



GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, RULES & CLAIMS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

11:00 AM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee will hold a public hearing to continue the June 5, 2024 discussion on Charter Review recommendations and develop draft recommendations to the full City Council for reviewing, deliberating, adopting, and processing possible changes to the Cambridge City Charter for future vote by Cambridge voters.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11:04 PM
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Joan Pickett	<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"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee was held on Tuesday, June 25, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:00 a.m. by the Chair, Councillor Toner. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 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 Azeem – Absent*

Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Pickett – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho – Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Toner – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 4, Absent -1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Azeem was marked present and remote at 11:04p.m.

The Chair, Councillor Toner offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to continue the June 5, 2024 discussion on Charter Review recommendations and develop draft recommendations to the full City Council for reviewing, deliberating, adopting, and processing possible changes to the Cambridge City Charter for future vote by Cambridge voters. Present at the meeting was Acting City Solicitor, Megan Bayer, First City Solicitor, Elliott Veloso, and Executive Director of the Election Commission, Tanya Ford. Also present at the meeting was Councillor Siddiqui, Councillor Wilson, and Councillor Nolan.

The Chair, Councillor Toner opened Public Comment.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and suggestions relative to the Charter and stressed the importance of public comment.

Louise Venden, 10 Rogers Street, Cambridge, MA, shared support for Charter Review recommendations be referred to the full City Council for discussion.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, noted the importance about open debate and shared what they did and did not support moving forward.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, highlighted that changes to the Charter should not be taken lightly and provided suggestions and comments relative to the Charter.

John Hawkinson provided comments and suggestions relative to conversations in Committee and Charter changes.

The Chair, Councillor Toner reviewed topics for discussion and highlighted which topics are important (Attachment A) as these discussions continue.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who offered the suggestions on how to move forward and stressed the importance of having a special meeting of the full City Council.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Azeem who offered comments and suggestions regarding a 2/3 votes and made suggestions on how this Committee can move forward with discussion.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who agreed the list of suggestions that need to be discussed are important. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler offered additional comments and suggestions relative to a 2/3 vote and recommendations that were suggested by the Charter Review Committee (CRC).

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Pickett who stressed the importance of the role of the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee relative to CRC recommendations and discussions that should move to the full City Council.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Nolan who suggested and reviewed what the process of the Committee and the full City Council should. Councillor Nolan noted how important the City Charter is for the entire City and shared that the Committee can review the CRC recommendations, but the full City Council should be making the recommendations on the Charter and City Government. In addition, Councillor Nolan provided comments on the 2/3 votes.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Siddiqui who agreed with much that has been said already and stressed the importance of having a conversation on the form of government recommendation.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked if Councillor Pickett had a vision on how the Government Operations Committee would be able to narrow down topics that the Committee should be discussing before it is brought to full City Council. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler offered suggestions on how the Government Operations Committee could move forward and provided an example of inviting CRC members to share their thoughts and experience. Councillor Pickett was recognized and provided a response regarding her ideas and suggestions on the Committee work.

The Chair, Councillor Toner reviewed what the goal and discussion should be for the five members of this committee and procedural steps that need to be taken to move forward with the CRC recommendations.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Azeem who offered feedback on how the full City Council and Government Operations Committees could be used for discussion and shared the importance of having more of an understanding of the procedural process.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who agreed with The Chair's thought process how on the Government Operations Committee should be used to discuss the CRC recommendations. The Vice Mayor provided suggestions on the Committee should move forward at this current meeting.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Wilson who shared her appreciation and thanks for all the work members from the CRC did and provided feedback and suggestions on how the Committee and the full City Council should move forward.

The Chair, Councillor Toner had a clarifying question for Megan Bayer related to the timeline of Charter Reviews conducted by Cambridge residents. Megan Bayer shared that every 10 years a CRC will be established to review the City's Charter. Megan Bayer also noted that the City Council can reach out to those who were members of the CRC to speak on what their experience was like on the body as an individual, but because the Committee has been dissolved, they cannot provide additional recommendations.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Nolan, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, and Vice Mayor McGovern who provided comments relative to the Charter being reviewed every 10 years.

