



# HUMAN SERVICES & VETERANS COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Thursday, April 17, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

**The Human Services and Veterans Committee will hold a public hearing to discuss the feasibility of a successor program to Rise Up.**

| Attendee Name          | Present                             | Absent                   | Late                     | Arrived |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Marc C. McGovern       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Patricia Nolan         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Sumbul Siddiqui        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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"/> |         |

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Human Services and Veterans Committee was held on Thursday, April 17, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Wilson. 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

**At the request of Co-Chair Wilson Clerk of Committees called the roll.**

Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

**Present – 5. Quorum established.**

Co-Chair Wilson offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing to discuss the feasibility of a successor program to Rise Up. Present at the meeting was City Manager, Yi-An Huang, Assistant City Manager of Fiscal Affairs, Claire Spinner, Assistant City Manager of Human Services, Ellen Semonoff, First Assistant City Solicitor, Elliott Veloso, and Diane Pires, Assistant City Solicitor. Also present was Councillor Zusy. Panelists that were present at the meeting were Elizabeth Patton, Chief of Staff for the Cambridge Community Foundation, Tina Alu, Executive Director of CEOC, and Geeta Pradhan, President of the Cambridge Community Foundation.

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

Jeffrey Thomas, Inman Square, shared how cash assistance has been helpful.

Tamara Christalin, East Cambridge, shared how the Rise Up program has been important to her and her children and urged the City to continue with a similar program.

James Zall, 203 Pemberton Street, Cambridge, MA, urged the City to continue to help residents.

Johanny Maria Castillo, East Cambridge, shared how the Rise Up program has helped her family.

Rabbi Yoni provided suggestions on other services the City can offer to assist residents.

Claudia Cadett, Columbia Street, Cambridge, MA, urged the City to continue to help residents with a Rise Up program.

Jody Ramkissoon, Harvard Street, Cambridge, MA, urged the City to continue to help residents with a Rise Up program.

Tabithalee Howard, North Cambridge, shared how the Rise Up program has been important to her and her children.

Co-Chair Wilson offered brief remarks and an overview of how this topic came to Committee as well as highlighting how the Rise Up program has positively impacted Cambridge families.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Tina Alu and the team of panelists who gave a presentation titled “Cash assistance for Cambridge families”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. Tina Alu shared that the goal for the presentation was to share a preliminary analysis of program design and costs that can inform the City Council in the FY26 budget discussion and future City budgets. Co-Chair Wilson thanked the panelists for all of their work.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized City Manager Huang who shared his appreciation for the work that has been done through the Law Department, CEOC, and the Cambridge Community Foundation. City Manager Huang explained that there is a lot of work to be done, including program design, and shared possible concerns that could arise if the City were to fund a similar program to Rise Up. Elliott Veloso provided a brief overview of the memo (which was included in the Agenda Packet), noting that there is a path to move forward, but as the City Manager mentioned, there are some concerns.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who pointed out that many recipients of Rise Up are hard working employees and residents of Cambridge. The Vice Mayor added how important it is for people who have more are doing more for those who have less. The Vice Mayor shared it would be an interesting analysis to see exactly how much money is being invested in residents of the community and the importance of social economic diversity.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked if there were any thoughts on what an iteration of a new program would look like and how funds would be transferred to recipients. Tina Alu provided a brief overview of how Rise Up recipients currently receive their money through direct deposit or a debit card and would like to continue to offer those same options. City Manager Huang reviewed the options presented in the Law Department memo, noting that there would need to be more discussion on this because it is not something the City has a complete answer to. Councillor Siddiqui pointed out that with the ARPA funding for Rise Up there was language that explained what the money would be restricted to. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared strong support for a program like Rise Up to continue and working to figuring out how to incorporate it in the upcoming budgets.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Councillor Nolan who shared her appreciation for having this conversation and pointed out that the attrition rate was extremely high in the pilot assessment. Councillor Nolan added that it would be important to have an analysis done of which participants left and why. Councillor Nolan offered the suggestion of possibly getting a distinction between groups and backgrounds. Councillor Nolan offered comments about the Treatment Group and Control Group within the pilot and shared the different outcomes between the two and how important it is to understand what led to the outcomes. Councillor Nolan had a clarifying question relating to waivers which Elizabeth Patton responded, noting that there was an analysis done through the City Manager’s Office and the Appendix in the last page of the presentation offers detailed information on eligibility.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Councillor Zusy who asked for more information on the attrition within the program and who has been managing the benefits for the recipients. Councillor Zusy offered the suggestion of providing cards to specific stores, such as Market Basket. Elizabeth Patton provided a brief overview of the attrition that was done through the course of the study that the University of Pennsylvania did. Geeta Pradhan added that the community of people who were involved in the study often have very difficult lives, working multiple jobs and taking care of children, which could have made it harder for researchers to keep in touch with

