

Citizen Comment 02/08/21

Stephen Sturdivant

When questions are asked and submitted by residents at any Seat Pleasant City Council meeting, I would suggest that the Council post all responses on the Seat Pleasant website or newsletter, this will promote full transparency and allow residents to view responses to any and all questions submitted to the Council.

The City will take your suggestion under advisement and will discuss with the city council as they determine policy for the city which the staff will follow. Providing answers to questions in the newsletter does not appear to be the most appropriate use for this form of communication since the intent is to provide updated and pertinent information to the residents. This of course pertains to specific questions which may not be advisable to publish to the entire community.

Some questions however that involve economic development, annexation, the overall safety, and wellness of the community, monthly, quarterly, or annual report summaries, seem to be more germane to the public and can certainly be published as responses in the newsletter or on the city's website.

I will be attending the meeting and prefer to ask my question.

Mrs. Barbara Kennedy

I would like to have clarification on the benefits such as paid insurance by the city; is it for the staff, employees as well as the councilmembers and the Mayor. Is this information written somewhere that the residents can find it to go over the insurance benefits package?

The City provides various benefit packages to its employees as an employee only benefit but are not offered to elected officials. The Attorney General provided in opinion on this issue approximately 30 years ago. For an elected official to receive benefits (i.e., medical coverage, life insurance, retirement), this would have to be approved via a referendum/ballot issue at the election of the council and mayor every four (4) years, similar to the recent ballot question during the 2016 election which approved the salaries of elected officials. Anytime benefits to elected officials are revised and/or approved, it cannot be for the current sitting council but for the next elected officials.

Benefits offered to the current employees are listed in the Personnel Rules and Regulations Manual which you should be able to locate on the City's website www.seatpleasantmd.gov.

Is Devan Martin holding two positions at this time, and if so, what are the positions or title?

Mr. Martin serves as the Chief of Police and is currently temporarily serving as the [Interim Deputy City Manager](#).

Who is the vendor for the Speed Camera Program?

The vendor for the Speed Camera Program is Optotraffic.

The newsletter seems to have a lot of fluff in my opinion. Instead of wasting city's funds, on months that you don't have enough reading that is necessary to the residents, it may be go to go from an eight-page article to a four page. Considering that we have gone from a two page than a four page now an eight-page newsletter. Since the newsletter is to inform the residents, and not for campaigning or for the Mayor's purpose we should be able to scale down and save the taxpayers money. I know just recently the residents were offered to submit information for the newsletter. Why not have a section called Residents corner or Citizen's concerns something like that or whatever you want to call it. Just a suggestion. I hope everyone is being safe, we are all in this together. Let us all work together, thank you.

The City reduced the Newsletter to four pages during the months of December and January. The City does determine which information to provide based upon several factors to include code violations that typically occur in each time frame, increases in violent crimes, burglaries, and assaults, as well as if we have determined that there is an increase in residential transition and a need for information pertaining to services and resources. Repetitive information is provided (e.g., COVID-19 Relief, Hypertension and Diabetes) because communities of color have a higher percentage of medial disparities than other ethnicities.

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In the upcoming Public Session of the Seat Pleasant City Council to take place on Monday, February 8, 2021, I would like for the following questions be presented to the City Council and entered into the record of the meeting:

1. Since September 1, 2016 to Present, how many changes have been made to the Seat Pleasant Charter?
2. Why is the Seat Pleasant Charter changed so much?

Not sure what is meant by “so much”. Although the Charter is the governing guide for municipal governments, it does have to be reviewed and revised from time to time to ensure that the regulations are relevant, and consistent with the Maryland Annotated Code, and laws within the State like amendments that are made in the United States Constitution. The City Charter was initially adopted when the City of Seat Pleasant was incorporated in 1931. The next revision was made in 1955, and again in 1993. Since ~~1933~~1993, revisions to the Charter were made in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2021.

While revisions were made 2007-2010, and most recently each year between 2016 and 2021 excluding 2019, thee revisions were made due to laws within the state that were changed, revisions to the city’s code which are laws pertaining to regulations within the City, and other factors including but not limited to creation and deletion of city departments, creation and/or elimination of positions within the government, and the establishment of one approved form of government that is recognized in the State of Maryland (the City previously had three (3) forms of government combined as one form which is not recognized within the State of Maryland).

3. Have the Seat Pleasant City Council considered alternatives to changing the Seat Pleasant Charter?

Yes, changes have been also made to the Personnel Rules and Regulations Manual as well as the City Code. These documents also determine how the government is conducted

4. Would the Seat Pleasant City Council consider formulating a committee to include citizen not in City Government to review the Seat Pleasant City Charter with an eye toward revising it to make it more compatible with contemporary times?

The Council has approved a Government Review and Oversight Committee.

I plan to attend the meeting to be available to be heard and to answer questions from the Council.

