



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026-76
IN CITY COUNCIL
March 30, 2026

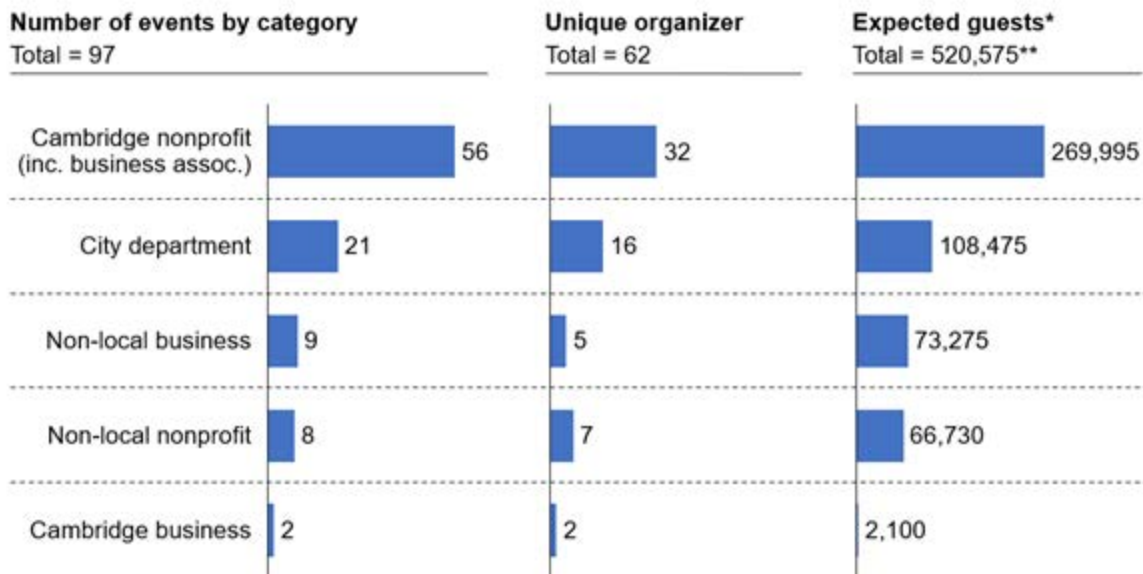
To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report #26-03 (formerly #25-48), which requested that the City Manager establish a formal policy that clearly defines the City's role and financial responsibilities in supporting large-scale public events hosted by Cambridge-based non-profit and not-for-profit organizations (hereafter referred to as "Cambridge nonprofits"), including criteria for fee waivers, we report the following:

Since the end of the 2026 outdoor event season, the City has undertaken extensive research and coordination across all departments involved in supporting public events, including Police, Fire, Public Works, Inspectional Services, Traffic, Parking & Transportation, the License Commission, Water, DHSP, CDD, and the City Manager's Office. This work involved reviewing operational practices, staffing patterns, cost structures, and permitting processes. Through this analysis, the City gained a more complete understanding of how public events operate across departments, how administrative and financial responsibilities are distributed, and where opportunities exist to make the system more consistent and predictable for both event organizers and the City.



Between Oct 2024 and Sep 2025, Cambridge hosted 96 special events organized by 62 organizers, drawing over 520,000 expected guests



Cambridge nonprofits and City departments/affiliates organized ~80% of the events, which accounted for 77% of the total expected attendance

*Expected guest figures are provided by event organizers

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**Excluding figure for one event, 2024 Komen More Than Pink Walk

As part of this research, the City analyzed event-related costs and spending and found that, during the most recent full year of available data, public events held in Cambridge generated approximately \$1,000,000 in total staffing and operational costs. Of this amount, the city departments absorbed roughly \$815,000 in unbudgeted costs, with the remaining costs charged to event organizers. The \$182,000 of costs that organizers paid consisted mostly of public safety details, licenses and food permits. Transportation and Public Works have been waiving their fees and absorbing service costs since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those 96 events cost ~\$1M in total, with the majority (82%, or ~\$815K) absorbed by the City and the rest (~\$182K) paid by the organizers

Event cost distribution by organizer category

Organizer category	Number of events	Total organizer-paid costs (\$ and % of total)	Total unbudgeted City-absorbed cost (\$ and % of total)	Total event costs
Cambridge nonprofit	56	95,368 (15%)	535,354 (85%)	630,723
City department	21	-----	207,974 (100%)	207,974
Non-local business	9	58,309 (52%)	53,601 (48%)	111,910
Non-local nonprofit	8	24,767 (66%)	12,635 (24%)	37,402
Cambridge business	2	3,534 (38%)	5,832 (62%)	9,366
Total	96	181,979 (18%)	815,397 (82%)	997,375

The City absorbed most event costs (85%) organized by Cambridge nonprofits

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Of the \$815,000 in costs the City absorbed, approximately \$535,000 was for community events held by Cambridge nonprofits, which is the focus of the Awaiting Report #26-03. In addition to these costs, the City also regularly supports large-scale unplanned events, such as protests, as well as events that are technically outside Cambridge but require significant City resources, such as the 4th of July celebration on the Charles River. These other events are not included in the cost calculation above.

