



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

~ MINUTES ~

Thursday, March 20, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

The Economic Development and University Relations Committee will hold a public meeting on March 20, 2025, from 3:00p.m.-5:00p.m. This meeting will be a Cannabis Roundtable with cannabis businesses to discuss issues facing the retail cannabis industry in Cambridge and discuss potential changes, including adjustments to the current 1,800 foot buffer zones and introduction of social consumption.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3:10 PM
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Economic Development and University Relations Committee was held on Thursday, March 20, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Toner. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 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 Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent*

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Siddiqui was marked present and in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:10p.m.

The Chair, Councillor Toner offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a Cannabis Roundtable with cannabis businesses to discuss issues facing the retail cannabis industry in Cambridge and discuss potential changes, including adjustments to the current 1,800-foot buffer zones and introduction of social consumption. Present at the meeting from the Community Development Department (CDD) were Christina DiLisio, Economic Development Specialist, Pardis Saffari, Director of Economic Development, and Melissa Peters, Acting Assistant City Manager for CDD. Megan Bayer, City Solicitor, was also present as well as Councillor Zusy and Mayor Simmons. Chair Toner introduced the panelists and cannabis business owners that were invited for the roundtable discussion, which included Richard Harding, Taba Moses, Sean Hope, and Marcus Johnson-Smith. Sean Hope and Marcus Johnson-Smith joined via Zoom.

The Chair, Councillor Toner opened Public Comment.

Jonathan Tucker, 200 Monsignor O’Brien Highway, Somerville, MA, The Boston Garden Dispensary, offered comments that were not in favor of the removal of the 1800-foot buffer zone and shared some of the challenges faced by business owners.

Jamil Myrie, 1960 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, urged the Committee to think about the impact of economic empowerment businesses if the 18-foot buffer zone were removed.

Michael Latulippe, 966 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the amendment to remove the buffer zone between cannabis retailers.

Damond Hughes, 57 JFK Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in favor of keeping the buffer zone.

Sieh Samura, 580 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, Yamba Market Central Sq, offered comments that were in support of removal of the buffer zone.

Marcus Johnson-Smith spoke on challenges of the cannabis industry and how important it is to have legislation in place to help ensure businesses can operate for the long run.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Richard Harding who offered opening remarks and thanked the Committee for inviting business owners to the discussion. Richard Harding shared examples of his experiences opening a cannabis business and shared how, no matter what changes are made, each cannabis business will be affected differently.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Taba Moses who offered opening remarks and questioned how the removal of the buffer zone will help current businesses and why the City is considering its removal.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Christina DiLisio who gave a presentation titled “Cannabis Roundtable, Industry Issues and Policy Discussion”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered a review of common terms, overview of the 1800-foot buffer rule, social consumption special terms, social consumption State regulations, and Cambridge regulations impacting social consumption. Committee members and panelists were recognized throughout the presentation for clarifying questions and remarks. Christina DiLisio and City staff were available to respond.

The Chair, Councillor Toner had clarifying questions related to the selling of a cannabis business. Christina DiLisio explained the different scenarios and what criteria need to be met for the seller and buyer.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Zusy who asked for clarification on the different requirements of the economic empowerment applicant versus the social equity applicant. Richard Harding responded by providing the distinction between the two, pointing out that it is complicated. In addition, Richard Harding shared the process of applying for economic empowerment and social equity applications.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Sean Hope who expressed concerns about how the group of people business owners can partner with and sell to are limited. Sean Hope shared that for a business to be equitable, there should be higher diversity and wage requirements, and provided suggestions on how the City can allow opportunities for additional cannabis businesses.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Taba Moses who pointed out that if the buffer zone were removed and there were a cap on licenses at the same time it would be conflicting. Taba Moses shared the challenges that arise when the City is saturated with cannabis businesses. Taba Moses suggested looking at additional ways to help receive funding for cannabis businesses so they can thrive and pointed out that it is important for business owners to have an exit strategy.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who provided an overview of why the Ordinance language on the buffer zone was created. Richard Harding explained that the language was helpful for economic empowerment businesses to get started, but the language also creates challenges for the business owner who is creating an exit strategy and trying to sell their business. The Vice Mayor noted that it is a very challenging conversation to have with many factors involved and asked for clarity on the number of businesses that could be allowed in the city if there were a cap. Megan Bayer explained that the City Council can chose to impose a cap, pointing out that it could not be less than 20% of the number of liquor licenses, and if it were less than 20% it would need to be voter approval. Megan Bayer shared that as of December 2024 there were 46 off

premise retail liquor licenses in the City. Megan Bayer added that right now there is no cap, and the Council could do anything between 20% and no cap.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Wilson who shared that she appreciates the conversation. Councillor Wilson stressed that if a Policy Order was created related to this topic it is important to recognize and think about unintended consequences.

The Chair, Councillor Toner asked for clarification on the different criteria associated with proposed State regulations related to social consumption. Christina DiLisio provided information and examples of supplemental, hospitality, and event social consumption. The Vice Mayor asked how cannabis smoking would be permitted inside if cigarette smoking is prohibited. Christina DiLisio reviewed the designated consumption area options and provided concerns that the State has raised related to indoor consumption.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked if there are any social consumption sites currently in Massachusetts. Christina DiLisio pointed out that there are currently no social consumption sites and shared concerns that have been raised by the State.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Siddiqui who shared that it is important for the City to focus on one thing at a time and should create a timeline to address the buffer zone first and then move on to the topic of social consumption.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Mayor Simmons who agreed that the conversation on social consumption should not be rushed, and it would be important to have cannabis business owners invited to those discussions. Mayor Simmons asked if there have been any changes made to the extension of the priority period. Megan Bayer responded by providing an update on the priority period being able to lapse to open all of the Priority A and Priority B applications. Mayor Simmons shared that she would like to have more discussion related to this in the future.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Richard Harding who provided examples of how social consumption can benefit a cannabis business and different methods that could be used to provide a space to smoke on the premise of the business for customers. Richard Harding pointed out that it won't be a simple task to create policies related to social consumption.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Zusy who asked if saturation and the decrease in costs for cannabis are reasons why some businesses are not profitable at this time. Taba Moses provided an overview of State regulations related to cultivation when cannabis businesses were first allowed and how it affected new businesses. Taba Moses also shared how the market plays a huge role for businesses to make money and become profitable. Mayor Simmons noted how underground markets impact cannabis businesses, pointing out that it is a regulated market competing with an unregulated market. Richard Harding provided additional comments that explained why the cost of the product is decreasing and what factors play a role in that.

The Chair, Councillor Toner offered closing remarks and added that Cambridge is dealing with microeconomics and reasons why people succeed or not.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Wilson who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Yes – 5. Motion passed.

The Economic Development and University Relations Committee adjourned at approximately 4:58p.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/985?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Christina DiLisio, Economic Development Specialist, transmitting a presentation related to the Cannabis industry.

A communication was received from Christina DiLisio, Economic Development Specialist, transmitting a presentation from the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission.