



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

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

11:00 AM

Sullivan Chamber

**The Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee will hold a public hearing to receive an update on the state of the arts in Cambridge and discuss how the City is currently supporting artists and art organizations through grant programs and funding, with a focus on the Central Square Cultural district.**

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

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee was held on Wednesday, March 5, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:00 a.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Zusy. 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 Zusy, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.**

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
  - Councillor Nolan – Present
  - Councillor Siddiqui – Absent
  - Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent
  - Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.**

Co-Chair Zusy noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing to receive an update on the state of the arts in Cambridge and discuss how the City is currently supporting artists and art organizations through grant programs and funding, with a focus on the Central Square Cultural district. Present at the meeting were Owen O’Riordan, Deputy City Manager, Matt Nelson, Director of Operations and Administration, Jason Weeks, Executive Director of Cambridge Arts, Claudia Zarazua, Arts and Cultural Planning Director, Jared Staley, Community Planning and Design, Daniel Messplay, Director of Community Planning and Design, Geeta Pradhan President of the Cambridge Community Foundation, Michael Monestime, President and CEO of Central Square BID, Christina Turner, Vice President, Programs and Grants CFF, and Nancy Rihan-Porter, Director of Resilience and Emergency Preparedness for the Public Health Department. Councillor Wilson was also present.

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

I’ve lived in Cambridge 30 years now and during this period it has grown more corporate and lost much of its funk. If we want Cambridge to remain a creative, dynamic, innovative place, we must do so intentionally and that means we must invest in the arts and artists.

Artists are divergent thinkers—they see the world in a different way and they are extraordinary problem solvers. We need them now more than ever.

Currently, we dedicate less than \$2m of our \$1b City budget to the Arts and Celebrations [via the Cambridge Arts Council].

This is a missed opportunity.

There is no stronger way to bring a community together than with the arts.

Scientific studies say that the arts make communities healthier. (Like exercise, they reduce stress and loneliness and ailments such as hypertension and heart disease.)

And the numbers show that the arts infuse our economy. A 2017/2018 Cambridge Arts & Economic Prosperity Study noted that the arts delivered \$174m to Cambridge and almost \$14m in local and state government revenue annually.

The arts build social cohesion, encourage self expression, nurture a healthier community and make Cambridge a place people want to live and visit. They make Cambridge an interesting place...

Art, nature and the love of friends and family sustain me. Seeing or hearing something beautiful or that makes me think or see the world in another way makes my life so much richer. I am not alone in this; that's what art does—for everybody.

Thank you all for being here today.

A quick nod to former Councillor Alanna Mallon who chaired the 2019 Mayor Arts Task Force under then Mayor Marc McGovern and to the establishment of the 2012 Central Square Cultural District and the 2019 Central Square BID. These three things have provided us with a strong foundation. They are how we got to where we are today.

I look forward to hearing from our presenters.

Co-Chair Zusy recognized Jason Weeks who offered opening remarks and gave a presentation titled "Arts and Cultural Programming in Cambridge". The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of Cambridge Arts, cultural planning and space planning, Central Square BID and the Cultural District, and Cambridge Community Foundation (CCF) economic mobility and social cohesion.

**Co-Chair Zusy opened Public Comment.**

Marisol Rosa, 119 Windsor Street, Cambridge, MA, Community Art Center, urged the Committee to ensure community based organizations are included in conversations around preserving space for arts and culture for those who lack access.

Peter DiMuro, 536 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, The Dance Complex, shared they were grateful for the support from the CFF and look forward to continued conversations.

Rus Gant, 23 Sidney Street, Cambridge, MA, MIT, offered comments related to Graffiti Alley and asked for the space to be more available and safer.

Phyllis Bretholtz spoke on the importance of artists having space to display their artwork.