them. Geeta Pradhan pointed out that the randomized control study happened during Covid which could have produced different outcomes due to what was happening during that period. Tina Alu shared how the CEOC works with a third party for the \$500 distribution to recipients and will assist recipients if any issues occur. Tina Alu added that the CEOC would continue to play that role if a potential program were to continue. Councillor Zusy shared concerns about a program being funded through free cash and urged the City to find money from somewhere else.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who expressed how the anecdotal data and stories are much more difficult to measure versus a study with data and it is important to stay focused on those factors as well when considering a possible program.

Co-Chair Wilson recognized Councillor Siddiqui who thanked the panelist and Committee members for the discussion and shared how important it is to work towards smart goals. Councillor Siddiqui noted that there were restrictions that were clearly defined, even within ARPA, and believes that people were using the money for basic needs. Councillor Siddiqui thanked the Co-Chairs for holding this meeting to bring everyone together and discuss what the next steps could be.

Co-Chair Wilson pointed out how the \$500 can help with financial goals and bring opportunities to people. Co-Chair Wilson highlighted how important it is to think about outcomes and empowering members of the community who are receiving assistance. Co-Chair Wilson asked how partnerships are being made to help recipients create and achieve goals. Tina Alu shared how the CEOC was able to work closely with recipients of the Rise Up program and noted that when the program first started, there was a survey sent out to people asking what other support services they would like to be provided by the CEOC. Tina Alu added that financial coaching was the top answer and provided an overview of how CEOC worked with recipients to help them with that.

Co-Chair Wilson and Vice Mayor McGovern reviewed with the Committee possible next steps. The Co-Chairs agreed to keep the topic in Committee with the intent of creating a Policy Order to have a discussion with the Finance Committee at a later date.

**Co-Chair Wilson recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.  
Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

**Yes – 5. Motion passed.**

**The Human Services and Veterans Committee adjourned at approximately 4:57p.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/1003?view\\_id=1&redirect=true](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/1003?view_id=1&redirect=true)

**A communication transmitted from Yi-An Huang, City Manager, relative to Awaiting Report Item Number #24-58, regarding the feasibility of a successor program to Rise Up Cambridge.**

**A communication was received from Councillor Wilson, transmitting a presentation related to Rise Up.**

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

**From:** James Zall <jzall@comcast.net>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 17, 2025 4:32 PM  
**To:** City Council; City Clerk; City Manager  
**Subject:** Continuing the Rise Up program (Committee hearing, April 17)

Dear Councilors,

I've heard residents who feel they have too much traffic on their streets come to the Council. Councilors have said that they want to help, and they've come up with ways to do that.

The City also has programs to help local retailers and restaurant owners succeed in their business. Homeowners have long enjoyed an extraordinarily low tax rate engineered by the city and many of us receive an additional half-million dollar exemption on the value of our homes.

Residents who are passionate about 19th century architecture and design receive assistance from a network of Neighborhood Conservation Districts that keep their neighborhoods in line with their preferences.

The voices of many low income Cambridge residents are quoted in the slides from CEOC and CCF in your packets today. Their request for a continuation of the help they've received from the Rise Up program is no less worthy of the city's efforts than the other programs I've mentioned, and that help is likely to bring greater benefits to the recipients and the city as a whole.

The City Solicitor has evaluated a continuation of the program and found that the main area of uncertainty lies in not restricting what the benefits can be spent on. She's right to alert the city to potential legal issues, but there's another issue outside this analysis that should be considered.

Recently, the city called on Harvard University to stand up and do the right thing. Harvard is now doing just that, at great cost and potential risk to their entire institution. Cambridge should also stand up -- and even Rise Up -- and find the funds to continue the unrestricted grants to Rise Up participants, who have a median income of just \$23,650 even though 72% are employed.

I ask that the Council and City Manager use the exceptional wealth of Cambridge to do the right thing, to continue helping the disgracefully high percentage of our neighbors who badly need this help and yet are being directly targeted by our own Federal government.

Thank you,

James Zall  
203 Pemberton Street