



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Economic Development and University Relations Committee will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, February 6, 2024 from 3:00p.m.-5:00p.m. to discuss the potential for our business corridors and squares to promote urban scale, mixed use development in which the provision of Innovation Space subsidizes the delivery of housing and ground-floor retail.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Economic Development and University Relations Committee was held on Tuesday, February 6, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Toner. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote

Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 5. Quorum established.

The Chair, Councillor Toner offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the Meeting was to discuss the potential for business corridors and squares to promote urban scale, and mixed use development in which the provision of Innovation Space subsidizes the delivery of housing and ground-floor retail. Present at the meeting was Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for the Community Development Department (CDD), Jeffrey Roberts, Director of Zoning and Development, Chris Cotter, Housing Director, and Megan Bayer, Acting City Solicitor. Also present at the meeting were Councillor Pickett and Councillor Azeem.

Public Comment

Daniel Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, offered comments on affordable housing and zoning and shared that they look forward to hearing the presentation.

The Chair, Councillor Toner introduced the panelists, Patrick Barrett, and Sharmil Modi. Sharmil Modi shared that they are from the East Cambridge Group and Patrick Barrett shared that he is a Cambridge resident involved with real estate development and a zoning attorney. The panelists gave a presentation titled “Harnessing the Innovation Economy to Deliver More (Affordable) Housing and Active Corridors”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of the pandemic’s effects in real estate, how the housing shortage remains acute, zoning as a potential solution, potential alternatives, and embracing a hybrid solution and highlighting a hybrid option. Sharmil Modi and Patrick Barrett were available after the presentation for discussion with Councillors and City staff.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Iram Farooq who noted that this is a similar discussion that has been done in the past relative to zoning, lab and innovative spaces, and housing. Iram Farooq shared how challenging it is to have a conversation around the financial feasibility of development, especially after the pandemic when costs are as high as they have ever been. Iram Farooq highlighted the importance of finding the balance between finding development that is feasible and the responsibility of the City to represent the public’s interest.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Jeffrey Roberts who offered comments relative to the presentation and thanked the developers for their work. Jeffrey Roberts shared that planning can be difficult when it’s not economically feasible but added that there are always different directions that can be taken when planning, and different considerations that can be taken into account, especially the community’s input.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Chris Cotter who shared the importance of looking at options to create more housing and affordable housing. Chris Cotter pointed out the difficult conditions for developing due to costs and noted the importance of how zoning and land have a direct relationship and impact with each other when looking to create more development. Chris Cotter added that it was nice to see the numbers in the presentation and plans on reviewing them further to have a better understanding about the true costs.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Azeem who shared that they were happy to see numbers included in the presentation and was excited to have a conversation on solutions to create more housing in the City. Patrick Barrett and Sharmil Modi offered comments sharing the importance of continuing the conversation and producing zoning that would allow more affordable housing and street level retail.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who offered comments regarding zoning and development, pointing out that it’s much easier for larger companies to take financial risks when it comes to developing versus the smaller developers. Vice Mayor McGovern asked the presenters if there were any concerns with mixing residential and lab spaces together. Patrick Barrett responded and shared that what needs to be looked at is what type of lab is being put in the development and it’s important to look at certain labs being thought of as an innovative space. Sharmil Modi added that it would not be a safety issue or concern depending on what the space was being used for. Iram Farooq commented that that there is a strong system that is different from zoning that addresses the safety considerations.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Wilson who highlighted the importance of continuing to have conversations around developers and land space and usage and being creative

to provide spaces that the City needs. Councillor Wilson echoed comments that were made by Vice Mayor McGovern regarding Envision Cambridge and suggested that the City revisit Envision Cambridge and its' goals. Councillor Wilson had clarifying questions for Patrick Barrett and Sharmil Modi who were both available to respond.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Siddiqui who shared concerns about basement level apartments and flooding and the challenge of creating safe housing. Councillor Siddiqui noted that the City Council will be having an upcoming goal setting meeting, and zoning is a topic that will be discussed. Patrick Barrett responded by sharing that basement level living can be a possibility if it is built and developed correctly with the right foundation. Sharmil Modi offered additional comments relative to zoning.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who emphasized the comments made by Jeffrey Roberts regarding zoning, noting that it is not necessarily dictating what gets built and recognizing that there are a lot of other economic and societal factors that work towards determining what will happen in a given space. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared that it is important to incentivize housing in every opportunity available within the City's zoning.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Pickett who shared that it is a great time to be having the conversation around zoning and development and to be able to look at and explore new ideas.

The Chair, Councillor Toner shared that he appreciated the conversation and the hard work done by the panelists and looks forward to future discussions. The Chair also agreed that it may be a good idea to revisit Envision Cambridge to continue to move forward and reaching the goals of the City.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion to close public comment. On a voice vote of 3 members, the motion passed unanimously.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. On a voice vote of 3 members, the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:50p.m.

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record. The video for these meetings can be viewed at:

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/659?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=38daaf53f06d16577503682274b2d025

A communication was received from Councillor Toner, transmitting a presentation titled "Harnessing the Innovation Economy to Deliver More (Affordable) Housing and Active Corridors".

A communication was received from Councillor Toner, transmitting materials regarding Development Cost Analysis.