

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES,
ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE
Tuesday, June 2, 2026**

**NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG-TERM PLANNING,
PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION
COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee was held on Tuesday, June 2, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Zusy. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this public meeting was remote participation via Zoom.

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

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

Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

*Vice Mayor Azeem was present and remote at 3:07p.m.

Councillor Zusy offered opening remarks (**Attachment A**) and noted that to discuss possible changes relating to setbacks, stepbacks, open space and wet labs to the recently adopted Cambridge Street Zoning. Present at the meeting was Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Director of Zoning and Development, Jeff Roberts, Deputy Chief of Planning, Jennifer Caira, and Acting Director for Community Planning and Design, Drew Kane. Also present was Councillor McGovern.

Councillor Zusy recognized Melissa Peters for opening remarks. Drew Kane gave a presentation related to Cambridge Street zoning. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Councillor Zusy opened public comment.

Richard Krushnic, 20 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about Cambridge Street zoning and the community outreach process.

O. Robert Simha, 303 Third Street, Cambridge, MA, offered suggestions to proposed amendments and spoke in favor of more green space.

Susan Markowitz, 20 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, shared support and concerns regarding the proposed amendments.

Marc Truant, 32 Warren Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and shared concerns related to the proposed amendments.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, offered concerns related to the proposed amendments and spoke in favor of more tree canopy.

Justin Saif, Cambridge, Ma, spoke in support of more housing.

Jason Alves, 544 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of ground floor active use and offered comments and suggestions related to the proposed amendments.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Nolan who thanked the staff for their presentation and those who spoke in public comment. Councillor Nolan asked if staff could respond to some of the concerns that were raised in public comment. Councillor Nolan added that she is comfortable with the current language and does not believe changes need to be made at this time, and the City Council could revisit the Ordinance and amend language if needed after a year. Melissa Peters responded by addressing the concerns that were brought up during public comment and provided an overview of the City's goal during the community engagement process. Melissa Peters emphasized that the engagement was conducted with professionalism, integrity, and careful analysis while also balancing the City's many planning goals, adding that housing has become a priority for the City, which is a reflection of the zoning changes.

Councillor Zusy shared that this meeting was an opportunity for the City to explain the reasoning behind the decisions related to Cambridge Street zoning. Councillor Zusy asked for more information related to rear setbacks, concerns with wet labs, open space, and design standards. Jeff Roberts explained the zoning requirements for commercial properties that abut residential districts, including the required 5-foot rear setback. Drew Kane provided additional information on wider rear setbacks and explained why they went from 10 feet to 5 feet, adding that rear setbacks was not a topic discussed as much during the engagement process. Melissa Peters explained that zoning encourages housing by limiting office and lab development, but still allows smaller lab spaces to support Cambridge's innovation economy. Melissa Peters pointed out that the City's regulations for wet labs are there to protect public health concerns and create safety requirements. Drew Kane provided information related to design standards and design guidelines. He explained that some design features, such as building setbacks, are required by zoning, while other design elements are included as citywide design guidelines.

Councillor Zusy recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who pointed out that there will be a discussion related to ground floor retail at an upcoming meeting. Vice Mayor Azeem questioned what had

changed between the previous and current Cambridge Street zoning, noting that the six-story height limit, FAR, and setbacks have stayed mostly the same. Melissa Peters confirmed that the six-story height limit was the same. Vice Mayor Azeem pointed out that there was only one wet lab on Cambridge Street and added that he supports medical research that helps people. Vice Mayor Azeem added that there was a lengthy public engagement process for Cambridge Street zoning and that many of the concerns being brought forward were discussed during that process.

Councillor Zusy asked for confirmation related to changes in setbacks. Drew Kane explained that it was added as part of the Cambridge Street zoning that was adopted in January. Councillor Zusy asked if there were any other changes made with the language adopted in January. Melissa Peters shared that zoning allows building heights of up to 10 and 12 stories in certain areas.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who asked if a buffer for wet labs had been considered for the development of larger labs. Melissa Peters explained that the City does not want to create nonconforming uses and wants to continue to allow smaller lab use to support smaller startups and innovation spaces. Jeff Roberts provided additional information on biosafety regulations and concerns related to noise and mechanical equipment. Councillor Al-Zubi asked for more information on the language related to pedestrian space and amenities from the slides that were presented and the 4-foot setback. Drew Kane explained that the 4-foot setback can be used for landscaping, public seating, or additional sidewalk space depending on the project. Councillor Al-Zubi asked if there have been situations where redevelopment projects created less housing units than previously existed. Jeff Roberts responded and noted that few redevelopment projects with less housing do exist, but the goal is to increase the number of housing units. Jeff Roberts added that if the City Council wanted to, they could amend the zoning to be more flexible with the sizes of housing units. Councillor Al-Zubi thanked the staff and spoke in strong support of having sidewalks with ADA accessibility and access to open space.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor McGovern who offered comments related to the zoning process for Cambridge Street, pointing out that the Ordinance Committee had several meetings and made amendments to the proposed language based on community feedback. Councillor McGovern noted that the final proposed zoning that was adopted was a result of compromise. Councillor McGovern pointed out that wet labs are allowed in business districts throughout the City and questioned why Cambridge Street should be treated differently, emphasizing the safety regulations and requirements that are in place to help support innovation. Councillor McGovern thanked staff for their presentation, but noted that he believes the City Council has made its decision on Cambridge Street zoning and changes should not be made at this time.

Councillor Zusy reaffirmed that the purpose of the meeting was to give staff an opportunity to explain the reasoning behind the Cambridge Street zoning decisions, noting that the rationale behind the decision had not always been discussed in the planning process. Councillor Zusy asked if information on retail, commercial, and lab use could be included in the annual housing report, which could help the City Council review the long-term impacts of the zoning. Melissa Peters noted that retail is not included in the housing report and shared what information the Economic Opportunity and Development Department tracks as far as commercial districts and vacancies. Councillor Zusy asked if there were any conversations on building design related to

upper floor setbacks and reducing shadows. Melissa Peters provided a brief overview of the conversation and shared that decisions were made based off the adoption of MultiFamily zoning.

Councillor Zusy thanked staff for their presentation and stressed the importance of having continued conversations and communication with the public.

Councillor Zusy made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Flaherty – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

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

The Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts and Celebration Committee adjourned at approximately 4:25p.m.

Attachment A – Opening remarks from Councillor Zusy (not verbatim).

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.v3.swagit.com/videos/389813>

Attachment A

Cathie Zusy Remarks before 6.2.26 NLTP Meeting about Cambridge St. Zoning

Thank you all for being here today.

As you all know, the City Council voted in new Cambridge St. zoning 1.26.26 and a Cambridge St. Active Use Zoning Petition 4.27.26.

This built on CDD's Our Cambridge Street Study of 2021 and 2022.
So you might ask, why are we meeting about Cambridge St. again?

Why is because many East Cambridge neighbors still felt that we needed to consider come additional zoning tweaks, especially relating to

- setbacks impacting sidewalks and trees
- setbacks at the 4th floor for buildings on the south side of the street
- wet labs, now as of right
- incentivizing the creation of pocket parks, especially beside CHA's Miller River
- rear setbacks at 10' so no dead zone
- design review for buildings over 4 stories
- that CDD produce and annual report on the impacts of the new zoning detailing how many housing units (affordable IZ and market rate) have been built, how many residents and local businesses have been displaced; and the impact on ground floor retail.

Today CDD is back to share their thoughts about all of these things and for the Committee to discuss them.

Again, I appreciate your all convening about this once again, to make Cambridge St., one of the sweetest and most vital retail streets in the City, even better.