



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND  
UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
AND  
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**COMMITTEE MEETING**

~ MINUTES ~

**Wednesday, July 21, 2021**

**2:00 PM**

**Remote Meeting**

**The Public Safety Committee and the Economic Development & University Relations Committee will meet jointly to hear from Saskia VannJames, President of the Massachusetts Recreational Consumer Council, on the importance of cannabis cooperatives and their potential role in the equitable development of Cambridge’s emerging recreational cannabis industry.**

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Quinton Zondervan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Timothy J. Toomey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The Economic Development and University Relations Committee and the Public Safety Committee held a joint public hearing on Human Services and Veterans Committee held a public hearing on Wednesday, July 21, 2021 at 2:00 p.m. to hear from Saskia VannJames, President of the Massachusetts Recreational Consumer Council, on the importance of cannabis cooperatives and their potential role in the equitable development of Cambridge’s emerging recreational cannabis industry.

Present via Zoom were Vice Mayor Mallon, Chair, Economic Development and University Relations Committee, Councillor Zondervan, Chair, Public Safety Committee, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Carlone, Councillor McGovern, Mayor Siddiqui, Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Lisa Hemmerle, Director of Economic Development, Christina DiLisio, Economic Development Department, Community Development Department (CDD), Arthur Goldberg, Deputy City Solicitor, Jennifer Matthews, Assistant to the City Manager, Sam Lipson, Director of Environmental Health, Susan Breen, Associate Chief of Public Health Nursing, Cambridge Health Alliance, Susan Mintz, Adult Employment Director, Office of Workforce Development, Dan Totten, Aide to Councillor Zondervan, Naomie Stephen, Executive Assistant to the City Council, and Paula M. Crane, Deputy City Clerk.

Also present via Zoom were Saskia VannJames, President of the Massachusetts Recreational Consumer Council, Tania Del Rio, Kavi Kaushik, Susan Breen, Interim Chief Public Health Officer, Nancy Porter, Director, Equity, Resilience and Preparedness, Cambridge Public Health Department, and Erika B.

Councillor Zondervan convened the hearing and read the Call of the Meeting and the Governor’s Executive Order regarding remote participation. He requested a Roll Call to indicate a quorum for the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

PRESENT:	Councillor Carlone, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Zondervan	-4
ABSENT:	Councillor McGovern, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Councillor Toomey	-3

A quorum was present.

Councillor Zondervan welcomed all present and introduced Saskia VannJames.

Ms. VannJames gave an overview of the PowerPoint presentation (**ATTACHMENT A**) titled “Solidarity Economy with Cannabis Coops Utilizing Public Safety & Public Health for an Intersectional Approach Towards Creating Sustainable Equitable Pathways for Economic Stability.”

Councillor Zondervan thanked Ms. VannJames and stated that there is so much to learn and a lot of work to do moving forward. He thanked Vice Mayor Mallon for co-hosting the hearing and he acknowledged Mayor Siddiqui and Councillor McGovern who were present at the hearing.

Councillor Zondervan noted that no one has signed up for Public Comment.

Ms. VannJames added that Boston recognized racial equity in their Public Health Department. She said that this is a neighboring city that has a Racial Equity Board that works with community members and the Health Department to help address the racial inequities in health because racism is the number one health crisis.

Councillor Nolan said that in regard to the idea of cannabis cooperatives, where are there successful models that are operating currently. She asked if there are any specific examples that the MRCC has worked with on cannabis cooperatives. Ms. VannJames said that they are a lobbying cooperative. She said that she believes that they are the only BIPOC women career founded in the state of Massachusetts and operates as a cooperative. She noted that lobbying nonprofits are usually not cooperatively structured. She said that her organization is aware of the cooperatives in the cannabis industry. She spoke about Hood Incubator and Bridges Academy that are up and operating but none are in Massachusetts. She said that previous Commissioners of the Cannabis Commission Board did not have a strong comprehension of cooperatives. She said that it was actually MRCC that successfully lobbied for a cooperative license to even exist. She said that they also successfully lobbied for the Equity Program to exist. She said that some are struggling to open their doors because of the land that is required. She said that they partner with Farm Bug Coop who has a wonderful black grower on staff. She said that another worker is a Somerville resident and is outspoken about racism in Somerville.

Vice Mayor Mallon asked Mr. Lipson to speak to what the Department of Public Health Department is doing currently to address racial inequities and health outcomes. Mr. Lipson deferred to the Interim Chief Public Health Officer. Ms. Breen stated that they are in the process of modeling a little bit after Boston. ~~She said that they were inspired and some of their thinking is about how we might model what we do is similar to what is happening in Boston.~~ She said that they attempted, but failed due to Covid, to create anis that they had an equity position which came through the school funding that they get annually through a grant. She said that they are restructuring to make that more of a permanent position in the department that will probably sit under Resilience. She said that they hoping to get this off the ground within the next six months, to have someone leading that department as a director and have the equity

work sit in there as well. Vice Mayor Mallon asked how that work will be broadcast to the public or available on the website so that residents can see the work that we are doing around the work of health and equity and outcomes. Ms. Breen said that when they were accredited, inequity was a crosscutting strategy. She said that in every domain to which they needed to demonstrate their abilities, it had to demonstrate what they were doing in those areas as well. She said that they would put something in all of the programming that you might find on the website. She said that it will be put on the website going forward. She said that they are a unique Health Department in that they sit within a hospital organization as well. They run a TB Clinic where they have done lots of work. She said that when she thinks about the programming side, a lot of the work is tagged with efforts towards making sure they are hitting communities where they feel that they really need to be and providing them with services that are needed. She said that they have never had a dedicated position but that is the goal.

Nancy Porter stated that there were a couple of things going on prior to the Covid pandemic that were very specific to cannabis and equity. She said that they had developed an entire campaign to try to get people to be aware that this is going on. Through that work, they realized that there were inequities. She said that cannabis is legal but if there is nowhere to smoke it or consume it legally, then you are still being placed in a position of being incarcerated or identified or targeted. She said that in an urban community such as Cambridge, you do not have the luxury of using cannabis anywhere you would like compared to a non-urban community. She said that the challenges that this is not legal federally but is legal in the state means that you cannot have consumers who live in buildings that are funded by the federal government be allowed to consume there because it is illegal. She said that the work that they have done focusing on young men of color in Cambridge is a pilot program and partnership with five other communities across the country called Building Community Resiliency. She said that it is being led by the American Public Health Association, George Washington University Center for Resiliency, and other entities including the CDC. They have been working on identifying the ways to disrupt the systems and looking at the systems to identify ways to disrupt what is happening on the ground when looking at it from the ground level as you cannot really adjust anything, you have to go up from there. She said that the soil has the pollutants that come from racism, redlining, gentrification and so what is coming out in the leaves. She said that there is mass incarceration, school to prison pipeline, young men of color disproportionately impacted by just about everything with the main cause being trauma. She said that it is not a program, it is about taking a bigger look at the systems in place and where the Public Health Department and City partners can get involved and disrupt the white supremacist approach to everything that has been done. She said that they have done a lot of work as it relates to the inequities around heat. She said that the Cambridge Community Corps members are a diverse group that has been making a point of finding out where seniors and those vulnerable are during the heat waves.

Vice Mayor Mallon highlighted that there is work being done by the Cambridge Public Health Department but when you go to look that stuff up, it is not readily apparent to residents. She said that it is great that these conversations are happening, but it is important to think about ways to make this work more public and available.

Ms. VannJames thanked the Cambridge Public Health Department for the work that is being done. She said that it does not have to be put on the website if you are engaging with community members. She said that social equity is not racial equity. They are two totally different terms, frameworks, and processes. She said that it is important when talking about racial equity for it not to be whitewashed and conflated into social equity. She said that she is specifically speaking about racial equity because the war on drugs was racially motivated, and it has disproportionately impacted the black and brown communities.

Councillor Carlone said that the presentation was an enormous amount of information. He suggested that next steps and early actions would be beneficial in order to focus better on the outcomes. He said that this would be very beneficial moving forward.

Councillor Zondervan asked Ms. VannJames for clarity around loan forgiveness and asking for 100% and getting 25%. Ms. VannJames responded that there is a bill at the State for a social equity fund to be created. She explained that we have businesses that are fighting to obtain licenses and there is no state funding for them. She said that they need state funding because currently their money is coming from private interests, and we can see how insidious these private businesses are lobbying and influencing local politics and local residents and trying to help drive corporate greed to influence public health. She said for MRCC, it means taking a moment to talk to senators and representatives to relay that this needs to happen yesterday. She said that they filed the first Social Equity Fund bill that did not pass the first year. Last year there was another bill filed by two commissioners. She said that this Social Equity Fund bill only had loans and it had a 10% set aside. She said that loans are a form of debt. She said that debt is not equity. She said that they are not happy about a loan. She said that this is about restitution. She said it is about accountability. The people at MRCC had a counter campaign to the commissioners to move in solidarity with the people. They had a campaign to fight for the language for loan forgiveness. She said that instead of the 10% set aside, they wanted that to be increased to 25% set aside.

Councillor Zondervan said that all of the information must be processed to look at next steps. He said that a few things that he did hear that we can begin to explore is how to take more action. He said that first and foremost, we have to center racial equity which has not been done properly. He said that we can invest in co-ops, provide space for co-ops and we can provide incubator space and services for co-ops to get started. He said that he appreciates any guidance that can be given to aid the City Council in acting.

Councillor Zondervan thanked Ms. VannJames for her work and her partnership. He thanked his colleagues, staff, and members of the public who participated.

Ms. VannJames thanked all present for their time.

Councillor Nolan made a motion to adjourn the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

YEA:	Councillor Carlone, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor McGovern, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Zondervan	-5
ABSENT:	Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Councillor Toomey	-2

And the hearing was adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

For the Committee,

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Councillor Quinton Zondervan, Chair  
Public Safety Committee

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Vice Mayor Alanna Mallon, Chair  
Economic Development and University Relations  
Committee

**A communication was received from Saskia VannJames, regarding a PowerPoint presentation titled "Solidarity Economy with Cannabis Coops Utilizing Public Safety & Public Health for an Intersectional Approach Towards Creating Sustainable Equitable Pathways for Economic Stability."**