

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 10, 2026**

ORDINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor McGovern, Chair
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor Flaherty
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Simmons
Councillor Zusy
Mayor Siddiqui

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Ordinance Committee was held on Tuesday, February 10, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:00 a.m. by the Co-Chair, Sobrinho-Wheeler. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 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 Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/Remote
Councillor Flaherty – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor McGovern – Absent
Councillor Nolan – Absent
Councillor Simmons – Present/Remote
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/Remote
Mayor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 7, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss a Zoning Petition by the Cambridge City Council. The Petition proposes changes to Section 4.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance to allow as of right in all zoning districts, religious and educational uses, and childcare uses, CMA 2025 #288. Present at the meeting were Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Director of Zoning and Development, Jeff Roberts, and City Solicitor, Megan Bayer.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Melissa Peters who explained that this Zoning Petition is addressing updates to Institutional Use zoning which would make the City be aligned and in compliance with State law.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Jeff Roberts who gave a presentation titled “Institutional Use Zoning”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. Also included in the Agenda Packet was a memo from the Planning Board related to the Zoning Petition.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler thanked CDD for their presentation and asked if there is anything staff would need from the City Council to move forward and draft language to the State Legislature. Megan Bayer explained that if that City Council would like to pursue a Home Rule Petition, a Policy Order would be needed and staff would also need guidance from the City Council related to the threshold of the exemption. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked why the original exemption was tied to a dwelling unit and if there was any documentation found around the time it was adopted. Megan Bayer shared that it dates back to 1979-1980 and there was no documentation explaining the rationale for that threshold. Jeff Roberts added that staff could not locate any documentation around the original thought process. Jeff Roberts emphasized that any new legislation would require clear justification for selecting districts for exemption and shared that further research and review could be done if necessary.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who spoke in support of moving the language forward to the full City Council.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Mayor Siddiqui who shared her support for moving the proposal forward but also shared concerns from the communities in residential areas and staying aligned with the 2019 Envision goals. Mayor Siddiqui asked for clarification on previous discussions with institutions in Cambridge. Melissa Peters explained that in prior Committee discussions, there were representatives from MIT and Lesley University, who shared that they did not see risks related to expansion. Melissa Peters added that institutional growth has changed a lot since 1979, adding that much of Harvard’s growth is happening outside of Cambridge. Melissa Peters noted that there could be a broader discussion if the City Council would like to create language and modifications to Dover related framework to align better with the City Councils zoning goals.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Zusy who shared her support for the proposal and emphasized the importance of long-term planning and ongoing discussions with universities related to institutional growth. Councillor Zusy suggested having additional Committee meetings related to housing development and relationships with universities to improve coordination. Councillor Zusy added that it will be important to have more conversations to ensure long-term plans align with community goals.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Flaherty who had clarifying questions related to the legal requirements and dimensional regulations and if the proposed language would effectively allow institutional uses citywide by a special permit. Megan Bayer confirmed that dimensional regulations would stay permissible and explained that nonprofit religious and educational uses would require special permits. Councillor Flaherty had additional questions

related to tax exemption eligibility and federal protections. Megan Bayer responded and briefly reviewed determinations for tax exemptions and how federal protections would be evaluated.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who had clarifying questions related to areas in white on the map on page 14 of the presentation. Jeff Roberts provided a brief overview, explaining that the areas in white were not subject to special legislation. Jeff Roberts shared options that the City Council could consider, such as reestablishing dwelling units or pursuing new legislation. Councillor Al-Zubi spoke in support of moving forward with the proposal to be in compliance, but suggested that there be more conversations with universities, especially related to the housing developments for students.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who pointed out that Cambridge is unique compared to other municipalities with having the exemption, and that other communities do operate under the Dover Amendment without similar requirements. Vice Mayor Azeem added that the City has stronger regulatory tools now than in 1979 and shared that it could also provide benefits towards daycares and nonprofit educational uses. Vice Mayor Azeem moved to forward the proposed zoning to the full City Council.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler noted that this zoning is needed to be in compliance with state law and provided a brief history of the 1979 planning on the City's institutional exemption under the Dover Amendment to minimum lot sizes. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler shared that the City Council had previously reviewed that policy and lot sizes and felt that it would not be in the best interest of the City to keep exclusionary zoning to preserve the exemption and would hold back the City from moving forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion to forward the proposed recommendations from the Community Development Department to the full City Council with a favorable recommendation to pass to a second reading.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi - Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Absent

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 7, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Flaherty who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi - Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes
Councillor McGovern – Absent
Councillor Nolan – Absent
Councillor Simmons – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Siddiqui – Yes
Yes -7, No – 0, Absent -2. Motion passed.

