

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE/CHARTER REVIEW
Monday, December 9, 2024 Recessed and
Reconvened January 27, 2025**

ORDINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Siddiqui, Co-Chair
Councillor Toner, Co- Chair
Councillor Azeem
Vice Mayor McGovern
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler
Councillor Wilson
Councillor Zusy
Mayor Simmons

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Ordinance Committee was held on Monday, December 4, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 1:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Siddiqui. 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 Mayor Simmons, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent*
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Wilson – Present/Remote
Councillor Zusy – Absent*
Mayor Simmons – Present/In Sullivan Chamber*

Present – 7, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

*Vice Mayor McGovern and Councillor Zusy were present in the Sullivan Chamber at 1:05p.m.

*Mayor Simmons went from in person participation to remote at 1:16p.m.

Mayor Simmons offered opening remarks. Co-Chair Siddiqui resumed Chair of the meeting and offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the recommendations from the Charter Review Committee (CRC) and any additional suggestions from the full City Council pertaining to the Cambridge City Charter. Present at the meeting was Megan Bayer, City Solicitor and Elliott Veloso, First Assistant City Solicitor. Tanya Ford, Executive Director of the Election Commission, was present via Zoom.

Co-Chair Siddiqui opened Public Comment.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, offered comments related to the history of the City Charter and suggestions made from the Charter Review Committee.

Co-Chair Siddiqui and Co-Chair Toner shared what the goals and intentions for the meeting were, noting that there have been previous discussions regarding the CRC recommendations in the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Megan Bayer who reviewed how this Special Committee of the Whole would not be making the final approval of the CRC recommendations but would be making recommendations that the full City Council would vote on in a regular City Council meeting. Megan Bayer explained that during this Committee meeting, the recommendations would be adopted by a majority vote.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the first CRC recommendation for review and discussion would be on the City Manager or Strong Mayor form of government, noting that the CRC did not reach a 2/3rds threshold for either option, but provided their thoughts on the pros and cons of each. Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who shared that she would like to have further discussion on this topic. Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner, Vice Mayor McGovern, Councillor Azeem, Councillor Zusy, Councillor Wilson, and Mayor Simmons who shared comments that were in support of a City Manager form of government. Councillor Azeem offered comments that were in favor of having the Mayor be the City Council President with the City Manager form of government. Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who offered comments that were in favor of a Strong Mayor form of government as well as more discussion on how the Mayor is elected. Vice Mayor McGovern and Councillor Toner also agreed that there could be more discussion on how the mayor is elected.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommends to the full City Council to maintain the City Manager form of government.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – No

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Yes

Yes – 7, No – 2. Motion passed

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the next item for discussion would be a proposed modern charter overview and if the City Council would want new Charter language drafted. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the CRC voted in favor to recommend to the City Council the drafting of new Charter text. Megan Bayer explained that if the Council voted in favor of this recommendation, the Law

Department would review and work on the drafted Charter language from the CRC and come back to the Council with proposed language for additional discussion and review. Megan Bayer noted that the CRC's draft Charter language was part of their final report and can be viewed by the public and Councillors.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion to that the Special Committee of the Whole recommends to the full City Council adoption of modern charter text structure and ask the City Solicitor's Office to begin drafting language.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui explained that the next two topics to be discussed were related to expanding enfranchisement and equity and that the first vote would be on maintaining an at-large city council elected by proportional representation. Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who offered comments that were in favor of keeping proportional representation.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommends to the full City Council that the City maintain an at-large City Council elected by proportional representation.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the next vote would be to maintain an at-large City Council of nine members. Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner, Vice Mayor McGovern, and Councillor Azeem who spoke in favor of maintaining the at-large nine members. Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who provided comments on why she would be voting against this recommendation by sharing that she believes it would be beneficial to have a combination of both at large and district representation as elected officials. Co-Chair Siddiqui

shared that she agreed with comments made by the Vice Mayor and that she would support maintaining at-large City Councillors of nine members who represent all districts of the City.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommends to the full City Council that the City maintain an at-large City Council of nine members.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – No

