

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
Monday, March 30 2026**

ORDINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor McGovern, Co-Chair
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Co-Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor Flaherty
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Simmons
Councillor Zusy
Mayor Siddiqui

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Ordinance Committee was held on Monday, March 30, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:00 a.m. by the Co-Chair, Sobrinho-Wheeler. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. 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, Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/Remote
Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent
Councillor Flaherty – Absent
Councillor McGovern – Present/Remote
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Simmons – Absent*
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Absent*
Mayor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 5, Absent – 4

*Councillor Zusy was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 11:03a.m.

*Councillor Simmons was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 11:18a.m.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to review the Community Benefits Ordinance and discuss potential updates including allowing the allocation of funding to community organizations for capital projects. Present at the meeting was Chief of Administration and Operations for Community Development, Sandra Clarkee, Assistant Director of Adult and Family Services for Human Services, Sue Walsh, Budget Director, Taha Jennings, City Solicitor, Megan Bayer, and Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Sandra Clarkee and Sue Walsh who gave a presentation related to Community Benefits. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan who asked for additional information regarding the outreach that was done related to the proposed amendments and highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders, as well as maintaining a balance between citywide and neighborhood needs. Sandra Clarke provided a brief overview of past engagement efforts and explained that the current amendments relied more on input from the Advisory Committee and nonprofit representatives rather than community outreach. Councillor Nolan emphasized the importance of community engagement and noted that there should be a more inclusive and collaborative process moving forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Mayor Siddiqui who expressed strong support for the proposed amendments and spoke in favor of expanding allowable uses to include capital expenses. Mayor Siddiqui asked if there was a timeline for distributing the remaining funds, noting the ongoing challenges nonprofit organizations are facing. Sandra Clarke responded that the Committee is in the process of developing a timeline, with the goal of having a stronger plan by the summer months, she emphasized that the Committee is focused on creating a sustainable process. Mayor Siddiqui urged the Committee to consider distributing the funds sooner given the urgency of nonprofit needs.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Zusy who asked for clarification regarding the 17 guiding principles and raised questions about how the Community Benefits Fund relates to other types of community benefits, such as open space, and other projects that support the community. Councillor Zusy offered comments related to the importance of understanding how these decisions are made and how priorities are balanced when working with developers, and what role the City has in those conversations. Councillor Zusy emphasized the need to balance nonprofit funding with broader community needs and acknowledged that there are many competing priorities across the City, such as housing. Councillor Zusy expressed support for the proposed amendments. Melissa Peters explained that Community Benefits funding comes from voluntary developer contributions tied to zoning agreements and clarified that while the City cannot require contributions, the fund is a preferred option when working with developers.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler expressed support for allowing funds to be used for capital expenses and asked whether the proposed changes would allow for the purchase of property. Megan Bayer responded that it would most likely be allowed. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler also raised concerns about the amount of funding currently available and noted that the City should work toward establishing a more consistent and sustainable funding source in the future. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler suggested that the City explore a more structured approach moving forward. Staff emphasized that increasing awareness among developers is an important step in encouraging more contributions.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Simmons who asked if there is a requirement within the Ordinance for a regular review process and suggested that a formal review process every three to five years could help ensure the program remains effective and equitable.

Councillor Simmons added that the original intent of the Ordinance was to address gaps across neighborhoods within the City. Councillor Simmons expressed support for the proposed amendments. Sandra Clarke noted that the Committee has produced reports following the different funding cycles, but there is currently no formal review requirement included in the Ordinance.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who asked whether the City could advance funding based on pledged future contributions in order to provide support to nonprofit organizations now. City Solicitor Megan Bayer explained that the City would not be legally permitted to advance the funding because the funds come from private contributors and are not guaranteed.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair McGovern, who raised concerns about potential confusion surrounding the term “community benefits.” Co-Chair McGovern noted that the term can refer to both community-related projects, such as sidewalks and parks, as well as funding for nonprofit organizations. He suggested that providing a clearer definition would improve transparency and help distinguish between these uses. Co-Chair McGovern also suggested that the Committee consider more consistent and predictable approaches to allocating funds moving forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler summarized the comments and concerns raised during the discussion and shared that the next step would be to forward the proposed amendments to the full City Council.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Mayor Siddiqui who made a motion to forward the proposed amendments to the Community Benefits fund to the full City Council with a favorable recommendation.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Flaherty – Absent

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan - Yes

Councillor Simmons – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 6, No – 0, Absent – 3. Motion passed

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Simmons who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Flaherty – Absent

Councillor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Simmons – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Siddiqui – Yes
Yes – 6, No – 0, Absent – 3. Motion passed

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:

[Mar 30, 2026 Ordinance Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)

[Deletions are in ~~strikethrough~~ and additions are underlined and bold.]

Chapter 2.127 COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

2.127.010 Established.

There is hereby established a Community Benefits Advisory Committee (the "Committee") to accomplish the purposes set forth herein.

2.127.020 Purpose.

The purpose of the Committee is to identify the community benefits needs of the residents of Cambridge based on the priorities established by the City Council and to solicit and evaluate applications with proposals to address the community benefits needs for the provision of said services by qualified applicants in order to make recommendations to the City Manager for the allocation of Community Benefits Funds for the award of grant agreements or contracts. ~~for the provision of said services.~~

2.127.030 Definitions.

"Applicant" shall mean a Community Based Organization applying to the City to provide Community Benefits subject to a grant agreement or contract.

"Application" shall mean a proposal by an Applicant to enter into a grant agreement or contract to provide Community Benefits.

"Community Based Organization" shall mean a non-profit entity registered pursuant to 26 U.S.C. § 501(c)(3) that provides Community Benefits.

"Community Benefits" shall mean the provision of programs or services, or capital and/or operating expenses of a Community Benefits Organization that are related to an necessary for a Community Benefits Organization to provide programs or services, that directly benefit Cambridge residents including but not limited to human services, the arts, cultural enrichment, sustainability measures, public health, housing, educational programs focused on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics ("STEAM") and other areas of community enrichment provided by Community Based Organizations.

"Community Benefits Advisory Committee" or "Committee" shall mean the Committee established by this Chapter and appointed by the City Manager.

"Community Benefits Funds" or "Funds" shall mean any funds offered to and received by the City in connection with the enactment of an amendment to the City's Zoning Ordinance or other agreements entered into with the City which provide funds to the City and are held by the City to be expended for community benefits or other related purposes.

"Community Benefits Stabilization Fund" or "Stabilization Fund" shall mean a stabilization fund established by the City to hold Community Benefits Funds.

"Funding Priorities" shall mean funding goals declared by the City Council for the expenditure of Community Benefits Funds in Cambridge.

(Ord. 1375, 12/21/2015)

2.127.040 City Council Goalsetting—Appropriations.

The City Council shall periodically review and update ~~assess~~ the City's Funding Priorities based in part on the Committee's identification and assessment of a needs assessment conducted every three to five years and submitted by the City Manager in order to identify Cambridge's most pressing Ccommunity Benefits needs, which will be reported to the City Manager. In his report, the City Manager may shall make recommendations to the City Council regarding the appropriation of funds from to the Stabilization Fund. The City Council may make appropriations to the Stabilization Fund after it receives the City Manager's annual recommendations.

2.127.050 Powers and Duties of the Committee.

To carry out its responsibilities under this Chapter, the Committee shall:

- A. Make recommendations to the City Manager for the award of grant agreements or contracts for Community Benefits to be paid for from the Stabilization Fund consistent with the City Council's Funding Priorities.
- B. Establish rules, regulations and guidelines to provide for the proper administration and implementation of the Committee's responsibilities in consultation with City staff and as approved by the City Manager.

2.127.060 Committee Process.

The Committee shall conduct ~~a public annual meeting and additional~~ public meetings as needed to accomplish the following:

- A. Prioritize needs, possibilities and resources regarding Community Benefits based on the City Council's Funding Priorities. Subject to and consistent with the City Council's Funding Priorities, the Committee shall consider the following guiding principles:

Frame Needs Thoughtfully

- 1. Fund programs or services that directly benefit Cambridge residents.
- 2. Emphasize funding priorities established by the City Council informed by the Committee's identification and assessment of needs. ~~outcomes of the needs assessment.~~

3. Prioritize support for vulnerable and underserved populations.

- ~~34.~~ Consider neighborhood(s) impacted by development projects.

