



NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

12:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebrations Committee will hold a public hearing to discuss the upcoming Central Square zoning process and next steps following the Central Square Lots Study, CMA 2024 #33, with a focus on 105 Windsor Street, 205 Western Ave, and 84 & 96 Bishop Allen Drive (Lots 4 and 5).

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Joan Pickett	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12:14 PM
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee was held on Tuesday, May 21, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 12:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Pickett. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 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.

At the request of the Co-Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
 - Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
 - Councillor Pickett – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
 - Councillor Siddiqui – Absent*
 - Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

***Councillor Siddiqui was marked present in the Sullivan Chamber at 12:14p.m.**

Co-Chair Pickett offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss the upcoming Central Square zoning process and next steps following the Central Square Lots Study, City Manager Agenda Item 2024 #33, with a focus on 105 Windsor Street, 205 Western Ave, and 84 & 96 Bishop Allen Drive (Lots 4 and 5). Present at the meeting was Owen O’Riordan, Deputy City Manager, Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for the Community Development Department (CDD), Melissa Peters, Director of Community Planning, and Marlees Owayda, Community Engagement Manager. Co-Chair Pickett noted that Mayor Simmons, Vice Mayor McGovern, and Councillor Wilson were also present at the meeting.

Co-Chair Pickett opened Public Comment.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, offered comments relative to zoning and the Central Square lots.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, offered comments relative to zoning and the Central Square lots.

Michael Monestine offered comments and suggestions on zoning in Central Square.

Patrick Barrett offered comments and suggestions on zoning in Central Square.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Deputy City Manager O’Riordan and Iram Farooq who offered opening remarks. Melissa Peters gave a presentation titled “Central Square Zoning”, which was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation provided an overview of Central Square rezoning and a proposed process and engagement plan and proposed next steps on select Central Square lots, including 105 Windsor Street, 205 Western Avenue, and 84 and 96 Bishop Allen Drive.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler who had a question regarding the timeline for the process. Melissa Peters responded and offered a brief overview of what the timeline looks like, noting that the first step was to have this discussion in Committee and then move on to the public having an opportunity to review the RFI to provide feedback. In addition, Melissa Peters provided information on the timeline and the process moving forward for other areas in Central Square, such as Massachusetts Avenue and the Central Square Library. Deputy City O’Riordan provided additional comments that shared what some of the future plans and challenges may look like. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked for more information on how the City is or planning to engage with property owners. Melissa Peters responded and shared how the City plans to meet with owners and provide information to them on zoning as it moves forward.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked what the City is doing differently as far as community engagement. Marlees Owayda provided information on how the CET is more involved with the different stages of this process and taking a more collaborative approach. Melissa Peters provided additional information to support comments made by Marlees Owayda, highlighting that community engagement should be meaningful. Councillor Siddiqui shared that she would be interested in receiving continued information on the outreach aspect of this project. Councillor Siddiqui highlighted the impact that Starlight in the Square has had in the community and asked what the plans may look like now that they will no longer have their current space. Melissa Peters pointed out that during the RFI stage is where more data will be provided on where a cultural use like Starlight could be subsidized. Melissa Peters also noted that it is very clear from Councillors and the public that Starlight is an important space to keep in Central Square. Iram Farooq responded and shared that affordable housing and Starlight are both priorities and provided examples of the space in Lot 5 that could be used.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Councillor Nolan who echoed comments made by Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler relative to the importance of working with property owners. Councillor Nolan had clarifying questions regarding the proposed zoning and proposed zoning from previous years. Iram Farooq and Melissa Peters provided a response and were able to share the distinction between the two. Councillor Nolan offered comments and suggestions on ways to move forward. Councillor Nolan commented on the importance of being aware of the budget and funding for both the capital and operating costs. Iram Farooq and Deputy City Manager O’Riordan provided feedback on funding and the budget and shared how partnerships could be beneficial for the City and the community and how RFI will help with decision making. Councillor Nolan pointed out that there should be outreach done regarding utilities and ensuring new development is fossil fuel free. Iram Farooq shared they have ongoing engagement with Eversource,

