



ORDINANCE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

11:30 AM

Sullivan Chamber

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11:36 AM
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"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12:16 PM
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11:37 AM
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Ordinance Committee was held on Tuesday, April 29, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:30 a.m. by the 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 Chair, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent*

Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Nolan – Present/Remote

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote

Councillor Toner – Absent*

Councillor Wilson – Absent*

Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Mayor Simmons – Present/Remote

Present – 5, Absent – 4. Quorum established.

*Councillor Azeem was present and remote at 11:36a.m.

*Councillor Wilson was present and remote at 11:37a.m.

*Councillor Toner was present and remote at 12:16p.m.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing on a Zoning Petition by the Cambridge City Council to amend the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance in Article 11.000 with the intent to amend certain subsections of the Affordable Housing Overlay, Section 11.207 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, with the intent of limiting allowable height increases in Residence C-1 districts, removing references to provisions in the base zoning that are no longer applicable, and clarifying references to departments responsible for enforcement. Present at the meeting was City Solicitor, Megan Bayer and from the Community Development Department (CDD) was Acting Assistant City Manager, Melissa Peters, Director of Zoning and Development, Jeff Roberts, and Associate Zoning Planner, Evan Spetrini.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Evan Spetrini who gave a presentation titled “Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Heights and Zoning Petition”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation provided an overview of the intent of the proposed amendments.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern opened Public Comment.

Marilee Meyer, 10 Dana Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the original amendment to Resident C1 and language that was added.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, agreed with comments made by previous speaker and noted that the City Council promised to have limits to the new C1 district.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy for clarifying questions related to open space on lots and questions on corridors. Evan Spetrini and Jeff Roberts responded by affirming that it is 5% required for lot open space and a review of C1 districts, height limits, and amendments that were adopted in 2023, pointing out that this petition does not change height limits that are allowed on the AHO corridors. Councillor Zusy stressed the need for open space in affordable housing and that 5% is a low number. Councillor Zusy shared concerns about building heights on smaller corridors.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who pointed out on Agenda Packet page 12, the chart shows that in regard to the 2025 Multifamily Housing nothing changed related to height limits except 4 stories and up to 7 stories. Evan Spetrini confirmed and noted that the affective change to the AHO from the 2025 Multifamily Housing was the base zoning. Jeff Roberts provided additional information and shared what the proposed amendments are addressing in the AHO with the 2025 Multifamily Housing addition. Councillor Nolan shared she would support the changes and suggested at a future date the Council discussing defining corridors.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Azeem who shared he would support the amendments although he was not in favor of them. Councillor Azeem provided clarification to some of the concerns that have been raised related to height limits and open space and pointed out that nothing has changed because of Multifamily zoning.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern shared some of the challenges that were raised when addressing different priorities as it relates to open space and height limits. Vice Mayor McGovern shared that 99% of residents are within a quarter mile of open space, which was information presented in a previous report from CDD. The Vice Mayor suggested that to address concerns about the additional 3 stories and the 5% open space, just eliminate that language. Megan Bayer pointed out that there would be concerns if the Committee were to eliminate paragraph E of Section 11.207.5.2.1 because it would be a fundamental change to the petition.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Azeem who made a motion to accept the amendments and forward them to the full City Council with a favorable recommendation.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 7, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Azeem who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Yes – 7, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

The Ordinance Committee adjourned at approximately 12:20p.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/1006?view_id=1&redirect=true

An Ordinance has been received from City Clerk Diane P. LeBlanc, relative to amend certain subsections of the Affordable Housing Overlay, Section 11.207 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance REFERRED TO THE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE AND PLANNING BOARD FOR HEARING AND REPORT IN COUNCIL MARCH 17, 2025

A communication was received from Evan Spetrini, Associate Zoning Planner, transmitting a presentation related to the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Heights Zoning Petition.

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

From: Marilee Meyer <mbm0044@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, April 28, 2025 6:12 PM
To: City Council; McGovern, Marc; Azeem, Burhan; Zusy, Catherine; Toner, Paul; Simmons, Denise; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Peters, Melissa; Roberts, Jeffrey; City Clerk
Subject: ORDINANCE- PLEASE NO FURTHER HEIGHT IN C-1 RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

4-28-25

Dear Ordinance Committee and Councilors,

I am concerned about the discussion about AHO heights and language that has basically been cooked for a long time by strong housing advocates. **They seem to have forgotten an amendment was proposed not to have AHO building exceed 9 stories in C-1 residential districts.** This would also be affected by the bonus 3 stories for 5% green space making heights in C-1 up to 12 stories. This would include small neighborhoods

This was a late policy order on February 10th, 2025 stated:

That the City Manager direct the Community Development Department and Law Department to draft an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance that make the provisions of Section 11.207.5.2.1, Paragraph (e), which allow qualified increases in building height under the Affordable Housing Overlay, not applicable in the Residence C-1 district.

POR 2025 #16 (Order adopted 9-0-0)

This change to Subsection 11.207.5.2.1 (e) was not included in the MFHZ petition because the Law Department deemed it beyond the scope of the MFHZ that had been advertised.

Please eliminate the 3 bonus stories for 9-story AHO projects (12 stories) in C-1 residential neighborhoods. The scale would be untenable for particular locations.

FURTHER, CDD has changed the language of Council's promise to community as expressed in POR 2025 #16 and now at Ordinance. The new language is as follows:

An AHO Project may exceed the allowable height limitations of the previous paragraphs of this section, not to exceed three additional stories or thirty-five feet (35') of additional building height, under the following circumstances.... The AHO Project is not located in a Residence C-1 district, unless it is also on an AHO Corridor Lot or within an AHO Square.

THIS IS NOT WHAT WAS SOLD TO THE PUBLIC AND READS AS SLIGHT OF HAND TO MAXIMIZE HEIGHT EVERYWHERE WITHOUT CONSIDERATION.

Streets like Broadway, Cambridge Street, Concord Ave and Mt Auburn Street are AHO corridors but also have block after block of C-1 zoning on one or both sides of the street. 12 stories are allowed, BUT NOT IF THEY ARE C-1 DISTRICTS. Three extra bonus stories for minimal return of 5% green space should not be allowed in C-1 zoning areas because that was never agreed to. Rather, the community received a promise that 9 stories would be the limit in C-1 residential neighborhoods, not

12 stories even if they were on corridors. There was an extended discussion using Concord Ave as an example of blocks of neighborhoods on a narrow st.

Maintaining 9 stories on corridors would contribute to the rhythm of the streetscape, and transitions to older neighborhoods which seem to be lost in this constant shuffling.

C-1 districts tend to be residential and don't necessarily include first floor retail spaces which is expected on corridors.

C-1 residential districts should be protected as density and modest height moves forward. You have already claimed quite the victory. Please look for balance in implementation.

The Planning Board was clearly confused by its charge to vote on whether C-1 was exempt from added height, when they thought heights of 15- and 18- stories were already ordained. That was not the question and CDD did little to clarify the issue which was extra height beyond the promised 9 stories only in C-1 districts. Pro-housing councilors would hardly point that out either.

The Councilors, in ordaining Multi-family, also eliminated the city exemption from the Dover Amendment keeping educational and religious institutions from spreading into neighborhoods where they take up housing. Maybe that is where proponents find more votes over previous ordinances.

Also ignored was the Anderson Petition which paused height between Lee and Trowbridge streets as a corridor, not as an extension of either Harvard or Central Squares, boundaries residents do not identify with. One-track Councilors seem to steamroll over previous ordinances to further their own agendas. This too, is not fair.

Please abide by the original Petition passed unanimously to cap heights in C-1 districts at 9 stories- PERIOD- which is still like plopping a Sheraton Commander Hotel in the middle of the PORT, CAMBRIDGEPORT or North Cambridge. Please look for balance in your advocacy.

Thank you.

Marilee Meyer

10 Dana St