

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 31, 2026**

**HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Councillor Nolan, Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor McGovern
Councillor Zusy

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Health and Environment Committee was held on Tuesday, March 31, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. 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, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/Remote
Councillor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 5. Quorum established.

Chair Nolan noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the Cambridge Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) Annual Report and the Climate Committee’s review and report. Present at the meeting were Julie Wormser, Chief Climate Officer, Susanne Rasmussen, Deputy Chief Climate Officer, Nikhil Nadkarni, Senior Climate Program Manager, and Thomas O’Neill, Sustainability Planner. Mayor Siddiqui was also present via Zoom. Present from the Climate Committee was the Chair, Joel Nogie and Megan Lim.

Chair Nolan offered opening remarks, not verbatim. (Attachment A)

Chair Nolan recognized Julie Wormser and the Office of Sustainability who gave a presentation titled “Net Zero Action Plan”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Chair Nolan recognized Joel Nogie and Megan Lim who gave a presentation titled “Cambridge Climate Committee (CCC) Presentation”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Chair Nolan opened Public Comment.

Susan Murcott, 265 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the NZAP and recommendations from the Climate Committee

Quinton Zondervan, Princeton, NJ, spoke in support of the NZAP and offered suggestions on how to move forward.

Chair Nolan read written public comment from David Rabkin for the record. (Attachment B)

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy, who thanked Chair Nolan, City staff, and the Climate Committee for their leadership and commitment to the Net Zero Action Plan work. Councillor Zusy asked for more information related to how BEUDO performance requirements are being met by larger buildings and businesses. Susanne Rasmussen responded and shared that there has been interest and some concern from property owners about how to comply with the regulations, adding that staff have been meeting with larger building owners and business associations to guide them through the process. Julie Wormser added that it is helpful that the larger buildings with more resources are required to comply first, because the City will be able to learn from that process before smaller BEUDO buildings begin meeting the requirements. Councillor Zusy asked if there is a timeline for a thermal energy network in Cambridge. Julie Wormser indicated that staff are actively studying clean thermal network opportunities, but the City cannot move forward with a citywide geothermal project at this time due to costs and feasibility. Julie Wormser added that there may be more opportunities for geothermal or clean thermal systems in the future, such as the Alewife Quadrangle, or by participating in regional broader studies.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who thanked everyone for their work and emphasized the important progress Cambridge has made while still having more goals to reach. Councillor Al-Zubi asked how BEUDO progress will be evaluated and what measurable data will help determine if buildings are meeting the required emissions reductions. Nikhil Nadkarni shared that the City would begin receiving data from the larger buildings as they establish emissions reductions, and that there will also be a review point in 2028 to determine if policy changes are needed. Susanne Rasmussen provided a brief overview of the system the City will use to collect data and analyze emission impacts. Councillor Al-Zubi asked for more information related to the role local institutions, such as Harvard and MIT, and how they will be making efforts to be compliant with BEUDO and overall emission reductions. Susanne Rasmussen emphasized that both institutions are expected to comply in the aggregate and have climate goals that align closely with Cambridge's goals. Megan Lin added that the City has a more indirect influence over the institutions, but there are many opportunities for collaboration, adding that Harvard and MIT also have their own climate action plans.

Chair Nolan had questions related to the City's greenhouse gas inventory and asked when it would be completed, adding that it is the first step in the NZAP five year review and needs to be completed before the full review can move forward. Nikhil Nadkarni provided a brief update and shared that staff are hoping to complete the inventory by the end of June. Chair Nolan emphasized the importance of having the inventory available to move on to the next phase of the review. Chair Nolan added that the NZAP update should include metrics that focus on actions

completed and the impact those actions have on reducing emissions. Julie Wormser indicated that staff would be including that with the update. Chair Nolan provided suggestions on how staff could be more creative with residential decarbonization plans, noting the importance of residential efforts because they can help support better health and residents have a better understanding of the City's climate goals.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who asked how the Urban Forest Master Plan relates to emission reductions and if trees are a factor in the City's carbon goals. Julie Wormser shared that the urban forest has a larger impact on heat reduction, water quality, and climate resilience than on carbon in an urban environment. Julie Wormser added that trees are very important for addressing heat and noted that the City is looking at opportunities to plant trees on state and private property because City property is becoming limited. Councillor Zusy asked for more information related to cool roofs and Chair Nolan asked if green roofs could be combined with cool roofs. Susanne Rasmussen provided a review of cool roofs and green roofs and explained how staff are looking into reviewing green roof performance over time. Joel Nogie provided an example of a building that uses both cool and green roofs, which help support each other by cooling the panels and reducing watering needs. Councillor Zusy asked about the City's equity work within NZAP. Julie Wormser explained that climate impacts and energy costs can worsen existing inequities related to income, health, housing, race, and language access, and putting efforts towards equity means helping everyone move through the clean energy transition without pushing people out of Cambridge because of rising costs. Julie Wormser also provided an overview of different financial tools that are available.