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 7, No – 1, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui noted that the next three topics that would be up for discussion would be enfranchising non-citizens in municipal elections, entrenching 16- and 17-year-olds in municipal elections, and moving municipal elections to even years. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared concerns about these topics not being favorable at the Legislature and offered the suggestion of filing a Home Rule Petition in the future.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who suggested that it may be better to keep the topic of enfranchising non-citizens in municipal elections for more discussion, with the possibility of pursuing filing a Home Rule Petition in the future. Co-Chair Toner explained that the goal of this Committee is to update the Charter and have changes prepared for the ballot in November, pointing out that this topic may take longer to get results at the State House.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who agreed with comments made by Co-Chair Toner regarding keeping this topic up for discussion and filing a Home Rule Petition. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared support for enfranchising non-citizens in municipal elections.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who shared her support for allowing this to happen but agrees this could be a challenging topic to send to the Legislature. Councillor Nolan agreed that holding this for more discussion would be more beneficial.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared support for enfranchising non-citizens in municipal elections and believes that they should have a say who represents them in their community. Vice Mayor McGovern spoke in favor of filing a Home Rule Petition and keeping this topic for more discussion.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zusy who stressed that voting is a privilege of citizenship as well as running and serving in office. Councillor Zusy shared challenges that the Election Commission may encounter if non-citizens were able to vote in the municipal elections.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Wilson who agrees that this should be held for more discussion and shared it would be important to get more feedback from the community.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Azeem who indicated that he believes there needs to be more information and research conducted on increasing franchise in elections.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Megan Bayer and asked if she had any recommendations on how the Committee could move forward with this topic. Megan Bayer offered the suggestion of referring this matter to a different committee for further discussion related to pursuing a Home Rule Petition.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council that the matter of enfranchising non-citizens in municipal elections be referred to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for discussion and to consider a separate Home Rule Petition.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who suggested that a similar motion be made for enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds in municipal elections.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council that the matter of enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds in municipal elections be referred to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for discussion and to consider a separate Home Rule Petition.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Committee members for comments regarding moving municipal elections to even years.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who spoke in favor of moving to even years, pointing out that it would be better for democracy and could encourage more people to come out and vote if municipal elections were on the same day as state and federal. Councillor Nolan shared concerns about the Legislature not approving this matter.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who shared concerns about moving to even year elections and noted that it could be overwhelming for voters. Co-Chair Toner also shared that local issues that are being addressed by those campaigning for office on a municipal level could get lost due to voters focusing more on state and national matters.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Azeem who offered the suggestion of referring this matter to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for further discussion and provided examples of how this could be beneficial.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared he would be in favor of keeping this for more discussion and stressed the importance of understanding why more people do not come out to vote during municipal elections and how the City can improve those numbers.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zusy who offered comments that were in favor of keeping municipal elections to odd years.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler and Councillor Wilson who were both in favor of referring this matter to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for further discussion.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council that the matter of moving municipal elections to even years be referred to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for discussion and to consider a separate Home Rule Petition. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the next vote would be on creating more flexibility and modernize election voting and tabulation methods in charter language. Co-Chair Siddiqui pointed out that the CRC voted favorably to recommend election procedure language changed to use any new tabulations method, election procedure language be changed to authorize the City to use any voting method of proportional representation, and that the remaining election procedures and relevant laws be compiled, updated, and drafted by the City, Election Commission, and Law Department consistent with all CRC recommendations.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who spoke in favor of allowing other tabulation methods but should be specific on which methods would be possible.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Tanya Ford who shared that the current language is very outdated and that the Election Commission would be in favor of discussing and proposing changes to the language.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council to create more flexibility and modernize election voting and tabulation methods in charter language and draft language to be developed by the Law Department and Election Commission before a final vote.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the next votes would be regarding different matters related to participation and accessibility of government for all residents. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the CRC voted favorably on the following recommendations: participation in and accessibility of government for all residents by creating resident assemblies and public tracking mechanisms of council policy orders.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner, Councillor Azeem, Councillor Nolan, Vice Mayor McGovern, Councillor Zusy, and Councillor Wilson who are shared they were not in support of creating resident assemblies and pointed out that there are already many advisory

groups and boards that offer opportunities for citizen engagement. Co-Chair Siddiqui agreed with their comments.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who offered comments that were in support of resident assemblies.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Megan Bayer and Elliott Veloso who provided a brief overview of the process on how resident assemblies could be created and examples of how they were created in other communities.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council participation and accessibility of government for all residents by creating resident assemblies.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – No

Vice Mayor McGovern – No

Councillor Nolan – No

Councillor Siddiqui – No

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – No

Councillor Wilson – No

Councillor Zusy – No

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 1, No – 7, Absent – 1. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Committee members for comments regarding public tracking mechanisms for policy orders.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who shared his support for having this be enshrined in the Charter. Megan Bayer provided an overview of the process the City Council can use if this were to move forward.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Azeem, and Councillor Zusy who offered comments that were not in support of this recommendation. Committee members, including Co-Chair Siddiqui, agreed that there needs to be better tracking mechanisms, but they are not sure if this is something that should be in the City Charter. Committee members also agreed that to move forward with this recommendation, it may be better for the City Council to work with staff on how the current structure can improve.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council public tracking mechanisms of council policy orders.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – No

Vice Mayor McGovern – No

Councillor Nolan – No

Councillor Siddiqui – No
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – No
Councillor Wilson – No
Councillor Zusy – No
Mayor Simmons – No

Yes – 1, No – 8. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared the next two matters for discussion were recommendations from the CRC relating to effectiveness of government and included matters regarding effectiveness of government through measurable goalsetting and maintaining two-year terms for City Councillors.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler and Mayor Simmons for comments regarding recommending effectiveness of government through measurable goalsetting. Both Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler and Mayor Simmons agreed that this is a recommendation that should stay within the City Council Rules and not the Charter. Co-Chair Siddiqui agreed with Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler and Mayor Simmons.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council improving the effectiveness of government through measurable goalsetting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – No
Vice Mayor McGovern – No
Councillor Nolan – No
Councillor Siddiqui – No
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No
Councillor Toner – No
Councillor Wilson – No
Councillor Zusy – No
Mayor Simmons – No

No – 9. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Vice Mayor McGovern, Councillor Zusy, Councillor Nolan, Co-Chair Toner, and Councillor Azeem who all agreed that the recommendation by the CRC on maintaining two-year terms for City Councillors should be held for further discussion by this Committee at the next meeting. Committee members shared the pros and cons of both keeping the current two term length and switching to longer term lengths.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the final five recommendations from the CRC would be under responsiveness and accountability. The recommendations included responsiveness and accountability through delineating budget process and priority setting, giving the City Council the power to add or increase line items in the budget, enshrining resident initiative provision, enshrining group petition provision, and a campaign finance study committee.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who suggested that the recommendation on responsiveness and accountability through delineating budget process and prioritizing setting be in the City Council Rules and not the Charter. Co-Chair Toner pointed out that the City Manager and staff offer plenty of access to budget-related topics and the process of starting budget planning has started sooner, which has only been beneficial to the City. Co-Chair Toner noted that by starting the process sooner, discussions can happen to share concerns, suggestions, and priorities ahead of the budget hearings.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council to increase responsiveness and accountability through delineating budget process and priority setting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – No

Vice Mayor McGovern – No

Councillor Nolan – No

Councillor Siddiqui – No

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No

Councillor Toner – No

Councillor Wilson – No

Councillor Zusy – No

Mayor Simmons – No

No – 9. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who shared that he would be in favor of having more discussion on giving the City Council the power to add or increase line items in the budget. Councillor Nolan and Vice Mayor McGovern shared that they agreed with holding for further discussion. Councillor Nolan pointed out how the School Committee has more responsibility and authority with their own budget.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who offered comments that were not in favor of this recommendation, sharing that he is happy with the current authority the City Council has with the budget.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that, based on the comments made by Committee members, this recommendation would be held for further discussion at the next meeting.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion to extend the meeting by fifteen minutes.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Yes
Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Siddiqui offered comments regarding the CRC recommendation to enshrine a resident initiative provision and what the goal of the CRC was behind that recommendation.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who asked Megan Bayer what citizens can do now through a petition process. Megan Bayer provided an overview of how citizens can file zoning petitions and changes to municipal ordinances. Elliott Veloso provided additional information on how this recommendation is used within towns and town meetings.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Azeem and Vice Mayor McGovern who offered comments that were not in favor of resident initiative provisions, pointing out that Cambridge is a city, not a town, and a recommendation like this may not benefit a city. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared she agreed with comments that have been made.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council to enshrine a resident initiative provision.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll

Councillor Azeem – No
Vice Mayor McGovern – No
Councillor Nolan – No
Councillor Siddiqui – No
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No
Councillor Toner – No
Councillor Wilson – No
Councillor Zusy – No
Mayor Simmons – No

No – 9. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui offered comments regarding the CRC recommendation to enshrine a group initiative provision and what the goal of the CRC was behind that recommendation.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council to enshrine a group initiative provision.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll

Councillor Azeem – No
Vice Mayor McGovern – No
Councillor Nolan – No
Councillor Siddiqui – No
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No
Councillor Toner – No
Councillor Wilson – No

Councillor Zusy – No
Mayor Simmons – No
No – 9. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the final recommendation for discussion would be enshrining a campaign finance study committee, which would have the ability to make campaign finance reforms.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who shared he does not believe this is something that should be in the Charter and asked Megan Bayer if the City Council did decide to have a campaign finance committee separate from the Council, would they have the authority to implement campaign finance reform. Megan Bayer shared that there would be no legal issue with convening a body to study the issue, but to make any campaign finance changes that would require action from the State Legislature. Co-Chair Toner suggested that his recommendation could be referred to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for more discussion.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who suggested that the Committee could have more discussion on this recommendation but does not believe it should be in the City Charter and pointed out that there is campaign finance limitation language in the Ordinance. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler and Co-Chair Siddiqui agreed that there could be more discussion on this recommendation.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who asked Megan Bayer for clarification on this recommendation if the City Council were to file a Home Rule Petition. Megan Bayer shared that this is something her department would have to look in to further.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Toner who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommend to the full City Council that the matter of enshrining a campaign study finance committee be referred to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee for discussion.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll

Councillor Azeem – No
Vice Mayor McGovern – No
Councillor Nolan – No
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – No
Councillor Wilson – No
Councillor Zusy – No
Mayor Simmons – No

Yes – 2, No – 7. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that the Co-Chairs are actively trying to get a meeting scheduled to continue this discussion in January.

**Co-Chair Siddiqui made a motion to recess the meeting,
Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

The Special Committee of the Whole went into recess at 3:13p.m.

On Monday, January 27, 2025, the Cambridge City Council’s Special Committee of the Whole that recessed on December 9, 2024, reconvened at 11:00p.m. by the Co-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 remote participation via Zoom.

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

Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Wilson – Present/ In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Mayor Simmons – Absent*

Present – 8, Absent -1. Quorum established.

*Mayor Simmons was marked present and remote at 12:11p.m.

Co-Chair Toner offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to resume the review and discussion of recommendations from the Charter Review Committee and any additional suggestions from the full City Council pertaining to the Cambridge City Charter. Present at the meeting was City Manager, Yi-An Huang, Deputy City Manager, Owen O’Riordan, City Solicitor, Megan Bayer, Assistant City Manager of Finance, Claire Spinner, Budget Director, Taha Jennings, Assistant City Manger of Human Services, Ellen Semonoff, Executive Director for the Election Commission, Tanya Ford, Assistant Director for the Election Commission, Lesley Waxman, and First Assistant City Solicitor, Elliot Veloso.

Co-Chair Toner opened Public Comment

Suzanne Blier, 5 Fuller Place, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and suggestions related to proposed Charter changes.

Robert Eckstut, 251 Western Avenue, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in opposition to the proposed Charter changes.

Marc Truant, 32 Warren Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and suggestions related to proposed Charter changes.

Siobhan McDonough, Walden Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and concerns related to proposed Charter changes.

Helen Walker, 43 Linnaean Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in opposition to the proposed Charter changes.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and concerns related to proposed Charter changes.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in opposition to the proposed Charter changes.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and suggestions related to proposed Charter changes.

Patrick Magee, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in opposition to the proposed Charter changes.

Marie Saccoccio, 55 Otis Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in opposition to the proposed Charter changes.