the Public Works Department, and the Water Department and once there is a clearer picture of what will be done in Central Square there will be additional engagement and conversations.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Councillor Azeem who thanked the team for their progress and clear timeline. Councillor Azeem asked if there have been any conversations on overlay districts and what the boundaries may look like. Melissa Peters responded and shared that the City is starting from the current Central Square zoning overlay and will revise it to accommodate additional areas. Councillor Azeem provided suggestions on how the overlays could be. Councillor Azeem asked how the City is thinking about different uses in Central Square going forward. Melissa Peters shared that CDD is looking at this as a housing production plan but also understands the importance of maintaining active street life and ground uses and are looking to the community to provide what is desired in addition to cultural and business spaces. Councillor Azeem asked if there would be any changes made to commercial uses, while Melissa Peters noted that the current thinking is to keep commercial as it is to incentivize residential use. Iram Farooq noted that housing has been the main focus so far, but the City is open to additional changes beyond what is proposed in C2. Councillor Azeem highlighted that keeping the culture in Central Square is important. Deputy City O’Riordan shared that keeping the relationship with the Central Square BID is of huge importance while continuing to keep their support and partnership moving forward. Councillor Azeem shared that having periodic updates while going through the process is beneficial for feedback before final zoning language is proposed.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Mayor Simmons who asked for more information on the timeline for the community engagement process and if demographic data will be collected during the engagement. Marlees Owayda shared that the community engagement process is ongoing and that the outreach team does not typically collect demographic data but can look at a process where that information could be integrated in a supported way. Mayor Simmons stressed the importance of having an organized plan with the community and that should be a focus in the process right now and going forward. Mayor Simmons noted that the information that has been shared is a good starting point but would like to see a more detailed list property and business owners as well as more information on how outreach will be conducted. Mayor Simmons also noted the importance of connecting with the Cambridge Housing Authority for outreach and creating an engagement plan. Marlees Owayda and Melissa Peters responded to comments and concerns raised by the Mayor.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who shared that he is glad to see this process moving forward and offered suggestions on the groups that could be included on the community engagement list that was provided in the Agenda Packet. The Vice Mayor agreed with comments made during Public Comment about Central Square being an attractive area as well as being a place that can help support local businesses. The Vice Mayor stressed the importance of creating a permanent home for Starlight. Vice Mayor McGovern shared that he looks forward to future conversations and pointed out that it is important to think about what Central Square will look like not just in the next few years, but in the future as well.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Siddiqui who made a motion to extend the meeting by fifteen minutes.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Pickett – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Yes – 5. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Pickett opened Public Comment. There was one speaker who signed up before Public Comment closed.

Morris Nagger, 585 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, offered comments on zoning and lot studies.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Councillor Wilson who emphasized the importance of community outreach and pointed out that this is an opportunity to use the BID to help lead conversations and partnerships with the community engagement team. Councillor Wilson shared the importance of using black owned and minority owned businesses as priorities as subcontractors and vendors during the process. Councillor Wilson asked how long the RFI would be open for. Melissa Peters shared that it would be open for six weeks, and there is not a start date yet because the City was waiting for feedback from the Council. Deputy City Manager O’Riordan pointed out that it is not unusual to have to extend the deadline associated with RFI if it is necessary. Councillor Wilson noted how important it is for there to be affordable housing in addition to keeping Starlight as a community space for residents to thrive. Iram Farooq pointed out that it is not going to be one or the other, and the goal is to accommodate both of those desired uses.

Co-Chair Pickett offered comments and shared that it is the responsibility of the Council to make sure the City is on task as far as deadlines and outreach throughout the process. Co-Chair Pickett noted that it was a very strong conversation with the Council sharing much interest in moving forward in the right direction. Iram Farooq shared that with the Committees approval they will work continue the work on RFI and bring a proposal back for feedback. Councillor Pickett offered closing remarks and shared that she is excited to see this process continue, highlighted the importance of community engagement, and would like to follow up with a future meeting.

Co-Chair Pickett recognized Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Pickett – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

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

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:15p.m.

Clerk’s Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record. The video for this meeting can be viewed at: https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/750?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Melissa Peters, Director of Community Planning, transmitting a presentation regarding Central Square Zoning.

A communication was received from Melissa Peters, Director of Community Planning, transmitting a draft Community Focus Group Meeting List regarding Central Square Rezoning.

A communication transmitted from Yi-An Huang, City Manager, relative to the Central Square Lots Study Report.