The City has a desire to continue supporting community events held by Cambridge nonprofits, and we recognize the continued challenges faced by Cambridge organizations in paying these and other event-related costs. In addition, for City departments, continuing to absorb such a high portion of these costs through budget balances is not sustainable in these uncertain financial times, especially as we continue to ask our departments to look for savings and efficiencies. These findings reinforced the need for a more transparent, equitable, and data-driven framework for how the City supports community events organized by Cambridge nonprofits.

Starting in the Spring of 2026, the City will institute a Community Events Support Pilot Program to assist Cambridge nonprofits in organizing community events that benefit the public. This pilot is intended to strengthen community programming, ensure consistency in the City’s special event processes, and improve internal cost management.

We estimate that this Community Events Support Program will save our nonprofit event organizers over \$100,000 annually. FY27 will be the first year that many Cambridge nonprofits,

including community organizations and business associations, will no longer receive City pandemic-era financial assistance. Many continue to face economic challenges resulting from pandemic recovery and broader financial pressures. This pilot program is designed to help sustain community events, promoting economic development and stability, during this period while allowing the City to evaluate long-term needs and policy options.

Under the program:

- Certain City fees (such as food serving permits, park and street occupancy permits), will be waived.
- City service costs (such as Police and Fire details) will be covered.
- Some permit and license fees may fall under additional statutes and/or authority and may not be waivable.

All City fees and service costs must continue to be paid by the organizer for:

- Events organized by Cambridge nonprofits that do not meet eligibility criteria.
- Events organized by nonprofits or not-for-profit organizations that are not Cambridge-based.
- Events organized by any business or for-profit entity, regardless of location.

The pilot will be implemented in April of this year and budgeted for FY27. A review will take place prior to the start of the outdoor event season in the Spring of 2027.

A formal policy will be released in the coming weeks, but event eligibility for receiving Community Events Support will consist of the following:

- A complete Special Events Application.
- Event is held on Cambridge Property.
- Approval of all necessary permits and licenses.
- Organized by Cambridge nonprofits.
- Create positive public value, as determined by the Special Events Committee, including community and civic engagement, economic activity, and cultural and/or artistic celebration.
- Admission is free and open to the general public.

The Special Events Committee – which is an internal committee made up of all of the departments who review, approve, and help support events in the city will review events' eligibility based on these criteria and may approve or deny applications based on factors including, but not limited to:

- Whether the event meets all eligibility requirements.
- Timing and location considerations, including the need to avoid competing events.
- Whether the event only serves the interests of a single Cambridge business, or a non-Cambridge-based organization.

As in years past, event organizers must complete the City's Special Event application and apply for all required departmental licenses and permits. The Community Events Support process will be incorporated into the existing Special Events Application.

Since the majority of community events take place after June 30, funding for approved events for the remainder of FY26 (April–June 2026) will come from departmental budget balances. For FY27 the City will include a proposal to support this work as part of the FY27 Budget. This budget proposal will support:

- City service fees currently passed on to event organizers, such as public safety details, which would be waived under the program, and
- Unbudgeted staff overtime absorbed by departments that support community events.

Centralizing these resources into a single department budget will make it easier to track the true costs of supporting community events and identify efficiencies wherever possible. A review process will be done to evaluate effectiveness, budget capacity, fairness, and equity, and if the program continues, reviews will occur annually. Moreover, the City will also implement several measures to improve cost management and resource allocation, including cost evaluation and development of staffing guidelines. Finally, the City will also develop a mechanism to ensure that full costs are charged for public events that do not qualify for Community Event Support, and that these charges are applied consistently and fairly.

Community events that bring residents together are a part of what makes Cambridge a special place to live. Through this Community Events Support Pilot Program, the City aims to provide support to Cambridge nonprofits during a period of continued economic instability while promoting transparency, operational consistency, and fiscal responsibility. We will continue refining this framework and will update the City Council with our final implementation plan and formal policy.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi-An Huang', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager