



FINANCE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, February 26, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

The Finance Committee will hold a public hearing to review and discuss City Council priorities and goals and discuss how these will shape and be incorporated within the City budget.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3:06 PM
Patricia Nolan	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<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"/>	3:08 PM
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4:36 PM

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, February 26, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, 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.

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
- 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 – Absent*
- Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Mayor Simmons – Absent*

Present – 6, Absent – 3. Quorum established

- *Councillor Wilson was recorded as present and in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:06p.m.
- *Vice Mayor McGovern was recorded as present and in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:08p.m.
- *Mayor Simmons was recorded as present and in the Sullivan Chamber at 4:36p.m.

Co-Chair Nolan noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the City Council priorities and goals and discuss how these will shape and be incorporated within the City budget. Present at the meeting were City Manager, Yi-An Huang, Assistant City Manager of Finance, Claire Spinner, and Budget Director, Taha Jennings.

Co-Chair Nolan offered opening remarks and read (not verbatim) from the following statement:

As the call of the meeting suggests, we are here today to review and discuss the City Council priorities and goals and discuss how these will shape and be incorporated within the City budget in advance of the FY26 Budget Presentation. As co-chairs, Councillor Toner and I have been working to build upon the work of the last

two budget cycles, which offered the council and the community opportunities to give input and discuss with City staff before the budget was presented and essentially finalized.

This meeting will build on the discussions we have had in the Finance Committee over the last several months. In the backup materials for today's meeting we have included an outline of the budget related meetings we have had over the last few months and how the process will continue going into the spring. All these conversations have allowed for more nuanced and meaningful back and forth with City staff - which helps them develop the City budget with Council priorities in mind. As the City Manager has said, the budget is not created through one meeting or one policy order, but throughout the year, over many conversations. This is the latest of these conversations and I hope we will be able to explore how our stated City Council goals (which we revised last year for the first time since 2017) will be reflected in the FY26 Budget.

The meeting materials contain a few documents which will hopefully help inform some of the discussion, including:

- An outline of the Finance Committee budget process for FY26, which started last fall and will continue through budget adoption.
- A copy of the Value Statement and City Council Goals, which we passed in May 2024
- The executive summary from City staff from our November 2024 discussion, which may be good context and a reminder of the discussions we jointly had during the fall about the need to moderate our budget growth over the next few years, including a goal to keep the FY26 budget increase to no more than 4%.
- Consolidated spending summaries, presented a few different ways, all from last year's budget, FY25

Another thing to consider as we continue these conversations is the larger macroeconomic climate, which we have discussed before, and will now include potential changes to the federal funding landscape. I have asked the City Manager to provide some additional context for our reliance on federal grant funding and his office should be coming out with a memo for a future meeting - that conversation will be an important point in the coming months, as the federal landscape has been rapidly changing. We've heard from the school committee that hopefully only a small amount of the total grant funding comes from federal sources, but we need to have contingency plans in place to ensure funding for essential services and our ability to maintain financial freedom.

Co-Chair Nolan opened Public Comment.

Tina Alu, 113 ½ Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA, CEOC, encouraged the Council to consider including funding for ongoing guaranteed income programs and budget priorities.

Jenny Andre-Jean, 11 Inman Street, Cambridge, MA, CEOC, spoke in favor of the Rise Up program and how much of an impact it has had on residents.

Yemi Kibret, 11 Inman Street, Cambridge, MA, CEOC, spoke in favor of the Rise Up program and provided examples of how beneficial it is to low-income families.

Tamika McKinney, 77 New Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the Rise Up program and shared their experience on how it has helped their family.

Lisa Nageuse, Intern for Co-Chair Nolan, shared the importance of defining steps on how City Council goals will be implemented to show how the budget will be effectively used to reach goals.

Co-Chair Nolan and Claire Spinner gave a brief presentation titled "City Council Goals and FY26 Budget Development". The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation gave an overview of the timeline of Finance Committee discussions on the FY26 budget development, Value Statement and City Council Goals, Executive Summary from the November 20, 2024 Finance Committee meeting, FY25 consolidated spending summaries, and FY25 expenditures by Department.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Toner who shared that he believes for this budget year it would be best to continue to focus on and maintain current programs and services and not try to take on any additional new

