



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Monday, March 3, 2025

2:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Public Safety Committee will hold a public hearing to review and discuss the City Manager’s Surveillance Technology Impact Report (STIR) related to allowing Remotely Piloted Aerial Vehicle (RPA) technology in Cambridge. CMA 2025 #11

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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"/>	
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2:02 PM

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Public Safety Committee was held on Monday, March 3, 2025 The meeting was Called to Order at 2:00 p.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 by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Co-Chair, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

- Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/Remote
- Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
- Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Zusy – Absent*

Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

***Councillor Zusy was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 2:02p.m.**

The Co-Chair, Councillor Toner offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the City Manager’s Surveillance Technology Impact Report (STIR) related to allowing Remotely Piloted Aerial Vehicle (RPA) technology in Cambridge. Present at the meeting were Christine Elow, Police Commissioner, Pauline Wells, Superintendent, John Boyle, Deputy Superintendent, Christa Cosenza, Detective, member of the Special Response Team, and Licensed Drone Pilot, Bob Reardon, Office of Public Information for the Cambridge Police Department (CPD), Kate Kleimola, First Assistant City Solicitor, Alex Marthews, Co-Chair of Digital Fourth, and Kade Crockford, Director of Technology and Civil Rights Program for ACLU Massachusetts. Mayor Simmons was also present and in the Sullivan Chamber.

Co-Chair Toner opened Public Comment.

Ori Porat, 24 Myrtle Avenue, Spoke in favor of the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Ran Gilboa, 14 Eustis Street, Cambridge, MA, Spoke in favor of the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Alex Marthews, 28 Temple Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Siobhan McDonough, Walden Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Richard Solomon, 9 Kinnaird Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Jennifer Warren, 9 Kinnaord Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Ilan Levy, 148 Spring Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

James O'Keefe, 25 Moore Street, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Serina Hu, 170 Gore Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) proposal.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Commissioner Elow and her team who gave a presentation titled "Cambridge Police Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) Proposal" which was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation provided a review of sUAS and how they would be used by CPD, safeguards for operation, addressing ACLU concerns, real world applications, and local case studies.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Wilson who thanked those who spoke in Public Comment, CPD for their presentation, and the panelists who were joined at the table. Co-Chair Wilson added the importance of maintaining the safety of the community, as well as the Police Department, and that this conversation is important to discuss the tools that are available are being used in a responsible way. Co-Chair Wilson asked for clarity on the process of the drones recording while they are in use. Deputy Superintendent Boyle explained that drones do not automatically record once they are in the air, and that the person operating the drone would be the one to activate recording from a handheld controller. In addition, Deputy Superintendent Boyle provided examples of when he believes CPD would want to record an event a drone is covering, such as a protest. Co-Chair Wilson asked what role the City Council would have if a Policy were adopted for the usage of drones, and if the City Council would be able to revoke the use of drones once approved. Kate Kleimola explained that once it is approved by Council they cannot vote or revisit that matter. Commissioner Elow added how important it will be for CPD to hold Officers accountable when using these tools.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Kade Crockford who shared concerns about comments made by the First Assistant City Solicitor and shared that they would like to have further discussion about the legal analysis regarding the Surveillance Ordinance. Kade Crockford pointed out that the ACLU believes that the City Council should withhold approval of this proposal for drones until a policy is created and added that it would be important to produce a policy that reflects what has been heard from the community. Co-Chair Toner asked Kate Kleimola for clarification regarding the Ordinance and the Council's role. Kate Kleimola provided a brief overview and shared it is something she can look into further.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Wilson who asked what the process would look like for evaluating this program and if it is working the way it was intended to. Co-Chair Wilson also asked if the State and Federal Government would have authority to request CPD to record drone footage for their benefit. Kate Kleimola explained that the Federal Government cannot force a local law enforcement agency to do the federal law enforcement agency's job for them and noted that CPD has shared that they will only share information with other agencies if it is in connection with an ongoing criminal investigation. Kade Crockford shared that the Federal Government can request information through a Court Order. Co-Chair Wilson asked when the proposed policy may be available for the City Council to review. Co-Chair Toner added that it would be important for the Council to have a policy before them when it is time to vote, noting that it would also be beneficial for the

public as well. Kate Kleimola explained that there are different requirements that need to be met before publishing a policy and does not have a current timeline. Alex Marthews pointed out that there does not need to be a rush for a policy until more members of the community provide feedback, noting that right now, what is before everyone, are just recommendations and suggestions for the use of drones. Co-Chair Toner provided a brief review of previous conversations regarding this topic and similar topics that have been discussed in the Committee and Council in the past. Kade Crockford explained that there have been many concerns raised by the community and provided suggestions on ways the City Council could move forward.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who thanked everyone for participating in today's discussion. The Vice Mayor explained that there are compelling arguments being made on both sides of the conversation. The Vice Mayor shared that he would agree drones would be good use in some scenarios, such as protests, to provide extra safety. The Vice Mayor lost connection on Zoom; Co-Chair Toner shared he would recognize him again once he returned.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Councillor Zusy who agreed it would be important for the Council to see a policy on this topic before it is voted on to understand what the perimeters would be. Councillor Zusy shared concerns and suggested that this topic is something that can be revisited in three or four years. Councillor Zusy noted that technology can be useful to help solve cases, but so can relationships with community members. Councillor Zusy asked if using footage from private parties or other cameras in the community to assist CPD would be an option. Kate Kleimola explained that CPD already does that to an extent and provided examples of what technology is accessible in the community and the possibility of bringing in a contractor for drones. Commissioner Elow and Deputy Superintendent Boyle shared concerns about asking private citizens to use drones to document crime scenes and police operations, pointing out that there are challenges CPD currently face when trying to obtain footage for incidents from private citizens. Commissioner Elow expressed great need for CPD to have access to drones as an essential tool within the Department. Councillor Zusy shared concerns about drones being used a large public events.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who expressed his support and trust with the CPD using this technology and shared concerns about the Federal Government wanting to obtain information for their use. Vice Mayor McGovern provided a brief background and overview of the Surveillance Ordinance, noting he was Mayor at that time. The Vice Mayor shared that he would like to see a proposed policy before the Council before anything is voted on and urged the City to draft language in a timely manner.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Mayor Simmons who thanked the Co-Chairs for holding this meeting and noted how important it is to have conversations around difficult issues. Mayor Simmons shared feedback from the Senior community, noting how important it is for them to feel safe and have more of a presence with Public Safety. Mayor Simmons indicated how much surveillance is a part of our lives with cell phones and other technology but stressed the importance of everyone's right to privacy and safety. In addition, Mayor Simmons noted that this is not a new conversation, but a continuance of past discussions, and it's important to engage as many people as possible, and those who are impacted by crime the most. Mayor Simmons pointed out that there are people who want more visible safety, and people who that want less, and stressed how important it is to work with the people that live in neighborhoods who want more safety and find a happy medium. Mayor Simmons concluded by highlighting how important it is to feel safe in your community.

Co-Chair Toner asked how many drones CPD is looking to obtain and how much the budget would be if the Council went through with a Policy. Deputy Superintendent Boyle explained the two different types of drones that would be used for indoor and outdoor use, and price range. Deputy Superintendent Boyle added that there would be additional accessories needed to ensure the drones run properly. Co-Chair Toner asked what neighboring communities currently have access to drones. Commissioner Elow shared that Somerville was the only City that did not have one. Deputy Superintendent Boyle pointed out that the ACLU website has 43 other law enforcement agencies listed that have access to drones. Co-Chair Toner asked the ACLU if there have been any cases of law enforcement abusing drones. Kade Crockford provided examples of where the ACLU believes drones are being misused and shared concerns with the "First Responder Program", which was mentioned in the presentation. Co-Chair Toner shared that he appreciates the concerns the ACLU is raising. Co-Chair Toner provided comments that were in support of the use of drones for the protection and safety of the community, but also, the Police.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Alex Marthews who pointed out that they do not believe that Police have bad intentions with the use of drones but does not agree with surveillance and generalized overwatch, pointing out that people have a right to their privacy.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Kade Crockford who provided additional comments and concerns regarding the use of drones by providing examples of studies done with surveillance cameras. Kade Crockford explained that if CPD does go forward with surveillance technology, it will be interesting to study the data to see if crime is discouraged. Kade Crockford pointed out that there is no evidence that drones make people safe.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Commissioner Elow and Deputy Superintendent Boyle who affirmed that drones would not be misused and only used as a tool to assist CPD to keep the community and Police Officers safe.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Wilson who offered closing remarks and shared how important it is to include the community and the most vulnerable population in these conversations.

Co-Chair Wilson noted that the purpose of this meeting was for City staff and partners to come together to have an important conversation that results in intentional and smart goals.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Wilson who made a motion to refer the matter of Remotely Piloted Aerial Vehicles back to the full City Council for further discussion.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Toner recognized Co-Chair Wilson who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:56p.m.

Attachment A – Communication 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.granicus.com/player/clip/968?view_id=1&redirect=true

Discussion

A communication transmitted from Yi-An Huang, City Manager, relative to a Surveillance Technology Impact Report (STIR).

A communication was received from Commissioner Christine Elow, Cambridge Police Department, transmitting a presentation titled "Cambridge Police Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) Proposal".

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

From: Ori Porat <xtra_photo@hotmail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 28, 2025 2:04 PM
To: City Clerk; Toner, Paul
Subject: Public comment for 3/3 public safety committee meeting, CMA 2025-11
Attachments: CMA 2025-11 Public Comment.pdf

Please see attached, thank you very much and have a nice weekend

February 26, 2025

Public Safety Committee CMA 2025-11

To whom it may concern,

We, the undersigned, live, work and/or study in Cambridge and we are writing to you today with regards to item 11 on the City Manager's Agenda for 2025, the Surveillance Technology Impact Report for Remotely Piloted Aerial Vehicles.

We support allowing the Cambridge Police Department to operate drones as outlined in the meeting agenda packet. Having reviewed the materials provided, we understand that the drones would not be weaponized, there would be no audio recording, no facial recognition, no autonomous operation, no retention of footage beyond 30 days (except active investigations), no sharing with other agencies (except through due process) and we feel comfortable that these parameters provide adequate protection for our constitutional and other rights while the deployment of drones would enhance public safety in the various ways outlined in the same agenda.

Furthermore, we became especially motivated to write to this committee after being disheartened by the opposing public comments during the February 3rd city council meeting. The opposing commenters did not raise any legitimate arguments, they simply repeated the same blanket anti-police statements which do not allow the important and nuanced privacy vs. safety debate to move forward in any productive manner. We can, and should, have better public policy debates as a city.

In summary, we would like to thank the members of this committee for their time and efforts in looking at this important issue. Given the evolving needs of law enforcement in the twenty first century and further given our all of our city's unique circumstances above and beyond normal urban crime, traffic and crowd control, we hope that the CPD's sensible and much-needed drone program will be approved.

Sincerely,

Lior Alon
Daniel Engel
Gideon Klionsky
Kiran Lang
Eitan Normand
Ori Porat