Co-Chair Zusy recognized Councillor Nolan who noted the importance of assessing what is being done related to art and art organizations. Councillor Nolan provided suggestions on how the Department of Public Works could be more involved with creating more art in the City, similar to a program that is being run in Boston. Councillor Nolan stressed how important it is to communicate with the different art organizations in the City so they are aware of the different opportunities the City may be able to provide them. Christina Turner shared that

they are in the process of creating an arts organization directory to understand who is operating within Cambridge and partner with Cambridge Arts to provide information to people that are on their mailing list. Jason Weeks added that the intent is to make sure communication is flowing appropriately to bring all those involved in arts and culture together. Christina Turner shared that Foundations across the state have put data together for the different cultural organizations in Massachusetts and that information will be released within the next few weeks. Councillor Nolan highlighted how important art programs are for people of all ages and for programs to be successful. Councillor Nolan added that she would support what needs to be done for Cambridge to continue support in arts and culture. Councillor Nolan provided suggestions on what topics could be discussed in the future related to economic impacts and setting up goals.

Co-Chair Zusy recognized Councillor Wilson who shared excitement for the richness of art in Cambridge and the diversity of people involved. Councillor Wilson offered comments on sustainability and housing for artists to create a community where people can share their art, learn, and grow in a space together. Councillor Wilson asked if there were suggestions on how to provide more support to the artist community. Jason Weeks provided information on how many conversations there have been regarding utilizing public dollars to support artists and what tools are available to help support them more. Christina Turner added that there are several groups that are already advocating and speaking on the needs and support of artists. Claudia Zarazua shared how housing for artists is a topic that comes up regularly and how the City is working towards those efforts. Councillor Wilson asked if there is a database available to the public who are interested in hiring artists for specific projects or events. Jason Weeks explained that there is not one specific database that holds that information, but there are databases that have that information. Geeta Pradhan shared that the Massachusetts Cultural Council has a database that provides information on 700 individual artists and art organizations. Councillor Wilson provided suggestions on what should be included in Cambridge databases. Councillor Zusy shared that the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association provides information on vendors for events. Co-Chair Zusy shared her experience visiting the Midway Studios in the Seaport and the opportunities that are provided there.

Co-Chair Zusy offered comments on the state of non-profits in the City and their funding needs and how important it is to communicate that to the public. Co-Chair Zusy asked Geeta Pradhan for clarification on funding programs. Geeta Pradhan provided information on two funding programs, Community Fund and the Cultural Capital Fund, which they are in the process of building, and what they offer. In addition, Geeta Pradhan shared there are challenges when discussing funding with possible donors as well as conversations with artists on what support they would like to see with the funding. Councillor Wilson highlighted the importance of investing in the arts to ensure art continues to thrive in the community. Co-Chair Zusy asked Geeta Pradhan if there was information on how much funding is currently available in the funding programs. Geeta Pradhan shared information on the Grant making process and possible outcomes of funding.

**Co-Chair Zusy recognized Councillor Nolan who made a motion to extend the meeting by five minutes. Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.**

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

Councillor Zusy – Yes

**Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.**

Co-Chair Zusy asked the Task Force to clarify if 15% of hotel taxes are still going to the arts and if the City is still getting the full 1% for art. She asked if there were any updates the Committee should know about. Jason Weeks responded by sharing that the Arts Council does get 1% of the funding to support the public art program. Deputy City Manager O’Riordan added that he would be able to provide information on the 15% at a later point. Michael Monestime provided information on the 2019 Arts Task Force and suggestions that were brought forward by former City Councillor Alanna Mallon related to the inclusion of the Office of Tourism and the arts. Matt Nelson shared information on how the Office of Tourism currently supports the arts as well as the many events that the City of Cambridge holds that provide an opportunity for cultural and creative spaces.

Co-Chair Zusy recognized Councillor Nolan who provided suggestions on how to spread the information in today’s presentation to the community.

**Co-Chair Zusy made a motion to adjourn the meeting.**

**Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.**

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

Councillor Zusy – Yes

**Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.**

**The Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee at approximately 1:07p.m.**

**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/971?view\\_id=1&redirect=true](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/971?view_id=1&redirect=true)

**A communication was received from Assistant to the City Manager, Matthew Nelson, transmitting a presentation titled Arts and Cultural Programming in Cambridge.**