION, SCOPE OF WORK, AND SPECIAL CONDITIONS

Project Name:
Pine Street Rehabilitation/Race Street Development

1. Project Description:

For the support of demolition costs associated with 507 Race Street and residential development in the Pine Street community in the City of Cambridge.

2. Project Address(es):

507 Race Street, Cambridge, Maryland Pine Street neighborhood in Cambridge, Maryland, which is located in a Sustainable Community.

3. Scope of the Project:

The funding will be utilized for two purposes: reimburse the City of Cambridge for the demolition costs associated with 507 Race Street and the acquisition of twenty-seven properties for renovation, demolition, and other capital improvements in the Pine Street Community.

4. Project Financing (Evidence and Use of Funding Sources):

The total cost of the program is \$380,000, all of which will come from Community Legacy.

5. Special Conditions:

If this award contains capital funds; all capital funds are to be used strictly for approved capital activities. The disbursement of grant funds requires that the Program be in a designated Sustainable Community at the time the funds are disbursed. Grantee will submit evidence of appropriate site control over the property acceptable to the Program prior to disbursement.

- **Information Clarification:** The City hopes that this information above has clarified some of the misconceptions about the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization process. Now that much of the grant funding for Phase 1 has been expended and/or allocated for the various housing activities during the January 1, 2020-December 31, 2021 timeframe, City staff hopes to keep residents updated at length on a quarterly basis. As quarterly (March 31, June 30, September 30, and December 31) and semi-annual (June 30 and December 31) reports and other grant-related activities (invoice submissions for reimbursements, etc.) are due to update the State on the various housing activities, residents will be informed at length of any updates within 1-2 months after these required report and invoice submissions. Not only would this enable City Planning staff to provide the most accurate information, it also enables enough neighborhood revitalization and/or housing activity to occur for City staff to have any meaningful information to report to residents. Should there be ANY questions or concerns in the future regarding the Pine Street neighborhood revitalization, please feel free to reach out directly to Pat Escher, Division Manager of Planning Department, at pescher@chooscambridge.com and/or Jeannie Bellina, Housing Specialist, at jbellina@chooscambridge.com.

- ***Thank You to Concerned Active Residents:*** Thanks to all our concerned active residents who virtually attended the two public hearings and/or are active in the neighborhood revitalization process in some way. We really appreciate your input, and look forward to moving in a positive direction in making the Pine Street neighborhood representative of your wonderful ideas that are in compliance with the adopted Plan and thus will create a better quality of life for our residents.

Meeting adjourned at 5:30pm.