Chair Nolan offered closing remarks and highlighted the recommendations made by the Climate Committee and recognized how important it is for the City to continue to be a leader in climate change.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

The Health and Environment Committee adjourned at approximately 5:05p.m.

Attachment A – Opening remarks from Councillor Nolan.

Attachment B - Written public comment from David Rabkin.

Attachment C – 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:

[Mar 31, 2026 Health and Environment Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)

Attachment A

We hold this meeting every year to monitor yearly progress on the Net Zero Action Plan, which is an action plan that focuses on emissions reductions for buildings, which account for the majority of emissions pollution in Cambridge. This annual report gives the City Council and the community an opportunity to monitor progress and stay involved. This annual accounting is to monitor progress, help reprioritize different programs and initiatives, and understand our overall roadmap to carbon neutrality. And since buildings account for approximately 80% of emission pollution in the citywide emissions, this report is critical, as is annual review. This annual review is for FY25, which covers the period from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025. Each year the Climate Committee, our citizen-led body, is charged with reviewing our progress on climate goals, including, importantly, NZAP. Their latest review letter, dated December 19, 2025, is in the packet for today's meeting and I have invited members of the Climate Committee to present their letter and go over their specific recommendations.

Per the Net Zero Task Force in 5-year update (2020 done, accepted in 2023):

To achieve even more aggressive action, the City should continue to monitor and pursue emerging opportunities and technologies to accelerate GHG emission reductions and adapt the Net Zero Action Plan appropriately on a regular basis. The stakeholders represented by Task Force members can help achieve this innovation through peer learning activities, and state and federal government should be engaged to advance the enabling policies and resources needed to achieve decarbonization of buildings at the local level. The Task Force also recommends centralizing GHG emission reductions as a priority across City administrative, decision-making and budgeting activities, including City Boards and Committees.

So we need to be thinking about all of our actions as a city through this lens of the Net Zero Action Plan and need to find ways to incorporate emissions reductions.

A key principle of the Net Zero Action Plan was to continuously monitor and adapt to changes related to GHG emission reductions in buildings. Climate change is accelerating, the new federal government will hamper a lot of progress, and so we need to push now more than ever and ensure that our actions are commensurate with our goals.

Later this year we are beginning the next 5-year evaluation of the Net Zero Action Plan. Plan was originally adopted in 2015, last 5-year update was delayed due to covid but was started in 2021 and officially adopted in 2023.

The results of the first 5-year review were sobering and troubling. Per last 5-year review:

[Any] declines that have been achieved have largely been offset by recent economic growth and new construction. Similar to what has been found on the global scale, the effects of the actions taken to date are too small to achieve the city's goals.

We expect greater emissions reductions as more impactful actions are implemented, including the low carbon energy supply and BEUDO performance enhancement requirements; however, over the next 10 years, emissions need to be reduced 240,000 – 290,000 MTCO₂e just to align with the 2°C Paris Agreement limit—an almost 20x increase over the initial five-year period.

The city needs to remain aggressive in its approach and find additional ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The next five-year period will be critical. If the current trend continues and emissions remain flat, meeting the targets set by the Paris Agreement for 2030 will become much more difficult, and significant adjustments in strategy will be needed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Since that review we have done a lot to set ourselves on a forward trajectory for emissions reductions, including and especially, BEUDO, the Fossil Fuel Free Pilot Program Ordinance, and the Specialized Stretch Code. But even with those, we still need to urgently address building emissions reductions in other areas: non-BEUDO buildings, and residential BEUDO buildings, which were exempted from BEUDO reductions requirements due to a vote by the council. I know staff are working hard on creative financing tools that will assist that, and so we need to take action to pair action with the financing. And I believe we should also be thinking creatively in the short term and implement diverse and creative strategies like transaction point upgrade requirements for gas equipment, distributing utility information to renters through a rental registry, and energy audit requirements for sales. These are strategies that other communities have had success with and could help on the margins while we work to develop large financing tools.

So now we will go to the staff presentation, and following that presentation we will go to the Climate Committee, and then public comment, followed by council discussion.

Attachment B

3/31/2026 – Public Comment

To the Health and Environment Committee:

As you well know, the political, and perhaps economic, context in which we do our climate-related work has changed. Climate science is ignored or denied by our Federal government, and work both on mitigation and adaptation face heavy opposition federally, as well.

Halting the development of economically viable wind projects very close to completion demonstrates that today extreme politics – rather than common sense, ethics, or even economics – are driving federal policy and action.

What does that mean to a city like ours? That we need to step up, that our primary focus has to expand from planning to a combination of continued planning AND active, aggressive support of the programs we implement. Failure leading to learning isn't good enough. And failing to meet our goals is becoming increasingly unacceptable.

Two priorities come to mind.

First, there's BEUDO, which asks a lot of our large property owners. The required conversions are challenging, require know-how, and demand up-front investment. In the face of economic pressure, agendas packed with business challenges, and a Federal-level context that fails to promote mitigation, some property owners – perhaps many – will choose to wait, perhaps until it's too late. The City needs to be clear that it will maintain its resolve while also backing it up with measures that include monitoring and accountability as well as support for our large property owners. We need them to stay in Cambridge AND to make changes; in fact, we want to attract new businesses. Those two goals require that BEUDO be carefully monitored and well-supported.

Second, there's the decarbonizing of our city's residential real-estate. Some will argue that it's such a small percentage of our total emissions that focusing on it isn't worth the hassle.

There's no doubt, it WILL be challenging. As with BEUDO, we need to recognize both the special position the City of Cambridge occupies as well as the path by which we have meaningful positive global impact.

Cambridge has the know-how and resources to be a leader – to develop and test policies and programs before other cities and towns. Our successes can become sources of inspiration, proof-of-concepts, and implementation templates that make it possible and easier for other cities and towns to elect to take action and then implement effectively.

OUR PRIMARY IMPACT COMES INDIRECTLY THROUGH THE INDIRECT IMPACT WE HAVE ON OTHER CITIES AND TOWNS. This is true both for residential and commercial property conversion. It's essential to keep this in mind as we consider the role we want Cambridge to play as a leading municipality. We protect our citizens and address our goals around social justice only if we contribute to global-level change. We need to make decisions based both on local impact and our ability to make a difference globally.

-David Rabkin, former member and chair of the Climate Committee

From: [Quinton Zondervan](#)
To: [Nolan, Patricia](#); [Al-Zubi, Ayah](#); [Azeem, Burhan](#); mmgovern@cambridgema.gov; [Zusy, Catherine](#)
Cc: [City Clerk](#)
Subject: Net Zero Action Plan Annual Report
Date: Tuesday, March 31, 2026 3:19:41 PM

Dear Chair Nolan and Health & Environment Committee Members,

Thank you for this hearing and for your ongoing efforts to get Cambridge's emissions to zero as soon as possible. As a former Cambridge resident, and former City Councillor, I was able to contribute significantly to those efforts.

Now, as Policy Director at Run On Climate, a non-profit I joined in the fall of 2024, I'm still here to help, so please call on us! We provide assistance with policy research, intern assignments, networking, and peer to peer information sharing. We work with activists, advocates, city staff, elected officials, and candidates for local office across the country to advance climate action at the municipal and county level.

Three members of the Cambridge City Council are also members of Run On Climate's Local Climate Policy Network ([LCPN](#)), and that's the highest number of any of our 30 cities and towns participating in our network. Cambridge remains at the forefront of climate action at the municipal level, and we need you to succeed so that others can follow in your footsteps.

Run On Climate is finalizing our thermal energy networks (TENs) policy audit, and we're excited to conduct it for Cambridge very soon. This policy audit will help us identify opportunities for advancing TENs deployment in Cambridge, and across the country.

Regarding the Net Zero Action Plan Annual Report specifically, I think overall Cambridge is continuing to make great progress, and that's great to see. I'm particularly heartened by your progress on community solar, renewable energy in the CCE via VPPAs, a model we are actively promoting through our network, and your efforts on thermal energy networks.

The Climate Committee's letter is strong, and I fully support it and agree with their recommendations. I have 3 observations to share with you.

1. Action 1.3 Upgrades at Transaction Points Greenhouse gas reduction strategies and measures at the time of sale, lease, renovation, or permit application - It's very unfortunate that this item is on hold, and I strongly urge you to implement these strategies immediately. There is some very low hanging fruit here, such as requiring an energy audit at time of sale, and prohibiting fossil fuel heating replacement unless electrification is economically infeasible.

2. In general you're not doing well on any of the Area 1 (existing buildings) SMART goals, and that is very unfortunate. This is a most challenging area, but also very important to tackle. Although the first BEUDO compliance period starts this year, success cannot be fully evaluated until 5 years from now, and this is the only item marked green in area 1 of your goals. I urge you to ensure concrete measurable progress along the way, to make sure we are not here 5 years from now wondering what went wrong.

3. Lastly, I recommend paying close attention to plug-in solar and battery storage developments as near term solutions that are increasingly going to be available and accessible to help reduce grid utility costs, while continuing to accelerate electrification. Although plug-in solar will not result in a lot of new electric capacity, due to the necessarily small size of these systems, it will result in a lot of new solar participants, and that's critical if we're going to be successful. We need to really lean on becoming more self-sufficient at the local level, as our state and federal governments continue to fail and to outright obstruct progress.

Thank you again, and please let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,

Q

Quinton Zondervan | Policy Director, [Run On Climate](#)

617-901-2006 | [schedule me](#)

Former Cambridge, MA City Councillor 2018-2023

Cambridge adopted a [Green New Deal!](#)

Check out my [TEDx talk](#): Go Solar and Save!

Connect with me via [LinkedIn](#).

