



BOARD MEETING: The CAN Board of Directors will meet on **Sunday, March 19th, at 3:00 pm** in the Cambridge / Dorchester County Public Library meeting room, 303 Gay St, Cambridge, MD. **The meeting is open to the public – Everyone interested in CAN is invited to attend.**

LOGO CONTEST: CAN is holding a contest to select a logo for the organization and will award a grand prize of \$5.34 to the winning entry. Entries can be submitted via email at CambridgeCAN@yahoo.com or in person at the Board Meeting on March 19.

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Check out CAN on FaceBook at <https://www.facebook.com/CambridgeAssociationofNeighborhoods/>

Contact CAN at: CambridgeCAN@yahoo.com

COMING MARCH 19 – CAN website at CambridgeCAN.org

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Welcome! We’re off and running. CAN got started in mid-January and we are in the process of putting things together. We have filed all the paperwork for the State and IRS. We have started up a newsletter, website, Facebook page and a community survey system. We are monitoring the Planning and Zoning meetings and looking at identifying problem properties in the neighborhood. We have established several neighborhoods with Block Captains. So things are moving forward but much remains to be done.

We would like to set objectives for the civic association for the coming year. There is a Board meeting on March 19th at 3 pm in the Cambridge Library meeting room. The Board will be discussing a possible community social event this summer, as well as ways to increase the number and diversity of our association neighborhoods. As always, Board meetings are open to the public. In addition, we have partnered with MidShore Riverkeepers to help promote their efforts (see “Operation Clean Stream) on page 3) and are meeting with several other organizations that are doing good things in Cambridge.

So, lots of things happening and we need you to lend a hand and help both with ideas and by volunteering. If you have ideas or suggestions for the CAN Board meeting, please send them to me at:

Ragtime31@gmail.com or CambridgeCAN@yahoo.com

More to come,
Chuck McFadden, President, CAN



CAN's MISSION STATEMENT

The Cambridge Association of Neighborhoods (CAN) fosters neighborhood cohesion and community involvement to (a) enhance the quality of community life for all residents of Cambridge through community events, social activities, and neighborly assistance; and (b) protect and enhance the value of properties in Cambridge by improving building and zoning codes, supporting adherence to those codes, and engaging constructively with City Government, including the Historic Preservation Commission.

CAN engages the Cambridge Community by encouraging the development of self-identified neighborhood "blocks" through which members both (a) address their own neighborhood-specific concerns (e.g., individual neighbors needing assistance/support), and (b) leverage the combined energy and influence of CAN to advance common goals (e.g., zoning standards and enforcement).

CAN is committed to transparency. Timely notification is provided to all CAN members of the Annual membership meeting, special membership meetings, and meetings of the Board of Directors. All meetings of the Board of Directors are open to the entire membership. Meeting minutes are posted to the CAN website in a timely fashion. Financial audits will be conducted annually and posted to the website.

CAN MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

CAN welcomes members from **any and all Cambridge neighborhoods** who are interested in organizing and working together, building a diverse membership reflecting the diversity of Cambridge residents.

Individual Membership. Any person at least 18 years of age residing within or owning property within the city limits of Cambridge is eligible for individual membership in CAN (thus including full time residents, part time residents, property owners, and renters).

Organizational Membership. Any business or other entity located within the city limits of Cambridge that is interested in fostering CAN's goals is eligible for organizational membership.

Dues. Annual membership dues for both individuals and organizations are currently set at \$20. Dues are reviewed annually by the CAN Board of Directors and may be modified based on CAN's financial needs. The Board of Directors also welcomes proposals (e.g., volunteer work) to reduce dues for low-income individuals and non-profit organizations who are interested in membership.

