



HUMAN SERVICES & VETERANS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Thursday, April 10, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

The Human Services and Veterans Committee will hold a public hearing on April 10, 2025 to discuss services being provided to the unhoused community and an update on the opioid settlement funds.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4:09 PM
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3:53 PM

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Human Services and Veterans Committee was held on Thursday, April 10, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern. 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, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Nolan – Present/Remote

Councillor Siddiqui – Present/Remote*

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Wilson – Present/Remote*

Present – 5. Quorum established.

*Councillor Wilson went from remote participation to the Sullivan Chamber at 3:53p.m.

*Councillor Siddiqui went from remote participation to the Sullivan Chamber at 4:09p.m.

Co-Chair McGovern offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss services being provided to the unhoused community and an update on the opioid settlement. Present at the meeting was City Manager, Yi-An Huang, Assistant City Manager for the Department of Human Services (DHSP), Ellen Semonoff, and Planning and Development Manager for Cambridge Continuum of Care, Liz Mengers. Also present in the Sullivan Chamber was Councillor Zusy and Councillor Toner was present via Zoom.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized City Manager Huang for opening remarks. The City Manager shared that these are never easy conversations and hopes the discussion today will be able to provide some reasoning to Councillors on the difficult decisions the administration has to make, especially when it comes to the unhoused community and the current economic environment.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Ellen Semonoff who gave a presentation titled “Homelessness Services Update”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Co-Chair McGovern opened Public Comment.

Gaelan Larkins-Ford, Spaulding Resident, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in strong support of the Transitional Wellness Center and shared experiences growing up in Cambridge.

David Haith, 362 Green Street, Cambridge, MA, shared their positive experiences as a resident of the Transitional Wellness Center and urged the City to continue to fund it.

James Geldern, 1575 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were in strong support of the Transitional Wellness Center and how the program works with residents to enter in society.

Angelo Cooney, 1575 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, shared how the Transitional Wellness Center has helped them.

Avinash Raman, 1575 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, stressed how the Transitional Wellness Center assists those who do not have addiction and how hard situations can happen to anyone at any time.

Jim Stewart, 11 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in strong support of the Transitional Wellness Center and shared how more services could be used with the opioid settlement funds.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, highlighted how the Transitional Wellness Center provides stability and certainty to residents and urged the City to not close it.

Anthony K, Spaulding, Cambridge, MA, shared how the Transitional Wellness Center plays a strong role in assisting residents in finding work.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked how the City plans to balance different types of shelters and available resources. Ellen Semonoff responded by providing a brief overview and history of when Cambridge became a sole funding source for specific shelters as well as information on funding partnerships with the State. Ellen Semonoff explained that in time the City hopes to continue to be able to fund and provide more supportive housing cohesively with other housing programs that the City offers.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who asked if the costs related to the expansion of services are a one-time cost or an ongoing cost. Ellen Semonoff shared that it was one-time funding in addition to other sources of funding for the programs. Liz Mengers noted that in addition to State funding, the Housing Authority is adding vouchers to those spaces and there are Medicaid reimbursed services as well. Councillor Nolan noted that it is important to balance City funding and outside funding to support these services.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked what upcoming years will look like as it relates to similar services or projects that the City is currently thinking about. City Manager Huang explained that there are no future projects being discussed currently and provided information on the opportunities for housing the City can provide now and possible additional opportunities the City can work towards in partnerships with other funding sources. Councillor Siddiqui shared how important it is to continue to discuss long-term goals and what that may mean for future Council discussions.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Co-Chair Wilson who shared that it is important to discuss how the City can continue to invest in short-term and long-term goals and priorities. Co-Chair Wilson asked how many additional Spaulding residents need to be placed in a different location and what the estimated \$3 million covers. The City Manager explained that the \$3 million is for the operation of the entire 55 bed shelter and pointed out that there has been a lot of work going towards transitioning people out of the Transitional Wellness Center and ensuring they have a different location to go to. Liz Mengers provided information on how Baycove is working towards an exit plan for residents, noting that new residents have not entered the Transitional Wellness Center, and there are around twenty people left to be placed. Co-Chair Wilson asked what options residents have if they do not want to be placed at a specific shelter, such as 240 Albany. Liz Mengers explained that options are very limited because of overall shelter capacity across the region, but there have been intentional efforts being made for the last two years to create a transition pathway. Co-Chair Wilson asked the City and Councillors what it would look like if the City were to keep the Transitional Wellness Center open for an additional year. City Manager Huang pointed out that the question that we should be asking is how to think about broader systems and the City's role to allocate resources. The City Manager stressed how difficult it is to make decisions on what programs should be funded and the City has explained and shared since the beginning that the Transitional Wellness Center was only meant to be a Pandemic one-time funded shelter. City Manager Huang noted that the

City is going to have to continue to make difficult decisions as it relates to funding due to a potential decrease in federal funding. Co-Chair Wilson added how important it is to have conversations and expand on quality-of-life services and how those programs positively impact people's lives.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who suggested taking what is being done at the Transitional Wellness Center and providing that at other facilities as well as investing in the structure of current facilities, noting that rethinking about what the City already has could work towards maintaining certain services.

Co-Chair McGovern pointed out the many ways the City is already helping the unhoused community but noted that it never feels like it is enough. Co-Chair McGovern shared that this is an issue that Cambridge cannot solve on its own and there need to be strong efforts made regionally to address the problem. Co-Chair McGovern added that it is important to look at what type of support people in the Transitional Wellness Center or other shelters need compared to someone who may be further along in their goals and more self-sufficient and pointed out that support for one individual may look different than another. Co-Chair McGovern shared his support for the Transitional Wellness Center continuing to be funded and urged residents there to consider alternative housing options that are being presented to them due to the Transitional Wellness Center closing in June.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized City Manager Huang who shared how valuable this discussion has been, adding that closing the Transitional Wellness Center has not been an easy decision. The City Manager shared he would like to see the City's role be focused on preventing homelessness and creating pathways versus being an operator of a temporary shelter. The City Manager reviewed goals and priorities within the upcoming FY26 budget and the importance of transparency with administration and the City Council. Ellen Semonoff shared some of the challenges that may occur if the Transitional Wellness Center remained open for an additional year, adding that there are many things that are valuable in the Transitional Wellness Center than other shelters.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Siddiqui who noted that not all Councillors were involved in the ending of ARPA funding conversations.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who shared that it is not an easy job for the City Manager to make decisions related to the financial welfare of the City.

Co-Chair McGovern stressed the importance of the Council priorities to be respected by the administration. City Manager Huang pointed out the many priorities that the City has been working on under the direction of the Council, such as the Affordable Housing Trust, Climate, Universal Pre-K, and Community Safety. The City Manager noted that there are fiscal restraints within the budget, and not all priorities can be addressed immediately, but it is important to be transparent with each other to discuss which priorities should be accomplished first.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Co-Chair Wilson who added that it is important as the Council and administration go forward with finance and budget conversations that they work together collaboratively.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Co-Chair Wilson who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Absent

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

The Human Services and Veterans Committee adjourned at approximately 5:02p.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/994?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Department of Human Services, transmitting a presentation related to an update on Homelessness Services.

A communication was received from Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Department of Human Services, transmitting a presentation on Opioid Abatement Funds.