Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

City Hall 2nd Floor Conference Room
57 N. Liberty Street
Cumberland, MD 21502

Tuesday, February 4, 2025; 4:00 pm

PRESENT: Mayor Raymond M. Morriss; Council Members: Richard Cioni (by telephone), Eugene Frazier, James Furstenberg, Brian Lepley.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey F. Silka, City Administrator; Allison Layton, City Clerk; Chief Ternent; Captain James Burt; Lt. Alex Menges; Alan Hall & Hartford Duddy, Parking Enforcement with the Police Department; Michael Cohen, City Solicitor

Media: Teresa McMinn, Cumberland Times-News and Hannah Fout, WCBC

I. CITY STAFF INPUT ON BALTIMORE STREET PARKING

Mr. Silka opened the discussion regarding staff affected by the current parking issue and turned it over to Chief Ternent.

Chief Ternent mentioned enforcing 1–2-hour parking limits is challenging but feasible. To enforce them, the officer would walk and keep a log of parked cars, revisit those locations again in 30 minutes, and issue a citation at that time. All issued citations would be enforceable in court. If a customer uses the ParkMobile app, parking officers can track the time through the app as well. Enforcement hours are from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Plans are in place to hire two additional officers, pending the decision of the Council Members.

The accuracy of determining how long a car has been parked was discussed. If an officer uploads a picture of the license plate to the app, it shows when the car was logged. On the other hand, if the officer uses their log, they only have the time they approached the vehicle. Consistent guidelines would make enforcement more efficient on Baltimore, Liberty and Centre Streets.

Mr. Silka shared Melinda Kelleher's feedback, recommending a six-month delay in enforcement and exploring non-app solutions.

Current meter kiosks will be replaced by an app when they are no longer functional. Final evaluations of the parking garages are currently in progress. The new payment options will include License Plate Recognition (LPR), pay stations, and QR code scanning. Since July, we have collected $19,000 through the ParkMobile app and $13,000 from the kiosks, indicating that the app is not deterring people from parking.

A discussion ensued among the Council Members around when implementation would take place based on waiting 6 months or 1 year. A grace period for reducing parking tickets could be problematic for the City, as fines cannot be increased until a ticket is contested. It was agreed by all to install 1-hour parking signs before the tourist season begins, effective 30 days after the order has been signed and the signs are available.

A discussion regarding unloading and loading zones on Liberty, Baltimore, and Centre Streets will take place at a later date.

II. FRIENDS AWARE REIMBURSEMENT DISCUSSION

Mr. Silka updated the Council on an issue regarding Friends Aware and the CDBG funding they received. Friends Aware received $78,000 in federal funding for two projects, which included a generator and the rehabilitation of a water tank. To be recognized as a CDBG-entitled community, the City is required to adhere to specific terms and conditions, including reporting requirements.

Lee Borror, who oversees this program, faced difficulties with Friends Aware from March to August 2024 in obtaining the necessary documents needed for payment of invoices. The CDBG requires proof of Davis-Bacon wages, which was not provided by Friends Aware. Additionally, the contract for disbursing the grant funding expired on August 31, 2024. Efforts continued to secure these documents.

A meeting was held on November 18, 2024, with the Executive Director to address the issue and request the necessary documents, but no results were achieved. On November 19, 2024, Mr. Silka sent a letter advising of the reallocation of funds, and the requested documents were finally submitted to CDBG on December 29, 2024.

The City is under no legal obligation to pay these funds, however, if the Council decides to proceed with the payment, an Order would need to be passed. The concern with making a payment after repeated requests and after the deadline has lapsed is the potential expectation that this leniency would apply to other organizations as well. It was noted that in the last ten years, no other organization has encountered this issue.

Additionally, since the contract has expired, the City would be in violation if the funds were paid, which could lead to an audit.

III. UPDATE FROM RICH RHEINHARDT WITH PERCY PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Rich Reinhardt attended virtually and updated this is week 5 of session and things are progressing quickly with about 66 days remaining.

He provided a breakdown of current bills:

<u>High Level</u>

The General Assembly is currently reviewing over 2,000 pieces of legislation and nearly 1,200 bills in the Senate and House. Key issues this year include the budget and energy, with concerns about data centers, nuclear, and gas energy. The Governor has also introduced an energy package.

The reauthorization bill for the Western Maryland Economic Future Investment (George Edwards Fund) is being discussed. The Governor proposed a $10 million appropriation for this fund, and steps are being taken to protect these funds, including obtaining council approval for budget appropriations.