For additional information or to join CAN, please contact: CambridgeCAN@yahoo.com



CAN NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE – BLOCK CAPTAINS NEEDED

The CAN Neighborhood Development Committee encourages the development of **self-identified neighborhood** “blocks” through which members both (a) address their own neighborhood-specific concerns (e.g., individual neighbors needing assistance/support), and (b) leverage the combined energy and influence of CAN to advance common goals (e.g., zoning standards and enforcement).

Neighborhood “blocks” are loosely defined to meet the needs and concerns of each self-identified neighborhood. Although such concerns may vary widely across the city, CAN identifies commonalities to prioritize and take action on shared concerns.

Neighborhood “Block Captains” organize social events and other activities through which people get to know their neighbors and identify problems and concerns. Building neighborhood involvement across the City is considered the key to keeping CAN vibrant and effective.

CAN DESPERATELY NEEDS BLOCK CAPTAINS FROM EVERY CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD. If interested in volunteering, please contact Chuck McFadden at Ragtime31@gmail.com or CambridgeCAN@yahoo.com

MIDSHORE RIVERKEEPER CONSERVANCY (MRC) – Project Clean Stream

The MidShore Riverkeepers are the local organizers for Project Clean Stream, a watershed wide event to improve the health of the Chesapeake and its tributaries. The event is a nice opportunity to clean up our environment and our neighborhood. MidShore Riverkeepers provides support with supplies and removal of bagged garbage.

This year's clean up event will occur on **Saturday, April 1st, 9am-noon**. CAN members have registered cleanup teams for the West End Avenue and Long Wharf Park / Municipal Marina areas. CAN Block Captains or other CAN members who would like to lead a clean up effort in a particular area, or otherwise participate as a volunteer, should contact **Judd Vickers** at judd.vickers@gmail.com AND **Suzanne Sullivan** at suzanne@midshoreriverkeeper.org.

MIDSHORE RIVERKEEPER CONSERVANCY (MRC) – How to Fertilize Responsibly

Everyone can do their part to help keep our rivers clean. One crucial and effective way is to fertilize lawns responsibly. The Maryland Lawn Care Act of 2011 helps prevent excess nutrients from non-agricultural sources from entering our local rivers. The first step to fertilizing responsibly is waiting until fall to fertilize. During these months, lawns are actively growing and can take up nutrients such as nitrogen and



phosphorus. In early spring, lawns are still dormant and over-fertilizing can cause excess nutrients to runoff into our rivers, creating harmful algal blooms. Another consequence is a buildup of salt in the soil causing lawns to dry out and turn brown.

A great way to fertilize responsibly is to consider alternatives for lawns, such as groundcovers. They provide a unique and colorful alternative to a standard green lawn. Some known ground covers include herbal lawns, clover, native grass, and sedges. Some native Maryland ground covers include creeping phlox, juniper, and moss phlox. Additional alternatives to lawns include planting native trees and shrubs or native plant gardens.

If you must fertilize, it is important to understand the best practices for lawn care. It all starts with performing a soil test on your lawn every three years to identify the type and amount of nutrients your lawn requires. These tests are simple and free. Other practices include setting your mower height at 3 inches and not bagging your grass clippings, instead leaving them to break down on the lawn. Decomposed clippings contribute about 25% of a lawn's nitrogen needs for the year—for free.

If you hire lawn care professionals, make sure they are certified with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and that they are aware of any streams, gullies, or other environmental sensitive areas. Also, inspect the property after a lawn care application is finished to ensure that fertilizer has not been applied to sidewalks, driveways, or other impervious surfaces. Lastly, be aware of annual fertilizer blackout dates from November 15 until March 1.

At Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy (MRC), we are dedicated to educating our community about lawn fertilizer use in an effort to reduce and eliminate lawn fertilizer. Last April, MRC launched our first-ever Lawn Fertilizer Awareness Week Campaign, April 1-8, 2016. The goal of this campaign is to partner with other environmental organizations and spread the word about lawn fertilizer use to our followers on social media including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. For more information on how you can reduce lawn fertilizer use, visit our website: <http://www.midshoreriverkeeper.org/how-can-i-reduce-or-eliminate-lawn-fertilizer/> or contact Tasha at keitasha@midshoreriverkeeper.org

Matthew J. Pluta
Choptank Riverkeeper

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION (HPC) UPDATE

The Cambridge Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has experienced a significant change in membership in the last six months. The previous Chairperson's term expired, the Vice Chair moved out of the area, and one member resigned. As a result we have three new members and a new chair and vice chair. The commission is now composed of Ron Berman, Chair; Sharon Smith, Vice Chair; and members Susan Morgan, Herschel Johnson, and George Vojtech.

The commission is embarking on an ambitious improvement plan that centers around three goals:



1. Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of HPC meetings and decisions
2. Increase community involvement and support
3. Protect and improve the historic housing stock in Cambridge.

We expect work on these goals to extend over several years, and hope that subsequent commissions continue working the plan.

On a related note, the City anticipates engaging an experienced preservation consultant to assist with completing the development of new Design Guidelines. The current guidelines are twenty years old and are silent on things such as solar panels, and don't adequately address newer building materials. An attempt was made by an earlier commission to write new guidelines in 2014, but was stalled by resident concerns and staffing changes.

Sharon Smith
HPC Vice-Chair

CAN HOUSING QUALITY COMMITTEE – PLANNING & ZONING MEETING UPDATE

Summary of March 2017 Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting

New Business – Cambridge Market Place Renovations:

Fairchild Properties will close shortly on the former Cambridge Plaza Shopping Center and obtained approval from the Commission to begin Phase I, which will be a direct, nicely landscaped entrance from Route 50 (SHA approval pending) and renovations to the existing retail between Crusader Road and the off track betting facility. All existing retailers will remain, with the exception of the Salvation Army and one other (name not mentioned). A new anchor tenant for this section will be DaVita (expansion of a Kidney Dialysis Center). The old Kmart, Super Fresh and Social Services building will likely be razed over the summer. Phase I targeted for completion in the next several months. Phase II will be resurfacing, a new connector road between Crusader and Woods Roads and construction of tenants on the pad sites, which will reportedly include Chick-fil-A, Starbucks and a new Taco Bell. Phase II targeted for completion with stores opening in 2018. The new grocery store, also part of Phase II, but may come in after the other pad sites. The grocer tenant (currently under negotiations, name not revealed) is the future use for the old Fresh and Greens site. Phase III will be in the rear of the site where the Kmart and Social Service buildings are located.

Public Hearing Items:

Recommendation to rezone 821 & 829 Fieldcrest from Industrial to Institutional Zoning (the jail and 7th Day Adventist facility). It is likely this area should have been zoned Institutional during adoption of the UDC but



was possibly overlooked. This is a preferred option to allowing Medical Treatment Facilities in industrial zones.

Two items related to Solar Energy Systems were the subject of public hearings. The first was to allow for Solar Energy Systems (Solar Farms) in Resource Conservation Districts, with conditions. Some highlights of the proposed conditions: 350 acre city wide limit; 200 foot setback from residentially zoned property; aviation analysis; screening; buffers; setbacks; and a decommissioning plan. The developer was at times contentious over what was a legitimate effort by the Planning Commission and staff to give appropriate consideration to the project while protecting the City and considering future land use demands. The second item was a proposed rezoning of portions of the former “Blackwater” development on the W/S of Egypt Road from residential to Resource Conservation. Both items were deferred to the April meeting. A special committee is working on the details of this matter.