The Ordinance Committee adjourned at approximately 11:57a.m.

Attachment A – Communications from the public.

Clerk’s Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

<https://cambridgema.v3.swagit.com/videos/374630>

Petition: To amend Section 4.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance as follows with the intent of permitting the use of land for the following purposes as-of-right in all zoning districts: religious purposes; educational purposes on land owned or leased by the Commonwealth or any of its agencies, subdivisions or bodies politic or by a religious sect or denomination, or by a nonprofit educational corporation; and for a child care center, school-aged child care program, family child care home, or large family child care home as defined in Section 1A of Chapter 15D of Massachusetts General Laws.

Amend Section 4.51 to read as follows:

4.51 Legal Authority. This Section regulates the use of land for institutional purposes, including but not limited to uses subject to M.G.L. c.40A, §3. Additionally, the City has authority pursuant to Chapter 565 of the Acts of 1979 of the General Court, as amended by Chapter 387 of the Acts of 1980, to restrict the use of land for certain institutional purposes in residentially zoned districts which require a lot of one thousand two hundred (1,200) square feet or more per dwelling unit. If any residentially zoned districts require a lot of one thousand two hundred (1,200) square feet or more per dwelling unit, this Section 4.50 will contain the applicable institutional use regulations.

Amend Section 4.56 to read as follows:

4.56 TABLE OF INSTITUTIONAL USE REGULATIONS

Use Categories	Inside Institutional Overlay Districts Existing Lot Status			Outside Institutional Overlay Districts Existing Lot Status		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
a. Religious Purposes						
1. Place of Worship	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Rectory, parsonage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Convent, monastery	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Social or recreational center	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Other use with religious purposes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. Use of Land or Structure for Educational Purposes on Land Owned or Leased by the Commonwealth or any of its Agencies, Subdivisions or Bodies Politic or by	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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a religious sect or denomination, or by a nonprofit educational corporation						
c. Use of Land or Structure for Educational Purposes on Land Owned or Leased by Entities not included in Subsection 4.56b						
1. Child care center, school-aged child care program, family child care home, or large family child care home as defined in Section 1A of Chapter 15D of Massachusetts General Laws	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Primary School	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
3. Secondary School	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No
4. College or university athletic facility, auditorium, theater or similar facility, any of which is customarily accessible to the general public on a paid admission fee or other basis	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No ⁶
5. College or university laboratory or research facility customarily involving radioactive materials and other controlled substances, high Intensity electromagnetic radiation or chemical or biological processes potentially entailing a high level of danger to the public health and safety	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No
6. Other College or university facility ¹	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	No	No ⁶
7. Vocational or other schools	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
8. Dormitory, resident fraternity or sorority	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No ⁶
d. Non-Commercial Research Facilities						
1. Laboratory or other research facility customarily involving research with radioactive materials, controlled substances, high intensity electromagnetic radiation or chemical or biological processes potentially entailing a high level of danger to the public health and safety	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No
2. Private library, study center or other research facility	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
e. Health Care Facilities						
1. Hospital	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No
2. Infirmary	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
3. Nursing or Convalescent home	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
4. Clinic not affiliated with any other institution	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
5. Clinic affiliated with a hospital or an accredited university medical school	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No ⁶