Co-Chair Toner provided a brief review of the previous meeting that was held on December 9, 2024. Co-Chair Toner recognized Megan Bayer for clarification regarding initiative petitions in Cambridge. Megan Bayer and Lesley Waxman both shared how the City has the ability to do initiative petitions pursuant to state law even though it is not in the Charter.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Nolan who offered brief remarks regarding updates to the Charter. Co-Chair Toner shared that the goal of the Committee is to assist with the update and modernization of language in the Charter.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who pointed out that there have been previous hearings held before the December 9, 2024 meeting and that this has been an ongoing conversation within the City Council.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who provided a brief review of the five proposed changes that were submitted by himself and Councillors Nolan, Wilson, and Azeem. The proposed changes were provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. Councillor Wilson suggested that the Committee go through the proposed

changes one by one for discussion. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler reviewed proposed change number one, City Council budget authority, noting that it would allow the Council to collaborate more closely with the budget process.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Nolan for comments related to proposed change number one. Councillor Nolan explained why she was in strong support of this proposed change, while also pointing out that the Cambridge School Committee has more authority as it relates to the budget. Councillor Nolan added that this proposed change would create good governance and provide more discipline to the Council.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Wilson who thanked the City Solicitor and the administration team for their work on responding to the proposed changes and how the Council moves forward with next steps. Councillor Wilson shared her excitement for improving the Charter language, while also pointing out that it will not be a perfect Charter, and more work will continue to be needed. Councillor Wilson offered comments that were in support of proposed change number one, proposed change number three, elected Mayor alongside a City Manager, and shared challenges with two-year term limits. Councillor Wilson also shared how other municipalities have staggered term limits that work effectively.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Deputy City Manager O’Riordan who shared strong concerns regarding City Council budget authority, stressing how important it is to maintain and achieve the balance that is needed for the financial success of the City. Taha Jennings highlighted how the City Council role has been very effective at shaping the budget by having discussions on City Council priorities and goals. Taha Jennings pointed out that the Finance and Budget teams will continue to work with the City Council to achieve those goals financially. Taha Jennings also noted how the budget is developed to support and reflect the priorities of the City Council. Taha Jennings thanked the City Council for sharing so much interest in the budget. Claire Spinner provided additional comments that supported the Deputy City Manager and Budget Director, and highlighted how the budget is a complex, year-round process that involves many employees with financial expertise. Claire Spinner provided a breakdown of the budget percentages and noted where the City Council would not have authority to change and noted that she believes that the current budget process with the finance team and City Council provides more transparency. Ellen Semonoff provided a brief overview of the budget process for DHSP and shared concerns about whether her budget was to change and how that would affect programs.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who shared some concerns with the budget process in the past as it relates to Council priorities being recognized and added that it is important to be more collaborative with the finance team to continue to be consistent with budget efforts. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that what she heard from Councillors is that there is something missing within the Council relating to the budget process.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared that there have been examples of when the City has responded to Council priorities and there have been examples where they have not. Vice Mayor McGovern pointed out the importance of stability when talking about the budget and shared a brief overview of how the School Committee addresses their priorities within the budget. The Vice Mayor offered the suggestion of the City putting a certain amount of money

aside for the Council where they would have discretionary power over that amount, and asked the City if that is something that would be possible to do in the future. Taha Jennings responded by sharing the challenges that could arise with putting money aside. Taha Jennings noted that it is important for the City to continue to collaborate and enhance communication with the Council early on in the budget process. The Vice Mayor shared he would not support proposed change number one due to unintended consequences.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Zusy who shared that she was not in support of proposed change number one and believes that the City is doing a good job managing the budget and does not believe that the Council has enough information to alter the budget.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Mayor Simmons who asked Taha Jennings what impact this proposed change would have if the Council were to have more budget authority. Taha Jennings shared how the AAA rating and budget approach could be affected. Mayor Simmons shared concerns about proposed change number one and shared she would not be in favor. Mayor Simmons stressed the importance of community involvement and providing more community engagement as it relates to the budget.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion to extend the meeting to 1:15p.m.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion to close public comment.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Azeem who pointed out that many Councillors have shared interest in having more input with the budget and noted the concerns addressed by City staff. Councillor Azeem suggested that proposed change number one be withdrawn, and Councillors work with City staff on a different approach and language to City Council budget authority.