Planning and Zoning Staff Report, March 7, 2017

- I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
P & Z Case No.: P&Z TA # 2017-016
- II. NATURE OF THE REQUEST: (1) Amend Permitted Land Use Table #1 to allow for Solar Energy Systems in the Resource Conservation District, (2) amend Permitted Land Use Table #1 and Table #2 to allow small systems throughout the City (3) amend 4.2.3, adding Section E. and amend Section 4.4.4, adding Section I, to add conditions for a Solar Energy System in the UDC and (4) add definitions for Solar Energy Systems into Section 9.2 of the UDC.
- III. STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff is recommending approval of the proposed amendments to the Unified Development Code.
- IV. BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION: During the recent adoption of the Unified Development Code, there was no mention of alternate energy land uses such as solar, wind or geo-thermal. As the Code is silent to these uses, the City’s position is that they are not permitted. These alternate energy sources need to be reviewed by the City to determine whether or not they are appropriate and if so, where they best located. Each of these systems have their pros and cons. This report will be focusing on the solar panels.

The State of Maryland wants to become more energy independent. Currently the State imports a majority of their power from outside sources. The goal is to have the State become more self-sufficient. To further that goal, in February 2017, Maryland lawmakers voted to enact H.B. 1106, which increases the state's renewable portfolio standard from previous 20% by 2022, to 25% by 2020. Given this objective, local jurisdictions are seeing more and more requests for alternate sources of power, most notably wind and solar.

At the October 4th hearing the Planning Commission had informal discussion with Urban Grid representatives to get feedback on a potential solar farm out on Egypt Road. After discussion with the applicant, staff was directed to work with a small sub group to research solar farms. Staff did two report backs to the Commission in January and February, with direction to proceed with the rezoning of the Egypt Road parcel to Resource Conservation and to amend the UDC to allow solar farms in the City. At the February hearing, the City heard testimony from Steve Dodd, Director of Dorchester Planning and Zoning Department. He gave his insights on solar farms as the County has had several applications for this use.

Concurrently, the applicant has filed an application the Public Service Commission for the Egypt Road Solar Farm. The Power Plant Research Program (PPRP), a division of the Department of Natural Resources, has meet with the City to provide information about the process and the resources available to the City as we go through the process. There will be public meetings in Cambridge on June 1, 2017 and July 10, 2017 regarding this matter.

Staff proposes to:



1. Amend Section 9.2 of the UDC to include the definitions below:

a. **Definitions:**

Solar Energy System (SES) – A system of solar collectors, panels, controls, energy storage devices, heat pumps, heat exchangers, and other materials, hardware or equipment to collect solar radiation and convert it to a useable energy form. Solar energy Systems include thermal and photovoltaic

Solar Energy System (SES), Small – SES that produce less than two hundred kilowatts (200kW) of power and utilizes less than one (1) acre. Small Scale SES include Rooftop Solar Systems of any size.

Solar Energy System (SES), Medium – SES that is engineered and designed to produce at least two hundred kilowatts (200kW) but less than two megawatts (2 MW) of power. Medium SES shall utilize at least fifty (50) acres.

Solar Energy System (SES), Large – SES that is engineered and designed to produce at least two megawatts (2 MW) of power or shall utilize at least one hundred (100) acres.

Kilowatt (kW) – A measure of the use of electrical power equal to 1,000 Watts.

Megawatt (MW) – A measure of the use of electrical power equal to 1,000 kilowatts.

Net Meter – A way of connecting an on-grid Solar Energy System to the utility grid and which measures the flow of electricity to and from the installation. Net metering allows residential and commercial customers who generate their own electricity from solar power to feed electricity they do not use back into the grid.

2. Amend Sections 4.2.3 and 4.4.4 of the UDC to include the requirements and conditions below: Solar Energy Systems

a. **Acreage Limitations:**

The City will have no more than 350 acres dedicated to Solar Energy Systems.

b. **Procedure**

- i. Small Scale SES require a building permit and a planting plan for screening, if ground mounted and visible from City ROW.
- ii. Medium Scale SES require a Category 1 Site Plan, Special Exception, building permit, a landscaping and screening plan and a decommission plan.
- iii. Large Scale SES require a special exception, Category 1 Site Plan, Special Exception, building permit, a landscaping and screening plan and a decommission plan.
- iv. Soils report and percolation tests are required.
- v. Other site specific approvals, such as nontidal wetland permits, forest conservation plans, forest preservation plans, and habitat protection plans are also required.

