

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE'S



JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, March 4, 2025	11:30 AM	Sullivan Chamber
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The Housing Committee and Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts and Celebration Committee will hold a joint public hearing to discuss zoning priorities focusing on major squares and corridors.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11:32 AM
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Remote
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Councillor Sobrinho -Wheeler, Co-Chair
- Councillor Zusy, Co-Chair
- Councillor Azeem
- Councillor Nolan
- Councillor Siddiqui

HOUSING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Azeem, Co-Chair
Councillor Siddiqui, Co-Chair
Vice Mayor McGovern
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler
Councillor Wilson

A joint public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee and Housing Committee was held on Tuesday, March 4 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:30a.m. by the Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts, and Celebrations Co-Chair, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this public meeting was remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll of both Committees.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Councillor Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent*
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

***Vice Mayor McGovern was recorded as present in the Sullivan Chamber at 11:32p.m.**

**NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING,
PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION
COMMITTEE**

Councillor Azeem – Present/In the Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Nolan – Present/Remote
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In the Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a joint public hearing to discuss zoning priorities focusing on major squares and corridors. Present at the meeting from the Community Development Department (CDD) were Jeff Roberts, Director of Zoning and Development and Daniel Messplay, Director of Community Planning and Design. Melissa Peters, Acting Assistant City Manager, and Chris Cotter, Housing Director, were both present via Zoom. Councillor Toner was also present via Zoom.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Melissa Peters who offered opening remarks and shared that it has been very helpful to have a clear set of priorities from the City Council on how the City should be prioritizing the zoning workplan. Melissa Peters explained that today’s focus would be to present an update on existing studies and a timeline as the zoning moves forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Daniel Messplay who gave a presentation titled “Planning and Zoning Projects for 2025”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. Daniel Messplay shared that the goal of the presentation and conversation was to revisit previously established timelines for current planning and zoning projects and share CDD’s plan for priority projects for the upcoming year.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler opened Public Comment.

Ethan Frank, 632 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, offered comments of support related to the presentation and timeline of zoning.

Michael Monestime, 614 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, CSBID, offered comments and suggestions related to Central Square rezoning.

Alison Field-Juma, 363 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, MA, offered comments on rezoning, corridors and squares, and the importance of educating the community of these proposed changes.

Richard Krushnic, 20 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, Cambridge Resident Alliance and Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition, shared concerns about proposed heights and how it relates to the AHO.

Marilee Meyer, 10 Dana Street, Cambridge, MA, shared that community outreach in Central Square has been good and offered comments on heights in Central, Porter, and Harvard Squares.

Rabbi Yoni offered comments and suggestions related to the proposed zoning.

Ruth Ryals raised concerns about how small businesses may be affected in the Mass Ave/Porter Square area.