The Chair, Councillor Toner had a clarifying question for Tanya Ford regarding special elections. Tanya Ford and Megan Bayer responded and shared the two different routes that are available for Charter changes.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion to close public comment.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Pickett – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner - Yes

Yes – 5. Motion passed.

The Chair, Councillor Toner agreed that it could be beneficial to speak to members of the CRC. The Chair shared that he has spoken to some of the State Legislators to receive feedback regarding the process and encouraged Councillors to reach out to State Representatives to be a part of the conversation.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Pickett who made a motion that the full City Council only considers Charter Review Committee recommended Charter changes which received 2/3 vote as stated in the Ordinance.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – No
Councillor Pickett – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No
Councillor Toner – Yes

Yes – 3, No – 2. Motion passed.

ORDERED: That the City Council only considers Charter Review Committee recommended Charter changes which received a 2/3 vote as stated in the Ordinance.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Pickett who made a motion that the Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee recommends to the full City Council to use a 2/3 vote for approving changes to be forwarded to voters on a ballot.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Present
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Pickett – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No
Councillor Toner – Yes

Yes – 3, No – 1, Present – 1. Motion passed.

ORDERED: That the City Council requires a 2/3 vote for approving changes to be forwarded to voters on a ballot.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who made a motion that Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee recommend to the full City Council to form a special meeting or special committee of the whole to discuss Charter Review recommendations.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes
Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Pickett – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Toner – Yes

Yes – 5. Motion passed.

ORDERED: That the City Council form a Special Committee of the Whole or hold a Special City Council meeting to discuss the Charter Review Committee recommendations.

The Chair, Councillor Toner recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Pickett – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Yes

Yes – 5. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:23p.m.

Attachment A - Discussion topics.

Attachment B – Written communication.

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/781?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Councillor Toner, transmitting the meeting agenda and questions for discussion.

A communication was received from Councillor Toner, transmitting questions regarding Charter Review recommendations and process.

A communication was received from Megan Bayer, Acting City Solicitor, transmitting a legal opinion in response to the Charter Review Committee's Final Report and the Process for Reviewing and Acting on those Recommendations.

A communication was received from Megan Bayer, Acting City Solicitor, transmitting a presentation relative to the City Council's Charter Review questions.

Attachment A

- Resident Assembly
- Public Tracking Mechanism
- Measurable Goal Setting
- Maintain 2 year Terms of Office
- Defined budget Process and budget priorities
- City Council power to add or increase items in the budget
- Enshrine resident initiative provision
- Group petition provision
- Campaign finance study committee

Attachment B

From Louise Venden, 10 Rogers Street #820, Cambridge 02142

Date June 25, 2024

I urge the Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee to refer the Charter Review Committee recommendations to the full City Council for discussion. City Council members are elected representatives who have the responsibility to consider the impact of these recommended changes on governance in this ambitious city, vote on them, and take them to the voters for their approval.

The principles and values cited in the Committee's final report are:

Equity and Enfranchisement

Participation in and Accessibility of Government

Government Effectiveness: Striving for efficiency and efficacy

Responsiveness and Accountability

While the Committee worked hard, did extensive research and interviewed many city opinion leaders, the important job of ensuring equitable, accessible, effective and responsive city government lies with the City Council members who are elected by city voters to review, recommend and enact policies.

Cambridge has set high standards for addressing the needs of our dynamic, diverse and resourceful community. It is increasingly difficult for our city government to enact policies that direct the course of extraordinary economic growth, housing displacement and needs, and displacement of lower income residents. Cambridge prides itself on inclusion, equity and responsiveness, but many question the effectiveness of our governance system that belabors decisions, empowers city management and diminishes accountability of city council members who must face voters each two years.

That is why the City Council must step up to openly debate the wide range of thoughtful and well researched proposals for Charter Change. Voters deserve to know how their elected officials view them.