c. **Siting Requirements**

- i. Rooftop Solar Systems shall not extend more than ten feet (10') above the surface of the roof. Visual analysis shall be required, including but not limited to building sections and site distance evaluations. The total height of the building or structure, including the solar collection devices, shall comply with the height regulations established in this Chapter.
- ii. Ground Mounted Solar Systems shall not exceed sixteen feet (16') in height.
- iii. SES in residential districts shall be located in a side or rear yard to the extent practicable.
- iv. The SES shall be located in such a manner to minimize view shed impacts, historic sites and scenic corridors.
- v. SES shall not be located on the State's scenic byway or on mostly wooden lots, and shall be in close proximity to a grid connection

Project that results in significant loss of prime agricultural land or undue impacts to forests, wetlands, other natural resources or environmentally sensitive areas are strongly discouraged.

d. **Aviation Analysis**

If the project is within two miles of an airport, the applicant must complete and provide the results of the Solar Glare Hazard Analysis Tool (SGHAT) for the Airport Traffic Control Tower cab and final approach paths, consistent with the Interim Policy, FAA review of Solar Energy Projects on Federally Obligated Airports, or successor policy. The applicant must also complete the Air Space Case Analysis (Form 7460) and provide the results.



- e. Visual Impact Analysis
An analysis of potential visual impacts from the project including solar panels, roads and fencing along with measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate the visual effects shall be required. A plan may be required showing vegetative screening or buffering of the system from those items to mitigate for visual impacts.
- f. Screening
- i. Small Scale SES shall be screened to shield the system from public view to the maximum extent practicable. Screening shall be designated on a planting plan approved by the Zoning Official and shall be maintained in good health throughout the existence of the SES.
 - ii. Medium and Large SES shall be screened from the public right of way and from adjoining properties with vegetation. The vegetative screen may consist of existing vegetation as determined by the City. A landscape plan, prepared by a third party licensed professional, shall be submitted as part of the applications process. The plan set shall show and identify all existing vegetation to remain or to be removed, pending approval. Any trees with a 6" or greater caliper to be removed shall be shown on the plan set. The landscape plan set shall include:
 1. A minimum of a 75-foot buffer with two staggered rows of 6 foot native evergreen trees located on a 3-foot undulating, naturalized berm. The trees shall be planted at 25 to 35 foot intervals – pending specie selection - with triangular spacing and attain an 8-foot height in 2 years. The buffer shall include a 10-foot-wide flowering ground cover/pollinator habitat area with the remaining area planted in native grasses/clovers.
 2. All plantings, excluding trees, shall benefit pollinators. The screen plantings, the flowering ground covers and grasses and clovers shall be considered "beneficial habitat."
 3. Flowering ground covers shall have a minimum of 10 plant species with a minimum of two flowering seasons in addition to spring.
 4. Cluster plantings of 7 to 9 native deciduous trees randomly planted to break up the evergreen screen shall be planted every 50 to 75 feet.
 5. Flowering ground cover/ pollinator habitat for the panel area shall be a minimum of 60% of the site, with the remaining portion of the site seeded with native grasses/clovers that benefit pollinators.
 - iii. The "beneficial habitat" shall be maintained during the life of the project in healthy status.
 - iv. All required screening shall be maintained in perpetuity and shall be replaced as necessary to preserve the required screening to the satisfaction of the Zoning Official.
 - v. Screening shall improve the view shed and minimize glare on the public ROW and adjacent properties.
 - vi. The applicant shall provide a detailed establishment, maintenance and monitoring plan. These plans shall include BMP and schedules of inspections.
 1. If mowing is required, it shall commence in the shoulder season of October through March. Plant material shall be maintained to a height of a 10 inch minimum.
 2. Invasive species shall be removed annually either by herbicide or manually as approved.
 - vii. If complaints regarding glare/reflection are received by the operator and/or the City, within two years of installation, these complaints shall be addressed/mitigated to the City's satisfaction and a written solution shall be submitted to the City for review and approval.
 - viii. Medium and Large SES shall post a performance bond of 125% of the landscape's installed value. The bond shall be held by the City for a period of 2 years upon which the City shall inspect the vegetative buffer to ensure its viability and require replacement of dead or dying material. Upon inspection and replacement of the planting material, the bond will be reduced to 15% of the initial bond and held by the City for an additional 3 years to ensure proper maintenance of the planting material. The City reserves the right to inspect and require replacement of plant material for the duration of the life of the facility.
- g. Setbacks
- i. Small Scale SES shall comply with required setbacks for the parcel size in the zoning district where the project is located.
 - ii. Medium and Large SES shall be setback a minimum of 200 feet from residentially zone property line and 75 feet from all other property lines and may be increased by the Planning Commission or