Co-Chair Toner shared that he believes the previous Finance Committee Co-Chairs have been conducting the budget process well and is not in favor of proposed change number one. Co-Chair Toner noted that the Council's role is to give the City Manager guidance regarding the budget and offered suggestions on more community engagement.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who shared he would support withdrawing the proposal at this time and come back to have more discussion. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler noted that the goal of this proposal was for the City Council to have more productive engagement earlier in the process.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Nolan who provided additional information on why Committee members brought this proposal forward.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who withdrew proposed change number one. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler provided a brief overview of proposed change number four, four-year terms, with elections every two years.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Nolan who shared she would be interested in discussing four-year terms further and address how it would be operational and impact future elections.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who offered comments that were in opposition to the proposed change at this time.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who suggested that the Committee take a vote on this proposed change and possibly move this for more discussion to the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommends to the full City Council four-year terms for City Council, with elections every two years.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – No

Vice Mayor McGovern – No

Councillor Nolan – No

Councillor Siddiqui – No

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No

Councillor Toner – No

Councillor Wilson – No

Councillor Zusy – No

Mayor Simmons – No

Yes – 0, No – 9. Motion fails.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who offered an overview of proposed change number two, City Solicitor appointed by the City Council, and proposed change number five, Department Heads appointed by the City Manager and approved by the City Council.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Nolan who shared her support for the two proposed changes, noting that it would be a joint appointment between the City Manager and the City Council. Councillor Nolan highlighted that with the appointment of the City Solicitor, it would promote opportunities for more collaboration with administration.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Wilson who shared that she agrees with the comments made by her Co-Sponsors, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler and Councillor Nolan.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who shared she was in opposition to proposed change number five and would be open to having more discussion related to the City Solicitor.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Zusy who shared she believes it would be a conflict of interest for the Council to appoint the City Solicitor. Councillor Zusy added that both proposed changes would undermine the power of the City Manager and his staff. Councillor Zusy noted that it is the City Manager's job to manage staff while the City Council's responsibility is to set policies.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared that he would be in favor of having more discussion on the appointment of the City Solicitor and asked the sponsors if the City Council had the power to hire the City Solicitor, would they also have the power to fire them. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler noted that the idea was to have this proposed change be similar to the appointment of the City Clerk and City Auditor and would be in support of whatever the Committee would like as far as the firing process. Vice Mayor McGovern shared that there needs to be a better balance between the City Solicitor representing both the City Council and the City Manager. Co-Chair Toner offered suggestions regarding the hiring process and how the City Council could be more involved. Vice Mayor McGovern shared he would not support proposed change number five.

Co-Chair Toner offered comments that were opposed to both proposed changes and does not believe the City Council should be involved with the hiring and appointment of Department Heads and the City Solicitor.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Azeem who suggested that these two proposed changes not get voted on today.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion to extend the meeting an additional ten minutes.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Yes
Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Megan Bayer who provided feedback and clarification to some of the comments made during the discussion. Megan Bayer pointed out all of the work that is done through the City Solicitors Office, noting that there is a lot of litigation that does not directly involve the Council and shared how closely the Solicitor works with the City Manager's Office day to day. Megan Bayer also added that much of the work cannot be openly discussed publicly. Megan Bayer offered the suggestion of the Council having more input on the hiring.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who shared that he would withdraw the proposals and come back with new language to incorporate the suggestions and comments that were brought forward in the discussion.

Co-Chair Toner offered comments regarding proposed change number three, elected Mayor alongside a City Manager. Co-Chair Toner shared what the current role, power, and authority of the Mayor is and suggested that before the next Committee meeting, members can discuss what would be the most effective way to have a better process of electing the Mayor.

**Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion that the Special Committee of the Whole recommends to the full City Council that Department Heads are appointed by the City Manager and approved by the City Council.
Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

Councillor Azeem – No
Vice Mayor McGovern – No
Councillor Nolan – No
Councillor Siddiqui – No
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – No
Councillor Wilson – No
Councillor Zusy – No
Mayor Simmons – Absent
Yes – 1, No – 7, Absent – 1. Motion fails.

**Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion that the Committee continue the discussion on changing how the Mayor is elected.
Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent - 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Siddiqui who made a motion to recess the meeting.

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent - 1. Motion passed.

The Special Committee of the Whole went into recess at 1:26p.m.

DRAFT