projects, based on the current economic situation and the uncertainty of what will happen on a national level. Co-Chair Toner asked if the City would be allowed to invest tax dollars into the Rise Up program. City Manager Huang responded that there is a possibility of a similar program being created, and that there would be more information related to Rise Up at an upcoming City Council meeting.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who expressed the challenges that come with discussing City Council goals when the Council is unaware of how much additional funding will be available in advance. The Vice Mayor shared that if there were additional funding available, he would like to see that money be used towards helping the more vulnerable residents because of the Presidential Administration and Congress. The Vice Mayor shared his strong support for the Rise Up program. In addition, the Vice Mayor offered comments on the importance of affordable housing in Cambridge and how funding can play a large role in making additional housing more successful.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized City Manager Huang who provided additional information on Consolidated Spending from Agenda Packet page 7 and how it relates to Council priorities and how the Operating Expenses on Agenda Packet page 9 are broken down by Department.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who asked for more information on Cherry Sheet and how it relates to the City budget. Taha Jennings responded and provided an overview of Cherry Sheet, noting that there is both revenue and expenditure that result from it. In addition, Taha Jennings explained the role that the State plays with Cherry Sheet. Claire Spinner provided additional information and examples on the different assessments that are made through the State and how they are beneficial to the City and School budgets. Councillor Zusy asked how much of the \$38 million is already accounted for because of cost-of-living increases. Taha Jennings explained that the Budget team is in the process of determining that information as FY26 discussions continue with various Departments. Councillor Zusy concluded by asking for more information on the opioid settlement. City Manager Huang responded and shared that the Advisory Committee will provide recommendations on the opioid settlement money and how it could be spent, noting that the idea behind the money would go towards new programming and support.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who had a follow up question on the Rise Up program and asked how much funding would be available in the FY26 budget for a Rise Up program. City Manager Huang provided a detailed overview of the City's financial stability and overall projection, pointing out that it would be better for the Council to ask the question of what in the budget would they like to make cuts on in order to find something new to spend on. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared examples of what he believes could have budget cuts, such as the Tourism and Police budgets. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler added that the Council has made it very clear in their goals and priorities that they would like the Rise Up program to continue. The City Manager explained that the challenge is finding space in the budget to continue funding Rise Up while also continuing to fund goals from this Council and past Councils. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler stressed how important it is to continue funding for afterschool and Universal Pre-K programming. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler pointed out how vital it is for City Administration to be transparent and clear during the budget process when City Councillors are discussing goals and priorities.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Wilson who shared her appreciation for the robust conversation related to the budget and highlighted how important it is to continue with efforts towards a Rise Up program. Councillor Wilson pointed out that it would have been beneficial for the Committee to know in advance of this conversation that cuts would need to be made in other areas of the budget to continue supporting members of the most vulnerable communities, sharing that Councillors could have come more prepared for that discussion. Councillor Wilson highlighted how crucial it is to listen to community feedback when it comes to the budget and proposed projects throughout the City. Councillor Wilson added that the quality of life for Cambridge residents should always be a priority for the City when there is an opportunity for the City to help support families. The City Manager agreed that it is important to be transparent on both ends throughout the process, and that the Rise Up program will be a long-term conversation to set expectations.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who shared her appreciation for comments made by previous Committee members. Councillor Siddiqui explained that if the City Administration is advising that the City Council make budget cuts in other areas in order to continue a Rise Up program, and support the most

vulnerable, then there needs to be guidance from the City on how to go through that process. Councillor Siddiqui shared that economic opportunity and equity is her main priority and pointed out that there is potential for private funding to assist with a Rise Up program. City Manager Huang suggested and reviewed two different options the City Council could take, such as defunding other areas in the budget or focusing on prioritizing the new ideas that are on the list.

Co-Chair Nolan shared that it is important for both the City Council and Administration to ensure that all of the budget is being evaluated in a way that ensures effectiveness. Co-Chair Nolan pointed out that initial plans for updates to Raymond Park were closer to \$8 million, which has been reduced to \$4 million, noting that the community shared the entire park does not need to be updated. Co-Chair Nolan provided comments and suggestions on how the City could bring in more revenue, such as increasing Resident Permit parking fees. City Manager Huang shared how the City has been responsive to making modifications to the Raymond Park plans, pointing out that the City has historically prioritized parks. City Manager Huang added that the funding for Raymond Park will be coming out of the Community Preservation Act, and not the Operating Budget. Co-Chair Nolan agreed with Committee members that there needs to be support for residents in the version of the Rise Up program.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Mayor Simmons who added additional comments related to parks in Cambridge. Mayor Simmons shared concerns about the changes that have been made towards street sweeping, noting that it does not look like the streets are as clean and questioned if the City was actually saving money. Mayor Simmons also asked the City Manager and Committee members to think about how tree wells are being treated and used throughout the City, and that it is important for neighborhoods to clean and be treated respectfully. Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Toner who shared that he believes the Administration and Finance Committee Co-Chairs have been transparent about what the FY26 Budget will look like as far as funding current and new programs. Co-Chair Toner agreed that Raymond Park does need to be updated to meet ADA requirements and also suggested that the City create a multi-year plan to address parks and facilities. Co-Chair Toner shared that he looks forward to working with Co-Chair Nolan, City Councillors, and the Administration to create goals and priorities which will direct staff to plan accordingly.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared it will be a difficult conversation to have when discussing making budget cuts and shared concerns about budget cuts being made to Departments that the City Council does not oversee. The Vice Mayor offered suggestions on how the Council and Administration can move forward with priorities and potential cuts, adding that it would be important for the City Manager and his team to meet with Department heads, based on previous discussions in the Special Committee of the Whole/Charter Review related to the budget. Vice Mayor McGovern added that it is also important to look at different ways to increase revenue, not just defunding areas in the budget, to reach goals.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized City Manager Huang who shared that as this conversation continues about potential budget cuts being made, it is important to recognize all of the City staff who deliver important services. The City Manager shared that he would be happy to sit down with Councillors to provide more detailed information on Departments and their funding if necessary and pointed out how the Finance and Budget team work with Departments to reach long-term financial priorities. City Manager Huang provided suggestions on how the Council could be more helpful as Administration and Councillors continue budget discussions and distinguish priorities.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Mayor Simmons who asked if there would be a follow up discussion related to Council priorities and the budget. Co-Chair Nolan shared that there is a Finance Committee meeting scheduled for April 16, 2025 which includes operating budget and capital expenditures.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who shared it would be helpful in the future for City staff to provide a cost to what Policy Orders are asking staff to do so the City Council understands what type of funding would be required. Councillor Zusy agreed it would be beneficial to look at ways to reallocate money in the budget.