the Board of Appeals during the review process. Setbacks shall be measured from the nearest solar array and/or structure within the solar farm, excluding security fencing, screening or berm.

h. Abandonment

- i. SES that cease to produce electricity continuously for one (1) year shall be presumed abandoned. The property owner may overcome this presumption by substantial evidence, satisfactory to the Zoning Official, that cessation of the use occurred from causes beyond the owner’s reasonable control, that there is no intent to abandon the system, and that resumption of use of the existing system is reasonably practicable.
- ii. Following abandonment, the operator and landowner shall remove all equipment and systems and restore the site as near as practicable to its original condition.
- iii. Failure to comply with the requirements of this section shall authorize, but not require, the County to remove the SES and restore the site in accordance with the approved decommissioning plan.

i. Decommissioning Plan

A decommissioning plan shall be required. The plan shall include:

- i. The expiration date of the contract, lease, easement, or other agreement for installation of the SES and a timeframe for removal of the SES within one (1) year following termination of the use.
- ii. A requirement that the operator and property owner provide written notice to the City whenever a SES is out of active production for more than six (6) months.
- iii. Removal of all above and underground equipment, structures, fencing and foundations. All components shall be completely removed from the subject parcel upon decommissioning.
- iv. Removal of substations, overhead poles, above ground electric lines located on-site or within a public right-of-way that are not usable by any other public or private utility.
- v. Removal of lot coverage and access roads associated with the SES.
- vi. Re-grading and, if required, placement of like-kind topsoil after removal of all structures and equipment
- vii. Re-vegetation of disturbed areas with native seed mixes and plant species suitable to the area or evidence of an approved nutrient management plan.
- viii. A recordable covenant executed by the property owner to reclaim the site in accordance with the decommissioning plan and associated approvals upon cessation of the use
- ix. A requirement for City and MDE inspections and approval of the decommissioning and reclamation of the SES site.
- x. The operator or property owner of a Medium or Large Scale SES shall provide a bond, surety, letter or credit, lien instrument, or other financial assurance in a form and amount acceptable to the City to secure payment of 125% of the anticipated cost of removal of all equipment, structures, fencing, above or below ground level, and any accessory structures, and restoration of the site in accordance with the requirements of this section if use of the SES is discontinued continuously for one (1) year. The financial assurance shall be provided prior to issuance of a building permit and shall be renewed so as to remain in full force and effect while the SES remains in place. The financial assurance shall require the obligor and the owner to provide at least ninety (90) days' prior written notice to the County of its expiration or nonrenewal. The Zoning Official may adjust the amount of the surety as reasonably necessary from time to time to insure the amount is adequate to cover the cost of decommissioning, removal and restoration of the site.



Pollinator Habitat



TAX RATE PROPOSAL AND SELECTED COMMENTARY

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Date: March 13, 2017
 Prepared by: Sandra Tripp Jones
 Submitted by: Sandra Tripp Jones
 SUBJECT: Property Tax Increase

Recommendation: That Council schedule a public hearing on proposed property tax increase from .007989 to 008878 to maintain property tax revenues for current operating levels, to fund repair of 300 block of High Street, and to establish a project for housing blight removal in FY 2018.

Discussion: On a rotating basis, every three years, the State of Maryland Department of Assessments reassesses property values. The City of Cambridge was reassessed to be effective Fiscal Year 2017. Assessed values went from 732,987,470 to 715,998,789 or a decrease of 2.3%.

Scenario 1

In order to maintain the same potential revenue of 5,855,837, the tax rate would have to change the constant yield (the property tax rate that, when applied to new assessments, will result in receiving the same revenue in the coming taxable year that was produced in the prior taxable year.)

Without increasing to the constant yield, the taxable revenue will decrease by approximately \$130,000. In order to keep the same revenue, the tax rate will increase .00019.

	Old rate	Without increase	Constant yield
	2017	2018	2018
Assessed Base	732,987,470.00	715,998,789.00	715,998,789.00
Tax Rate	0.007989	0.007989	0.008179
Taxable Revenue	5,855,836.90	5,720,114.33	5,856,154.10

Scenario 2

If the City were to generate an additional \$250,000 beyond the constant yield in property tax revenue, the tax rate would need to change from the constant yield of .008179 to .008528.

	Constant yield	Increase
	2018	2018
Assessed Base	715,998,789.00	715,998,789.00
Tax Rate	0.008179	0.008528
Taxable Revenue	5,856,154.10	6,106,037.67
Increase		249,883.58

Scenario 3



If the City were to generate an additional \$500,000 beyond the constant yield in property tax revenue, the tax rate would need to change from the constant yield of .008179 to .008878.

	Constant yield	Increase
	2018	2018
Assessed Base	715,998,789.00	715,998,789.00
Tax Rate	0.008179	0.008878
Taxable Revenue	5,856,154.10	6,356,637.25
Increase		500,483.15

For a house valued at \$200,000, this would mean increase beyond the constant yield (or last year's tax) of \$140 a year.

Why Consider Increases?

Maintaining constant yield in property tax (\$130,000) will support maintenance of current services with no new cost to property owners, on average. An increase in property tax revenue of \$500,000 will provide new funds to apply to:

- 1) Funding repair of the 300 block of High Street over 2 years (\$250,000 per year -General Fund portion of total repair costs), and
- 2) Providing match funds (approximately \$250,000) for a grant application to establish a home rehabilitation program in the Pine Street Study Area where approximately 40% of houses surveyed are either blighted or at risk of blight. City Council has adopted a CouncilGoal to address blight and the City's Economic Development Plan identifies blighted housing as an impediment to economic development.

Comment from Commissioner Steve Rideout

This is an important discussion to have now as we start the budgeting process. At this point there are any number of ideas on the table to help improve the quality of life here in Cambridge and, I think, ultimately the value of homes here. I am not sure where we will wind up, but hearing from the taxpayers is important.

As important is the issue of the possibility of raising taxes we also need to look at how effective and efficient the city is in doing its work and how we might reduce our costs. What does the city do that it should not do? Will that save us money? What does it do that could be done at less cost and possibly more effectively by the private sector?

For those who may not have seen it, the **2017 CAMBRIDGE BLIGHT STUDY** can be accessed at: http://www.choosecambridge.com/uploads/agenda_docs/02132017RS/22%20--%20Blight%20Study.pdf

Comment from former Commissioner Frank Cooke

City staff propose increasing the city property tax by 9 cents/\$100 of valuation. The increase would fund a 1-cent shortfall owing to property devaluations. It would also partially fund repairs to High Street and



repairs

to blighted property primarily around Pine Street in Ward 3. Each project would depend on state grants not yet applied for or granted. While... both projects are worthy, each will be funded on the backs of the city's property owners. The real beneficiaries will be the owners of the blighted property, the ones who allowed their property to decay in the first place. Many of these are slumlords as there is no provision for owner occupancy.

