



# HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE'S

## JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

**Tuesday, June 17, 2025**

**3:00 PM**

**Sullivan Chamber**

**The Housing Committee and Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee will hold a joint public hearing to discuss draft zoning recommendations for Cambridge Street and Massachusetts Avenue.**

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3:13 PM
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"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s joint Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts and Celebration Committee and Housing Committee was held on Tuesday, May 7, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Siddiqui. 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 for both Committees.**

**Housing Committee**

- Councillor Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent\*
- Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Wilson – Present/Remote

**Present – 4, Absent -1. Quorum established.**

\*Vice Mayor McGovern was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:13p.m.

**Neighborhood & Long Term Planning, Public Facilities,  
Arts & Celebrations Committee**

Councillor Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor Nolan – Present/Remote  
Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

**Present – 5. Quorum established.**

Co-Chair Siddiqui offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss draft zoning recommendations for Cambridge Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Present at the meeting from the Community Development Department (CDD) were Assistant City Manager, Melissa Peters, Director of Zoning and Development, Jeff Roberts, Associate Zoning Planner, Evan Spetrini, and Senior City Planner, Drew Kane.

**Co-Chair Siddiqui opened Public Comment.**

Gordon Moore, 9 Rutland Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and concerns related to infrastructure issues.

Allan Sadun, 237 Elm Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed for the corridors.

James Zall, 203 Pemberton Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed in the corridors for additional housing.

Ethan Frank, 632 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed in the corridors for additional housing.

Hallie Trial, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed in the corridors for additional housing.

David Halerpin, 14 Valentine Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed in the corridors for additional housing.

Casey Szilagyi, 20 Child Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed in the corridors for additional housing.

Young Kim, 17 Norris Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and concerns related to the proposed zoning changes.

Neil Miller, 425 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the proposed zoning changes and increasing the depth and height allowed in the corridors for additional housing.

Georgia Giannoukos, 305 Webster Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of additional housing and opposed to increasing height limits.

Cynthia Muller Goldberg, 305 Webster Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of more green spaces to help improve mental health and happiness.

Jason Alves, 544 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the Cambridge Street Study and pointed out that Mass. Ave. and Cambridge Street are two different places when discussing zoning.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the affordability of developments and rising costs to live in Cambridge.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Melissa Peters who shared the presentation will reflect updates on zoning recommendations that came out of Cambridge Street and Mass. Ave. Studies. Melissa Peters added that the hope of this meeting is to discuss proposed changes with the Committees and move forward to create draft

language to come back to the Council for additional discussion and adoption. Melissa Peters added that once Cambridge Street and Mass. Ave. are completed, the goal is to move on to and discuss Central Square.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Evan Spetrini and Drew Kane who gave a presentation titled “Zoning for Cambridge Street and Mass Ave”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Azeem who thanked CDD for their presentation and shared that he had reviewed it in advance of the meeting. Co-Chair Azeem shared that he was in favor of the fix to the setback issue between residential and non-residential areas and asked if areas along Mass. Ave. will be cleaned up in the new zoning updates, noting that some topics related to Mass. Ave were left out. Evan Spetrini indicated that the proposed zoning on Mass. Ave would combine the current zoning districts into one district along the corridor. Co-Chair Azeem asked if housing would be able to be developed above the commercial height limit. Evan Spetrini confirmed that the proposed zoning does allow for commercial use up to the nonresidential height limit, and residential uses will be permitted up to eight stories. Jeff Roberts added that the City is shifting its approach to mixed-use zoning, with residential height limits being the maximum overall height limits and encouraging more mixed-use developments. Co-Chair Azeem shared that he would like to see twelve story buildings on North Mass. Ave. and possibly Cambridge Street, adding that cities such as Somerville are already developing taller buildings. Melissa Peters explained that staff are looking at North Mass. Ave. and Cambridge Street differently, and North Mass. Ave. could have the possibility of supporting taller buildings because the street is wider. Melissa Peters shared that these distinctions between the two have been ongoing conversations with community members.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who thanked city staff for their work and shared excitement for the proposal. The Vice Mayor agreed with comments made by Co-Chair Azeem related to twelve stories, noting that buildings between eight and eleven stories do not make financial sense. The Vice Mayor pointed out that there is limited space in Cambridge and that building taller developments along the corridors will help with housing goals. The Vice Mayor highlighted that with the mixed-use developments, residents in those areas will help support local businesses. The Vice Mayor spoke in favor of making zoning more attractive to developers so they chose to build more housing but explained that changes should not bring challenges to nonprofit developers. Vice Mayor McGovern addressed concerns raised from the community related to low-income residents and shared that the city has provided hundreds of subsidized units and are now working towards housing for unhoused individuals. The Vice Mayor added that many units help low-income and middle-income residents, and that this proposal will help get closer to reaching housing goals.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who shared concerns about the electrical grid being able to handle all the new development, noting that there may need to be upgrades in residential and commercial areas. Jeff Roberts shared that those concerns have been discussed among staff and noted that the demand for electricity is shifting regionally and there are concerns about what upgrades need to be made in the future, especially for commercial projects. Councillor Nolan asked why F.A.R. is still being used to regulate commercial development, noting that it was removed for residential zoning. Evan Spetrini explained why F.A.R. was kept in for commercial use and noted it could be reviewed further in the future. Jeff Roberts added that F.A.R. is helpful for commercial buildings because they vary more in design and will help the city manage different impacts commercial buildings may bring, such as traffic and transit use. Jeff Roberts shared that keeping the F.A.R. will give development more flexibility. Councillor Nolan shared that she believes setbacks and open space would be enough to help developers with design, noting that the goal is to bring more people into the corridors to support local businesses. Councillor Nolan offered comments that were in favor of twelve stories along North Mass. Ave. because the street is wider but also supports having different height limits for different areas. Councillor Nolan added that she would like to have more Council discussions on future housing goals.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Zusy who asked for clarification about whether the 20,000 housing units by 2040 were in addition to the 10,000 planned by 2030. Evan Spetrini explained that 20,000 is the total goal, including the 10,000. Co-Chair Zusy shared concerns related to 5-foot rear setbacks and the Fire Department being able to respond efficiently. Jeff Roberts pointed out that all buildings must meet fire safety codes regardless of zoning. Co-Chair Zusy asked if roof decks or balconies would be considered open space,

