



FINANCE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

The Finance Committee will hold a public hearing to review and discuss capital and large-scale programs and projects currently underway and in the funding plan, and potential future programming and projects that would need to be planned and incorporated into medium- and long-term capital and operating budgets.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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"/>	
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"/>	
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, April 16, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, 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.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan addressed the Committee, attendees, and those listening to the live stream that there were technical difficulties occurring with Zoom, and Zoom is unable to start. Councillor Nolan shared that the Law Department would provide guidance on whether the meeting can be held because the meeting was advertised as hybrid. Elliott Veloso, First Assistant City Solicitor, stated that if the best efforts were made to address the problem, it is under the discretion of the Chair if the meeting goes forward. Councillor Nolan pointed out that staff have been making every reasonable effort to address the technical difficulties and called the meeting to order.

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/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Mayor Simmons – Absent

Present – 7, Absent – 2. Quorum established at 3:27p.m.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing to review and discuss capital and large-scale programs and projects currently underway and in the funding plan, and potential future programming and projects that would need to be planned and incorporated into medium-and long-term capital and operating budgets. Present at the meeting was City Manager, Yi-An

Huang, Deputy City Manager, Owen O’Riordan, Budget Director, Taha Jennings, Assistant City Manager for Fiscal Affairs, Claire Spinner, Assistant City Manager of the Department of Human Services, Ellen Semonoff, and Commissioner of Public Works, Kathy Watkins.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Claire Spinner who gave a presentation titled “Capital and Large-Scale Programs”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized City Manager Huang who offered brief remarks related to the Federal Government funding and funding cuts. The City Manager stressed how the City is committed to ensure the vulnerable population still receives City support if Federal funding disappears. City Manager Huang added that there is a broader set of work being done to address the unhoused by focusing on prevention, housing stabilization, and permanent supportive housing. The City Manager shared that he looks forward to discussing the budget collectively and making decisions together on how City resources are being used.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan opened Public Comment.

Geeta Pradhan, 99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of a successor program to Rise Up.

Tina Alu, 113 ½ Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of a successor program to Rise Up.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of continuing to fund the Transition Wellness Center and offered suggestions on how the City can continue to fund.

Gerald Bergman, 82 Elm Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about those who need emergency shelter and the Transition Wellness Center closing, also spoke in favor of a successor program to Rise Up and Universal Afterschool.

Robert Winters shared that it is important to maintain most of excessive levy capacity. He noted that there are many items that could be categorized as discretionary, he would like to see more effort in having reasonable efficiency in municipal buildings. He spoke in favor of the stabilization fund, and shared concerns about the increase in tax levy.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councilor Toner who had a clarifying question relating to the \$5 million stabilization funds and if it was a one-time investment or would the \$5million continue to be added every year until the City reaches stabilization. Claire Spinner shared how the \$5 million would be used once, from free cash, to address Federal funding reductions that may occur and would work in to the operating budget for future years. Councillor Toner asked if \$5 million would be enough. Claire Spinner responded by sharing that the biggest concern right now is to be able to fund it in future years and maintain flexibility within the budget, noting that decisions and tradeoffs will have to be made. Councillor Toner asked what the status was regarding placement of the remaining 22 residents of the Transition Wellness Center. Ellen Semonoff provided a brief update on placement, noting that the City is working with Baycove to find housing for them. Councillor Toner added that he would like the City Council to focus on the budget that is being presented to maintain core operations and services.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked for clarification on where the \$5 million is coming from. The City Manager shared that it will come from free cash as part of the FY26 budget. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler spoke on the importance of transparency and having early conversations and a more engaged process related to the budget to discuss funding for Council priorities, noting that some priorities that are budgeted are from previous Councils. Councillor Sorbinho-Wheeler added that he appreciates all the work that goes into preparing the budget, noting that it is complicated work.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Wilson who highlighted that it is an important topic to be discussing and focusing on where the City is going with finances and meeting the needs and priorities of the community. Councillor Wilson asked for clarification on why \$5 million was decided and why it could not be more money to help support programs that the Council are prioritizing, such as Rise Up and the Transition Wellness Center. Claire Spinner pointed out that in the last page of the presentation (Agenda Packet page 21) it

helps explain why the City has decided to limit the proposed stabilization to \$5 million and added that it is important to maintain the flexibility that the City currently has but also remain cautious due to anticipated uncertainties as it relates to the budget. Councillor Wilson offered suggestions on tradeoffs and funding some programs differently and reassess the process and outlook of some programs, such as Universal Pre-K and housing. Ellen Semonoff responded and provided a brief overview about current housing units and housing individuals, pointing out that in addition to the Transition Wellness Center closing, there are many other shelters closing as well, and offered suggestions on how the stabilization fund could be used.

At approximately 4:44p.m. Zoom became operational.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Toner who made a motion to extend the meeting to 5:15p.m.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

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, Councillor Nolan opened Public Comment.

Rabbi Yoni offered comments related the expansion of the stabilization fund and the tradeoff between Rise Up and the Transition Wellness Center and helping people stay housed.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked for clarity on how the City would like the Council to make decisions as it relates to the stabilization fund. The City Manager explained how the funding could be flexible, and it would be important for further discussion with the Council, pointing out that it is important to recognize decisions that may affect the future and to have a broader view of long-term impacts. Councillor Siddiqui questioned if sources of funding for housing stabilization and vouchers could come from the Affordable Housing Trust (AHT). City Manager Huang affirmed that money allocated to the AHT can only be used for the preservation or building of affordable housing and has confirmed with the Law Department that vouchers cannot be included in that. Councillor Siddiqui pointed out that it seems like the stabilization fund is going to be used more towards loss of Federal funding. Claire Spinner responded by sharing that it will be used if the City were to lose funding. Councillor Siddiqui stressed how her priorities have always been to assist low-income families and families in poverty and added that there will be more discussion related to a successor program to Rise Up and the Human Services and Veterans Committee meeting on April 17, 2025. Councillor Siddiqui shared that she would like to see more discussion about providing support within the next budget and more clarity on how issues are discussed in future meetings.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who pointed out that everywhere around the country will have federal funding impacts and the housing crisis is a national problem. The Vice Mayor added that the Council is not asking the City to expand the number of beds at the Transition Wellness Center but continue to support the residents and the number of beds that are currently there. The Vice Mayor asked why the City cannot find the \$5 million in the Operating Budget, while also continuing to take \$5 million out of free cash for the next upcoming years. Claire Spinner responded and explained why that may not be possible due to concerns the City will not be able to replenish free cash and see the number continuing to decrease as it is being used. Claire Spinner added that there is a City Policy on maintaining a certain level of reserves. Vice Mayor McGovern stressed how important it is to support people and believes that using the money out of free cash for upcoming years is one way to address concerns. The Vice Mayor provided suggestions on how the Council and the City can prioritize goals during the budget process. Vice Mayor McGovern asked the City if they have looked at different percentages for property tax increases and how that additional money could help support

programs. Claire Spinner explained how residential and commercial properties play a role in the tax levy and what future projections may look like as it relates to development and how much new growth may not occur in the upcoming years.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan made a motion to extend the meeting by ten minutes.

Clerk of Committees called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Absent

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

Lee Farris, 269 Norfolk Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments on the importance of housing vouchers, continued funding for the Transition Wellness Center, a successor to a Rise Up program, climate resilience, and municipal broadband.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who noted how important it is to have stability within the budget and provided suggestions on how to spend less and spend smart. Councillor Zusy added that the City should adapt to the circumstances they are being faced with as it relates to the budget.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered closing remarks and shared what she has been hearing from Committee members is will there be a way to cut costs in various departments and restructure programs to provide funding for other opportunities, she spoke on the importance of prioritizing goals for future budgets.

With the time of the meeting being expired, Councillor Nolan adjourned the meeting at approximately 5:26p.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/1004?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Councillor Nolan to the Finance Committee and City staff related to the Finance Committee meeting.

A communication was received from Claire Spinner, Assistant City Manager for Fiscal Affairs, transmitting a presentation on Capital and Large-Scale programs.