With regard to High Street, it is indeed a disaster. However, its repair could be funded either by using the city's line of credit, a city bond, or by introducing more efficiency into city government like the new proposal to save the city tens of thousands by revamping its medical insurance program. In the past, the city has run just fine with far fewer city employees who are the main expense for the city.

Raising the city property tax will have the effect of depressing housing prices even further. We need look no further than across the Malkus Bridge to see the positive effects of the lowest property tax in the state. If City Council cannot understand fundamental economics, we may need to institute limits on their power including property tax caps, bond approvals for loans, as well as shortened terms to get their attention. Remember, as citizens we hold the ultimate power.

Comment from Sharon Smith

I don't like raising taxes, but I think there is a danger here in being penny-wise and pound-foolish. We need to invest a little to deal with years of neglect of our housing blight problem. We need to base our policy on factual information. My understanding is that in the last ten or so years, the city has decreased the number of employees, not increased them. And during the recent economic downturn, employees went for several years without any pay increases, so we need to show them some respect. In my interaction with city employees, I see the need for more employees, not less.

One of the reasons we have blight is because our compliance function is understaffed. If we invest money to "fix" that problem, those property values will increase, ultimately bringing in more property tax revenue. Furthermore, a line of credit or bond to repair High Street just creates another debt, which has to be repaid, with interest. As far as grants go, many require a match from the city, so we can't apply for the grants unless we have funds to match.

Comment from Judd Vickers

I don't mind paying a bit more, but the City does need to be mindful of the property tax rate. Businesses, individuals (especially seniors) make housing/real property decisions based upon the property tax. We want to attract folks and not make things harder for those that struggle to pay their property taxes.

A couple of alternatives could be:

- Make a portion of the increase a "special tax assessment" levied for only a 3-4 year period to raise funds specifically to address blight and infrastructure. The City could fence off the money and demonstrate its



progress;

- How can we tax the problem? I understand some Cities charge higher taxes on vacant, boarded up and abandoned property. Let's create a disincentive to let properties sit vacant and dilapidated - and raise revenue from them while they sit there! If they don't pay the taxes, they go in a Land Bank, to be re-purposed.

While I am not opposed to applying for grants, the City needs a policy and plan of it's own to address the blight issue (do we have one and I'm not aware?). Plus, many DHCD grants come from Federal Fund sources, need I say more?

Ultimately, the reduction of blight should help lift values, negating the need for tax increases. In summary, I would support a tax increase if the City would somehow limit the duration, fence off the funds and demonstrate progress over a period of time, with the ultimate goal of removing blighted housing throughout the City and improving infrastructure.

Comment from Roman Jesien

Let me get this right, my property value decreased, so I should pay more in property taxes?
Scary, but I got it.

Last year city council had the same reoccurring issues with High St and blighted areas and decided to lower the tax rate because there was an excess in the budget, \$1 - 2 Million, I believe (Chuck and Steve should have a more accurate number). What happened to that excess? Yes, it's a rainy day fund and should not be used for capital expenses, but could it be used as match for grants?

The Salisbury University Blight Study provided by Steve Rideout had 4 recommendations. These recommendations could be realized through grants, but one in particular needs no grant to implement, just a desire to make things better; i.e., "Develop more efficient code enforcement practices to collect citations. Consider attaching citations to individuals as opposed to properties. Develop process for repeat offenders". CAN might be able to help out on this and should look into it. Also, I think Judd's comment to create disincentive for vacant and dilapidated properties is spot on and should be explored further.

I, for one, understand the need to fund city operations, but feel that the money must be spent wisely. It's a great function for CAN to help instill "wisely" into the operations process.