Jason Alves, 544 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the Cambridge Street study and offered suggestions as the study moves forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Azeem who thanked CDD for their update and shared he was excited to start focusing on the Squares and inclusionary housing. Councillor Azeem asked the team if they could provide more information on zoning in the Northern Mass Ave area and Cambridge Street. Daniel Messplay shared that the plan is to have the whole corridor north and south of Porter Square completed by April, and the plan would be to bring an update with a summary and recommendations to the City Council and discuss what the timeline may look like as the City moves forward with planning. Jeff Roberts shared that CDD is in the process of drafting proposed zoning language for Cambridge Street and added that when staff give an update on Mass Ave, they can also show how Cambridge Street and Mass Ave align and receive feedback from the City Council on the direction they would like CDD to go with. Co-Chair Azeem shared he would like to see northern Mass Ave and Cambridge Street a priority and provided suggestions on how CDD can work with the City Council as this process continues. Councillor Azeem added that during this time it will also be good to continue discussions on Central Square and would be in favor of 12 stories versus 18. Councillor Azeem offered comments and suggestions related to residential use in certain areas of the City.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan who stressed the importance of understanding the current and past zoning timelines, pointing out that there have been joint Committee hearings on zoning before. Councillor Nolan added that it is important for people to understand the amount of work, goals, and thoughtfulness that has gone into this planning. Councillor Nolan provided suggestions on how the City can provide community outreach and agreed with comments made by Co-Chair Azeem related to Council input. Councillor Nolan shared she would like to see draft language for Central Square zoning within the next couple of months, noting that there has been zoning language created by community members in the past as well as a lot of community input. Jeff Roberts noted that the City Council directed staff to prioritize Central Square at the beginning of the term and staff has had much of its focus on that area. Councillor Nolan offered comments and suggestions regarding height limits and projections for 2040.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Toner who shared his support for rezoning in all three areas and would support development done in all the corridors. Councillor Toner provided suggestions on how to create more housing in North Cambridge and added that he would like to see development and prioritization in Central Square sooner rather than later. Councillor Toner offered comments on height limits and the number of units that could possibly be developed and pointed out that it could be challenging with today's economy. Councillor Toner shared support for the continued work on Mass Ave and Cambridge Street.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who agreed with other Councillors on how the City is moving forward. The Vice Mayor provided comments related to height limits and the importance of taking lot sizes into account when developers are looking at spaces. The Vice Mayor agreed with Councillor Toner noting that it is important to look at the economy and the costs related to creating developments. The Vice Mayor stressed the importance of neighborhood small businesses and making sure zoning does not affect them negatively. The Vice Mayor spoke in favor of changes made in Central Square and Cambridge Street and how they will benefit those communities. Vice Mayor McGovern offered the suggestion of creating a working group for Central Square to include community feedback and asked staff if that would be helpful for them moving forward. Daniel Messplay explained why a working group was not created for Central Square, pointing out that they were on a very aggressive schedule, so the engagement process looked different. Daniel Messplay added that an advisory group would be helpful for where they are in the Central Square process. Jeff Roberts added that it is up to the City Council how they would like to move forward with zoning, and the work and the progress that has been made on Central Square was based off language in a Policy Order.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Wilson who noted how important it is for community engagement, input, and feedback in partnership with City Council goals. Councillor Wilson asked if CDD has gone back to the community to receive feedback on the 18-story development in Central Square before considering building additional developments with the same height. Daniel Messplay responded by providing an overview of how the engagement process is first initiated and the review process within the community. Daniel Messplay explained that CDD will take both positive and negative feedback as guidance on the best way to move forward with projects. Councillor Wilson shared that she would like to have more discussions and partnerships with the community and the City regarding rezoning in Central Square and would be in favor of seeing Cambridge Street and northern Mass Ave continue with the work that is being done there in the meantime. Councillor Wilson added that there is a lot of potential for Central Square, pointing out that it is important to be thoughtful during the process.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Zusy who echoed comments made by Councillor Toner regarding the financial challenges that may arise with new development within the next couple of years and Councillor Wilson regarding community engagement. Co-Chair Zusy asked if the City could clarify why it has been difficult to advance zoning recommendations in Central Square with all the studies that have been conducted in the past and currently. Daniel Messplay explained that part of this meeting today was to discuss community engagement, receive Council feedback and directives, and try to resolve the outstanding issues regarding Central Square. Co-Chair Zusy offered suggestions on development sites in Central Square and community engagement.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler shared that he agrees with other Councillors about prioritizing Northern Mass Ave and Cambridge Street. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler offered suggestions regarding Northern Mass Ave and Cambridge Street and pointed out that they are both unique areas and to take that into consideration if they will be worked on at the same time. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler added that Northern Mass Ave would be able to provide more opportunities at this time for an increase in housing units.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Azeem who offered the suggestion of a motion and a vote to help direct CDD to move forward. Co-Chair Azeem thanked the City for their hard work and recognized that these are always challenging conversations.