Build on Existing Assets and Programs

- ~~54.~~ Consider other public resources allocated to a neighborhood in order to better understand unmet needs.

6. Foster awareness of and connection to existing programs and services.

7. Prioritize approaches that leverage other private and public resources.

8. Encourage an asset-based approach that recognizes and builds on the resilience of Cambridge residents and communities.

Promote Holistic Approaches, Innovation and Collaboration

- 9. Recognize the inter-connectedness among community needs.**
- 10. Emphasize holistic and creative ideas that promote prevention and coordination across systems and organizations.**
- 11. Remain open to bold and innovative approaches to challenging issues.**
- 12. Recognize that addressing community challenges takes time and provide the latitude for longer term interventions.**
- 13. Prioritize funding for nonprofit applicants that promote collaboration, partnership and collective impact.**
- 14. Encourage and incorporate program evaluation to identify which strategies work best.**

Simplify the Application Process

- 15. Establish a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative process.**
 - 16. provide support and technical assistance to nonprofits in the application process to ensure equal opportunity and access.**
 - 17. Consider opportunities for renewable grants to returning nonprofit providers that have an excellent performance evaluation record and programmatic success.**
- ~~5.— Prioritize funding for nonprofit applicants that promote collaboration, partnership and collective impact.~~
 - ~~6.— Establish a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative process.~~
 - ~~7.— Provide support and technical assistance to nonprofits in the application process to ensure equal opportunity and access.~~
 - ~~8.— Provide opportunities for renewable grants to returning nonprofit providers that have an excellent performance evaluation record and programmatic success.~~
- B. Develop requests for Applications to provide Community Benefits consistent with the City Council's Funding Priorities.
 - C. Evaluate Applications for the provision of Community Benefits.
 - ~~1.— The Committee shall not consider Applications requesting expenditures for an Applicant's capital or infrastructure projects or general operational expenses.~~
 - D. Develop or establish recommendations to the City Manager for the award of a grant agreement or contract for the provision of Community Benefits.

2.127.070 Membership—Appointment—Term.

- A. The Committee shall consist of thirteen members appointed by the City Manager, including the City Manager or his or her designee who shall serve as the Chair.
- B. The members shall be appointed for terms of three years. The term of the City Manager or that of his or her designee and any City staff designees shall not expire.
- C. The Committee shall be comprised of the following representatives—three **(3)** members shall be representatives of non-profit organizations that provide services to Cambridge residents; three **(3)** members

shall be City staff designees including the City Manager or his or her designee; four (4) members shall be Cambridge residents, who shall be residents of the City at the time of appointment; one (1) member shall be a representative of the Cambridge Community Foundation; one (1) member shall be a representative of the City's business or property development community; and one (1) member shall be a representative from one of the City's universities or colleges. At least two (2) of the non-profit representatives shall be **selected by and provided to the City Manager** ~~appointed from a list of at least four nominees provided~~ by the Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition so long as that organization submits ~~said list~~ **the selections** in a timely fashion.

- D. If any appointed Committee member misses half of the scheduled meetings of the Committee during any calendar year, the absences of the Committee member shall be reviewed by the Chair and the Chair may recommend dismissal and replacement of such member to the City Manager.

2.127.080 Officers—Quorum—Rules and Regulations—Committees.

- A. The City Manager shall appoint a Vice Chair. The Vice Chair shall chair a meeting or meetings in the Chair's absence.
- B. Seven members shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of convening a meeting and of conducting the business of the Committee. The Committee shall approve its actions by majority vote.
- C. All records of the Committee shall be public except as provided by State law.
- D. Committee members shall serve without compensation.
- E. Committee members shall be classified as special municipal employees for the purpose of Chapter 268A of the Massachusetts General Laws.

2.127.090 Effective Date.

This Chapter shall take effect upon its passage.

[Clean version of ordinance with revisions]

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