HAVING TO REGISTER FOR THE MEETING DOES NOT COMPLY WITH OPEN MEETINGS LAW (this question was posted in the chat during the meeting) Open meetings law were established

Charter 26 of the City Code requires citizens to register to speak in a public meeting. This requirement has nothing to do with the mandate that is required for any government to follow the Open Meetings Act and the regulations that apply to closing a meeting.

The need for asking citizens to register for the meeting is to protect our meeting platforms which are held virtually, requiring the registration of citizen speakers is to ensure that the city complies with the City Code of Ordinances.

Aretha Stephenson
604 64th Place
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Ward II
Citizen's Comments for the February 8, 2021
Seat Pleasant Public Work Session 7:00 PM Meeting

Questions of Interest:

1. Who is paying for the City's investigation & the Mayor's Attorney?

The City pays for legal services from the annual budget allocation approved by the City Council during budget adoption. The City does not pay for the mayor's personal attorney nor is it our concern who does, as the City does not allocate funding toward any elected official or employee's personal legal representation. City elected and appointed officials are covered under the Public Official Liability Coverage through Local Government Insurance Trust.

2. What is the outcome of the investigation, it has been some time since we have heard anything?

The investigative firm has presented its findings to the City Council. There are still however, matters under review. The City Manager will provide a summary on March 1, 2021 during the presentation of the Annual Report.

3. Would the Council be in favor having an open meeting with the SP residents to answer questions regarding what is the status of the SPICE fund and explain where and how the \$600 thousand taken from our budget is benefiting the citizens of SP i.e., what type of return on our investment are we receiving?

The matter involving SPICE is currently under review by the City Council as well as the City Attorney.

4. Can we do better with responding in a timely manner as to how our Citizen's questions are being answered and perhaps give your responses in an open form so that other citizens can obtain the same feedback to your responses? I think this would help with more transparency.

The City makes every attempt to answer citizen comments within 30 days in time for the subsequent public meeting of the City Council. However, it is not always possible to answer questions within that time frame, given the number of tasks that the staff are involved with daily. There are critical issues pertaining to water run-off, code violations, legal issues, personal issues, teleconferences, Zoom meetings, code, and charter updates which often require immediate attention. Additionally, while working remotely during this pandemic, the work-load has increased, and the staff does not want to respond to questions during a meeting that they have not had a chance to confirm or research to ensure that the information provided is accurate.

Additionally, you posted 12 questions; there are other citizens that posted multiple questions as well. To provide adequate and thorough response takes an enormous amount of time. During this response to you and three citizens has required 4.5 hours and I have not completed the responses.

5. How do citizens obtain a recording of both Work Session and Public meetings and is there a way to make the steps available so that people can easily obtain the instructions i.e., on the website.

The City's Public Engagement Department is looking into your request. The City is also researching other host vendors to accommodate posting of recorded meetings.

6. Do we have the technology to post the recorded meetings on our city's website yet?

The City's Public Engagement Department is looking into your request. The City is also researching other host vendors to accommodate posting of recorded meetings.

7. The Central Corridor that is to be Annexed, is its primary purpose geared for residential, commercial or for profit in traffic ticketing?

The primary purpose for annexing Central Avenue is threefold:

- ***Control traffic safety on a major thoroughfare which includes speeding, red light violations, and fatalities. There has been a total of ___fatalities on this roadway which the City now controls. At least 8 out of 10 routine traffic stops result in confiscation of illegal weapons and drugs.***
- ***Spur business improvements along the corridor which may lead to further development within the city.***
- ***To increase revenue for the City which translates to improved services for the community***

8. What are the criteria for the use of the camera money? How is the City's contract worded or stated that we are to be held in compliance with the use of those funds according to government regulations? Not just Optic Traffic or Red-Light regulations.

Only Speed Camera funds are restricted solely for public safety use. Red-light camera funds are unrestricted and can be used for anything that pertains to the governmental operations and the funds within the general funds.

9. Could Optic Traffic be a conflict of interest in the Annexation of the Central Corridor? If so, how do we plan to fix that?

There is no conflict. You will need to further explain what you are referencing here and further elaborate on your question.

10. Will the City once the Annexation is done be responsible for the maintenance and repairs of the highway or roads? Or are we just using the Annexation as a Cash Cow?

Under Phase I of the annexation process, we annexed only the roadway. Because it is a State Highway which is owned and operated by SHA, they are responsible for maintenance of the roadway and snow removal.

11. Can you provide a detailed report of how the camera money has been used for 2020 along with invoices and receipts?

Due to the magnitude and volume of this request, you will need to provide a time period and submit this request through a PIA (JustFOIA) on the City's website under the City Clerk's tab.

12. Lastly, I am perplexed as to why the Citizens must register each time for a Work Session or Public Meeting? I was not able to find such ordinance or charter stating that it was a prerequisite. I only have knowledge that the meeting is open to all the public who wants to attend. When? And why is the city forcing this to be a requirement now.

Charter 26 of the City Code requires citizens to speak in a public meeting. This requirement has nothing to do with the mandate that is required for any government to follow the Open Meetings Act and the regulations that apply to closing a meeting.

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