Budget update:

The budget proposal for FY26 is a $67.3 billion investment distributed across four key principles:

1. Growing the economy
2. Strengthening the Maryland labor force
3. Modernizing state government
4. Reforming the state’s current tax system

These proposals aim to provide a tax break to nearly two-thirds of Maryland residents and reduce the structural deficit from nearly $3 billion to $2.25 billion for fiscal year 2026. Additionally, the proposal allocates new state resources for investments in commercial hubs while maintaining funding for public safety. The structural deficit refers to a projected shortfall of nearly $3 billion, which represents an 11% operating loss. This includes 62% for state Medicaid costs and 27% of state aid to local municipalities, including public schools.

Contributing factors include a cash surplus in late 2022 due to federal pandemic relief. From FY19 to FY23, Maryland's total budget grew by $20 billion—45%, rising from $44 billion to $64 billion. The general fund also increased by 55%, from $18 billion to $28 billion. However, with no significant GDP growth, they are overspending, as general fund revenue grew only 1% in FY24.

Growing the economy:

Proposals involve over $120 million in investments to drive economic activity and retain 2,600 jobs. Key allocations include $10 million for public schools, $400 million for community colleges and childcare scholarships, and a $500 million boost for employment advancement.

Tax reforms could offer nearly two-thirds tax cuts for low-income Maryland residents, lower corporate tax rates, double standard deductions, and eliminate inheritance tax. To balance these cuts, a 15% increase in sports wagering taxes, a 25% increase in table game taxes, and a 15% cannabis tax beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 are proposed.

Positive directing investments for Cumberland:

The Department of Natural Resources has dedicated funding for several projects: $225,000 for improvements to Fairmont Avenue Park, $1 million for Wills Mountain, and $620,000 for capital facility improvements at Frostburg State University. Additionally, there is $57,000 allocated for the Cumberland dry run dam protection system and $2.1 million for addressing sewer overflow issues. Furthermore, a legislative initiative for the Mechanic Street infrastructure project has been proposed with a budget of $350,000.

The George Edwards Fund will expand its program through 2031, committing $10 million annually. The board will include one representative from District 1 and two appointed by the Senate President and House Speaker, with the executive director serving as a non-voting member.

Funding will focus on grants or loans to create jobs and economic opportunities. Proposals must create at least 25 new jobs or 10 jobs with wages at least 150% of the median household income, and they should promote significant population growth in the municipality where the project is located.

He also added a bill that will be introduced SB878 Oil and Natural Gas, hydraulic fracking authorization.

IV. PROJECT UPDATES

Mr. Silka updated on the following projects:

Choose Cumberland Program -, Out of over 1,000 responses, one-third of the recipients met the requirements. Currently, there are six candidates under contract, and they have until July 1, 2025, to complete the closing on a home. Since some applicants were unable to meet the requirements, the applications will be reviewed again to initiate another round of candidate selections.

Rolling Mills – Last month, the final alley closure was completed. Utility relocation and a traffic study for Cecelia Street have been completed, and a meeting with MDOT and traffic consultants will determine approval. Chipotle has received site plan approval from the Planning Commission, but no progress is expected until Spring.

Skatepark – An award of $580,000 was granted two months ago, and a notice to proceed will be issued to the contractor on March 1, 2025. The environmental permitting process went through the commenting period without any public comments, the next step is waiting for the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to approve it.

Teabow Residential – One unit on Arch Street is nearly complete, and work has begun on a second unit. Additionally, a new unit is starting on Pennsylvania Avenue. Permitting will be postponed until the units on Arch and Pennsylvania are completed. We are retooling the agreement for the assisted living facility on Elder Street and hope to renew it by March, setting new timelines for the project.

V. REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC MEETING AGENDA OF FEBRUARY 4, 2025

Mr. Silka updated that Larry Jackson would be presenting on the Business Improvement District (BID) process and how the solicitation was obtained. The

BID will replace the Downtown Development Commission (DDC) and will be providing services, not promotions.

Mr. Silka went through the Orders and briefed on anything noteworthy including Resolution 2025-02 for the disbursement of bond funds and Order 27,646 for the temporary closure of the Queen City Underpass and a few change orders for projects. Remaining items were just housekeeping.

VI. MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL UPDATES

The City celebrated Groundhog Day on Monday February 3, 2025 with Queen City Charlie reporting an early Spring

Mayor Morriss and Eugene Fraizer attended Catholic School Week at Bishop Walsh

Emma Watkins from Souls One celebrated her 90th birthday celebration, Mayor Morriss, Eugene Frazier and Chief Ternent attended the celebration.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 5:56 p.m.
Respectfully Submitted,

Allison K. Layton
City Clerk

Minutes approved on February 18, 2025