Co-Chair Azeem offered the following motion. That the City Manager be requested to direct the Community Development Department to prioritize Cambridge Street and Northern Massachusetts Avenue first and introduce the necessary zoning language. The motion was shared on the screen

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler opened the floor for discussion of the motion.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan who shared that she would like to move forward with Central Square but understands there needs to be additional discussion with the community and Council. Councillor Nolan added that she would like to see Central Square be prioritized once Northern Mass Ave and Cambridge Street are completed.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Zusy who asked for clarification if the City was ready to move forward with Northern Mass Ave based on discussions she had with Melissa Peters and indicated that she would like to see Central Square be prioritized in Councillor Azeem's motion. Melissa Peters pointed out that the presentation provided information that Mass Ave is being finalized, and the process should conclude in April

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion to extend the meeting by fifteen minutes.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll of both Committees.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

**NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING,
PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION
COMMITTEE**

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes

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

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared that he would like to see work being done in Central Square but also recognizes that there needs to be more engagement and discussion with the community.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan who offered a proposed amendment to the motion. Councillor Nolan shared at the end of the motion she would like to add “and to continue working on Central Square as soon as practicable.”. The proposed amendment was shared on the screen.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler, Co-Chair Zusy, and Councillor Wilson shared that they would be in favor of the proposed amendment.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler made a motion that the City Manager be requested to direct the Community Development Department to prioritize Cambridge Street and Northern Massachusetts Avenue first and to introduce the necessary zoning language and to continue working on Central Square as soon as practicable.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll of both Committees.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

**NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING,
PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION
COMMITTEE**

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Wilson who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll of both Committees.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed

**NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING,
PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION
COMMITTEE**

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed

The joint Housing and Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration adjourned at approximately 1:33p.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.granicus.com/player/clip/970?view_id=1&redirect=true

I. Communications and Reports from Other City Officers

- 1. A communication was received from Director of Community Planning & Design, Daniel Messplay transmitting staff presentation titled Planning & Zoning Projects for 2025.**

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

From: Suzanne Blier <suzanne@ccoalition.org>
Sent: Thursday, March 6, 2025 7:50 AM
To: Belinda Rathbone
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Re: Our squares and corridors

Thanks so much for writing! And yes to historic preservation.
Suzanne

From: Belinda Rathbone <belindarathbone@gmail.com>
Date: Monday, March 3, 2025 at 7:18 PM
To: dsimmons@cambridgema.gov <dsimmons@cambridgema.gov>, mmcgovern@cambridgema.gov <mmcgovern@cambridgema.gov>, Nolan, Patricia <pnolan@cambridgema.gov>, ssiddiqui@cambridgema.gov <ssiddiqui@cambridgema.gov>, bazeem@cambridgema.gov <bazeem@cambridgema.gov>, jsobrinhowheeler@cambridgema.gov <jsobrinhowheeler@cambridgema.gov>, Toner, Paul <ptoner@cambridgema.gov>, amwilson@cambridgema.gov <amwilson@cambridgema.gov>, czusy@cambridgema.gov <czusy@cambridgema.gov>
Cc: clerk@cambridgema.gov <clerk@cambridgema.gov>
Subject: Our squares and corridors

Dear Members of the Cambridge City Council -- As a Cambridge resident, I urge you to take a careful view of our squares and corridors - not repeat past mistakes with "luxury housing upzoning." Cambridge doesn't need another one-size-fits-all plan, and we definitely don't want further erosion of resident rights. Don't cherry-pick sites for political expediency. Instead, I strongly urge you to focus on the needs of the vast majority of Cambridge residents: not even more luxury condos, and not fall for the disproven 'supply-and-demand' claims. Don't ignore the costs: infrastructure upgrades, rising property taxes, constant street closures and detours, and higher utility bills. I urge the council to look at the facts, plan smarter, and prioritize people.

I also urge you not to abandon **historic preservation** in the pursuit of these housing goals.

Sincerely,
Belinda Rathbone

Erwin, Nicole

From: Lynne Reiss <lreiss82@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 9:50 AM
To: Simmons, Denise; McGovern, Marc; Nolan, Patricia; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Azeem, Burhan; Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan; Toner, Paul; Wilson, Ayesha; Zusy, Catherine
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Our squares and corridors

Dear Members of the Cambridge City Council --

As a Cambridge resident, I urge you to take a careful view of our squares and corridors - not repeat past mistakes with "luxury housing upzoning." Cambridge doesn't need another one-size-fits-all plan, and we definitely don't want further erosion of resident rights. Don't cherry-pick sites for political expediency. Instead, I strongly urge you to focus on the needs of the vast majority of Cambridge residents: not even more luxury condos, and not fall for the disproven 'supply-and-demand' claims. Don't ignore the costs: infrastructure upgrades, rising property taxes, constant street closures and detours, and higher utility bills. I urge the council to look at the facts, plan smarter, and prioritize people.

Sincerely,

Lynne Reiss
76 Oxford St.

Erwin, Nicole

From: Diane Ballestas <dballestas@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 7:42 AM
To: Simmons, Denise; McGovern, Marc; Nolan, Patricia; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Azeem, Burhan; Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan; Toner, Paul; Wilson, Ayesha; Zusy, Catherine
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Our squares and corridors

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Thank you,
Diane Ballestas

Erwin, Nicole

From: David Hattis <davidwhattis@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 3, 2025 11:29 PM
To: City Council; City Clerk
Subject: In Support of Multifamily Housing in Squares and Corridors

Hello,

I am in support of allowing for taller buildings to allow for more market rate and affordable housing in Cambridge's squares and corridors.

Envision set a goal of 12,500 homes by 2030. That goal was over a period of about 12 years, so to have met that goal, we would have needed to build around 1,000 homes every year for 12 years. The AHO is a wonderful tool that has been quite successful getting desperately needed affordable homes built. Though vitally important, the AHO is limited in how much housing it can produce with available public funding. During the multifamily housing process, CDD estimated that we can expect to build about 100 AHO homes a year going forward (<https://cambridgema.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=4157&Inline=True>). So to be at the pace of meeting our Envision housing goal, we would have needed to build about 900 market rate/inclusionary homes in addition to the 100 AHO homes every year for 12 years starting in 2018. I fully support finding ways of increasing the funding for affordable housing to make the AHO even more impactful, as well as exploring other ideas (like Montgomery county's public housing model) to increase the number of affordable homes we're able to build. For the foreseeable future however, it is clear that we need a large quantity of market rate housing to meet our housing goals.

It's also true that we need a large quantity of market rate housing to meet our affordable housing goals. Envision's affordable housing goal was 3,175 affordable homes by 2030, which is about 265 affordable homes a year over those 12 years. If CDD is right and we can expect around 100 AHO homes every year, that means that to have met our affordable housing goal, we would have needed to build about 165 inclusionary homes every year in addition to the 100 AHO homes. Allowing for more height in squares and corridors is crucial to making that happen.

We need an all of the above approach. AHO homes, inclusionary homes, and market rate homes all are needed. With adequate density, we can get enough of all these kinds of homes to address our housing needs. And if in the future we get a public housing program up and running, it too will be more effective and will produce more homes if more height and density are permitted in our corridors and squares.

Thank you,
David Hattis
393 Broadway

Erwin, Nicole

From: Belinda Rathbone <belindarathbone@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 3, 2025 8:18 PM
To: Simmons, Denise; McGovern, Marc; Nolan, Patricia; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Azeem, Burhan; Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan; Toner, Paul; Wilson, Ayesha; Zusy, Catherine
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Our squares and corridors

Dear Members of the Cambridge City Council -- As a Cambridge resident, I urge you to take a careful view of our squares and corridors - not repeat past mistakes with "luxury housing upzoning." Cambridge doesn't need another one-size-fits-all plan, and we definitely don't want further erosion of resident rights. Don't cherry-pick sites for political expediency. Instead, I strongly urge you to focus on the needs of the vast majority of Cambridge residents: not even more luxury condos, and not fall for the disproven 'supply-and-demand' claims. Don't ignore the costs: infrastructure upgrades, rising property taxes, constant street closures and detours, and higher utility bills. I urge the council to look at the facts, plan smarter, and prioritize people.

I also urge you not to abandon **historic preservation** in the pursuit of these housing goals.

Sincerely,

Belinda Rathbone