On a Voice Vote of 7 members present, the Finance Committee voted in favor to extend the meeting by two minutes.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked what would specifically be helpful from the City Council as a next step for the FY26 budget. City Manager Huang provided suggestions on what next steps could look like, adding that an additional meeting before May could be beneficial.

Co-Chair Nolan shared that she would work with Co-Chair Toner and City staff to see if an additional meeting should be scheduled.

On a Voice Vote of 7 members present, the Finance Committee adjourned at approximately 5:09p.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/965?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Councillor Nolan, transmitting a presentation related to City Council Budget Goals.

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

From: Geeta Pradhan <gpradhan@cambridgecf.org>
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2025 11:26 AM
To: City Council; City Council; City Clerk
Cc: Elizabeth Patton; City Manager
Subject: Written public comment for 2/26/25 Finance Committee meeting
Attachments: Letter to Cambridge City Council Finance Committee on FY26 budget priority.pdf

Dear City Council,

Please see below and attached for a letter to the Finance Committee as written comment for today's meeting. I apologize for not being there in person as I am traveling.

With gratitude,
Geeta

Re: Support for FY26 funding for Rise Up Cambridge in City's budget

Dear Mayor Simmons, Vice Mayor McGovern, Councillor Azeem, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Siddiqui, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Councillor Toner, Councillor Wilson, and Councillor Zusy:

Thank you for supporting cash assistance for almost 2000 Cambridge families during the difficult times of the pandemic and for passing policy order (POR 2024 #131) last fall to look at next steps for Rise Up Cambridge. I am writing to encourage the Council to prioritize FY26 funding to support Cambridge families given the recent end of this program.

Early data from our external research partner MDRC shows that ARPA funding through Rise Up was critical in helping families to meet basic needs in Cambridge's high cost-of-living environment and to weather unexpected financial shocks such as rapidly increasing food prices. In addition, families were able to stabilize themselves, pay off some debt, and spend precious time with their children which resulted in better educational and behavior outcomes for their children. It is also important to remind ourselves that 54% of the population served by Rise Up were children under 21 years old, with the largest share under age 12. As such, continued investment in these families is also an investment in Cambridge's children.

As you are well aware, there is growing uncertainty about federal funding and changes which will likely affect healthcare, food, and other assistance – jeopardizing residents' economic stability and further fraying the safety net. Given that likelihood, it is prudent for the City of Cambridge to continue support for our most vulnerable families. It is important that we all – including the City, the Foundation and other institutions – are proactive about prioritizing the needs of Cambridge families in alignment with the Council's goal of Economic Opportunity and Equity.

We are grateful to City Manager Huang and City Solicitor Bayer for conducting an analysis of a successor program's feasibility in response to the policy order. We look forward to working with City Council members and others to outline options and considerations for how we might be able to support families now, even as we work together on policy solutions for the future.

My apologies for not being there in person as I am traveling. However, I strongly encourage the Council to allocate funding in FY26 for an immediate stopgap measure and to further explore the details of a Rise Up Cambridge successor program for the following year.

In partnership,

Geeta Pradhan, President
Cambridge Community Foundation

For more data on Rise Up Cambridge families and the program, see CCF's [Cash Empowers report](#) and MDRC's [Preliminary Findings from the Rise Up Cambridge Evaluation](#). Contact Elizabeth Patton (epatton@cambridgecf.org) for additional information on the latest MDRC findings.

GEETA PRADHAN

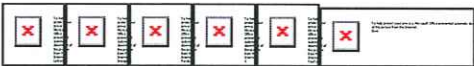
PRESIDENT



O: 617.431.3150

**99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA
02139**

CAMBRIDGECF.ORG





February 26, 2025

Cambridge City Council
Cambridge City Hall
795 Massachusetts Ave
Cambridge, MA 02139

Cc: City Manager Yi-An Huang

Re: Support for FY26 funding for Rise Up Cambridge in City's budget

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