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	6. Clinic connected to a community center	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
	7. Other health care facility	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
f. Social Service Facilities							
	1. Social service center	SP ⁴	Yes	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
	2. Community Center	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No ⁶
g. Local Government ²							
	1. Administrative office	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No ⁶
	2. Fire or police station	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
	3. Museum	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
	4. Municipal service facility	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	No	No
	5. Public park, playground, or public recreation building	SP ⁴	Yes	Yes	SP ⁴	Yes	Yes
	6. Municipal Library	Yes ⁸					
h. Other Governmental Facility		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
i. Other Institutional Uses							
	1. Club, lodge, or other fraternal or sororal meeting facility	SP ⁴	SP	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
	2. Museum or noncommercial gallery ³	SP ⁴	Yes	Yes	No	SP	SP ⁵
	3. Cemetery	SP ⁴	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	4. Institutional use not listed in any other category	SP ⁴	SP	SP	No	SP	SP ⁵

FOOTNOTES TO TABLE OF INSTITUTIONAL REGULATIONS

1. Other college or university facility shall include administrative offices, faculty and staff offices, teaching and research facilities not included in Subsection 4.56c(4) or c(5), libraries, museums, dining halls and service facilities including facilities listed in Subsection 4.56c(4) which are not accessible to the general public.
2. Local government shall include all nonresidential facilities and activities of the City of Cambridge, the Cambridge Housing Authority, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority and their component agencies, but shall not include public schools.
3. This use designation shall include facilities for cultural and ethnic heritage appreciation.
4. The Board of Zoning Appeal shall grant a special permit for this use only if the applicant demonstrates that he will act to replace indefinitely the dwelling units removed from the lot or converted to institutional use with an equivalent number of units, not previously on the housing market, at another location or locations within the City of Cambridge, before the units are removed or converted, and only if the applicant adequately provides at his own expense for the relocation of the occupants of the existing units to comparable units within the City of Cambridge. In every case, this replacement housing shall include units suitable for and available to low and moderate income households in an amount equal to ten (10) percent of the total number of units to be replaced. The remaining replacement units shall be comparable to the units removed. Comparability shall be determined by dwelling unit mix in terms of number of bedrooms, special facilities (such as handicapped access or common areas), amenities, including those existing in the surrounding neighborhood and range of price/rent levels. The Board of Zoning Appeal may require that the applicant submit whatever evidence

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it deems necessary to determine that the replacement units will be comparable and the applicant is bound to provide such units. Otherwise the special permit will not be issued. Replacement units shall be available for occupancy before the existing dwelling units are removed or converted and shall remain available as low and moderate income and comparable units unless otherwise authorized by the Board of Zoning Appeal. No building or demolition permit for the proposed institutional development shall be issued until the replacement units are available for occupancy and the occupants of the existing units have been relocated.

5. This use is allowed as of right if the pre-existing institutional use of the lot is in the same use table category in Subsection 4.56, otherwise a special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeal shall be required. Such special permit shall be granted only if the Board determines that the use will have fewer adverse impacts on the neighborhood than the pre-existing institutional use. In making this determination, the Board shall consider and comment on the physical attributes of the use, including those evaluated in the Cambridge Institutional Growth Management Plan. The Board may require the applicant to submit whatever documentation it deems necessary, to assist it in making said determination.
6. This use may be allowed upon issuance of a special permit by the Board of Zoning Appeal if the pre-existing institutional use of the lot is in the same use table category in Subsection 4.56 or if the Board determines that the use will have fewer adverse impacts on the neighborhood than the pre-existing institutional use. In making this determination, the Board shall consider and comment on the physical attributes of the use, including those evaluated in the Cambridge Institutional Growth Management Plan. The Board may require the applicant to submit whatever documentation it deems necessary to assist it in making said determination.
7. Subject to the provision of Section 11.20.
8. Any dimensional or other relief from the provisions of this Ordinance required to construct or locate a municipal library use shall be permitted by grant of a special permit from the Planning Board. In granting such a special permit, where the library is proposed to be located within an Open Space zoning district, the Planning Board shall, in addition to the criteria set forth in Section 10.43, find that there will be no substantial reduction in the recreational and/or open space use, excluding parking areas and roadways. Where the Board does find there will be a substantial reduction in the recreational and/or open space use the special permit shall be granted upon assurance by the City Manager that he will offset such reduction by increased recreational and/or open space uses at another location, subject to necessary appropriations.