which Evan Spetrini confirmed they could be, but shared that more specific language would be worked on over the summer months related to that. Co-Chair Zusy spoke in favor of ground level open space, such as small parks, and shared concerns about noise coming from rooftops affecting abutters. Co-Chair Zusy stressed the need for parking on Cambridge Street and asked if parking could be provided as a community benefit to accommodate people coming to local businesses. Jeff Roberts provided a brief overview of the City's implementation of the Flexible Parking Corridors and noted that CDD would like to see how that implementation works before making any additional changes to parking. Co-Chair Zusy indicated that there was a need for more community input before the zoning was drafted. Co-Chair Siddiqui explained that the zoning recommendations were based on public feedback from previous community meetings, and there will be additional public hearings before anything is adopted. Co-Chair Zusy spoke in support of taller buildings along the corridors and squares, but not in residential areas, and highlighted the diversity along Cambridge Street and noted that new development should protect that.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked if zoning corridors, such as Cambridge Street, could be widened to allow for more development. Melissa Peters responded and explained how current zoning relates to corridors before transitioning into residential neighborhoods, noting that it creates and maintains a difference between commercial and residential areas. Additionally, Melissa Peters highlighted that the community has shared support for being able to walk along Cambridge Street.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Wilson who shared her appreciation for the transparency related to this topic and the conversations about zoning changes. Councillor Wilson stressed the importance of the need for more housing, especially near transit and commercial areas within the City, but also recognizing the concerns related to height, shadows, and the impact development may have on communities. Councillor Wilson asked for clarification on how height limits were going to be determined for different corridors. Drew Kane and Melissa Peters explained that the proposed recommendations came from community feedback and development feasibility, while also trying to stay on track with the City's goal of more housing and sustainability with the environment. Melissa Peters added that there sometimes need to be trade-offs with zoning when trying to reach the goals and visions for the future of the City. Councillor Wilson shared concerns about these proposed changes actually bringing in more development, pointing out that many of the already approved projects have not started yet due to high costs and funding challenges. Melissa Peters shared that CDD is always evaluating zoning outcomes and are open to adjustments. Councillor Wilson asked how often the progress of these proposed changes will be reviewed and if the Council will receive updates on that data. Melissa Peters pointed out that zoning cannot be the only thing to promote more housing and that there needs to be effort within different city departments and collaboration with city leaders to reach housing goals. Melissa Peters added that there will be updates related to challenges and progress with the proposed zoning.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Azeem who shared his support for the proposed zoning changes. Co-Chair Azeem offered comments related to the working groups for Mass. Ave. and Cambridge Street and pointed out how the two communities are different as it relates to development height and added that he believes the Cambridge Street plan needs more improvement with the proposed zoning.

Co-Chair Siddiqui concluded the meeting with pointing out the different opinions shared by Committee members but believes the feedback on the proposed recommendations was positive. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared her support for the proposed recommendations and highlighted how the recommendations were achieved using community input and feedback. Co-Chair Siddiqui shared she is not opposed to taller buildings, but pointed out that there would need to be trade-offs to consider, as Melissa Peters mentioned. Co-Chair Siddiqui added that while not everyone agrees with the proposed zoning, everyone does agree that there needs to be an increase in housing. Melissa Peters shared that this conversation has been very helpful for staff to come back to the Council in the fall with proposed draft language.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Azeem who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll of both Committees.

**Housing Committee**

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

**Neighborhood & Long Term Planning, Public Facilities,  
Arts & Celebrations Committee**

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

**Yes – 5. Motion passed.**

**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/1044?view\\_id=1&redirect=true](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/1044?view_id=1&redirect=true)

**A communication was received from Evan Spetrini, Senior Manager, Zoning and Development, transmitting a presentation related to zoning on Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street.**