



GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, RULES & CLAIMS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, August 12, 2025

12:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

The Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee will hold a public meeting to discuss the City’s community engagement function, share updates on its structure and direction, and hear from the City Council about their values, priorities, and expectations for engaging with community members.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 Government Operations, Rules, and Claims Committee was held on Tuesday, August 12, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 12:00 p.m. by the Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern. 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 Azeem – Absent
- Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote
- Councillor Toner – Absent
- Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber.

Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

The Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss the City’s community engagement function, share updates on its structure and direction, and hear from the City Council about their values, priorities, and expectations for engaging with community members. Present at the meeting was City Manager, Yi-An Huang, Director of Community Engagement, Jackson Price, Director of Communications and Community Relations, Lee Gianetti, and Director of Media Relations and Content Strategy, Jeremy Warnick. Jackson Price shared that also in attendance were Community Engagement staff that represent different departments throughout the City. They included Crystal Rosa, Kristen Kelleher, Bridgit Martin, Elizabeth Edwards, Jackie McLaughlin, Melissa Liu, and Chaimaa Medhat. Also present was Councillor Nolan.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized City Manager Huang for opening remarks. City Manager Huang provided an overview of the Community Engagement team and reflected on the different challenges staff encounter in their efforts towards community engagement and outreach as well as the many different conversations that happen internally on how those efforts can be improved. City Manager Huang added that he is excited for the conversation and for staff to share accomplishments over the last few years.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Jackson Price who introduced the Community Engagement team and thanked them for their hard work and dedication. Jackson Price, Lee Gianetti, and Jeremy Warnick gave a presentation titled “Community Engagement Presentation and Discussion”. The presentation was provided in

advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. Staff noted that on Agenda Packet page 13 there was a clerical error, sharing that it should read 19% rating the City as excellent, not 9%.

Vice Mayor McGovern opened Public Comment.

Helen Walker, 43 Linnaean Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about community engagement as it relates to the Mass Ave Planning Study.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about community meetings and transparency, and explained why there is no trust in City Government.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about how the City responds to community feedback.

John Pitkin, Cambridge, MA, spoke on the importance of in-person meetings versus remote and neighborhood feedback and input.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who thanked everyone for their work and shared her experience with community outreach. Councillor Zusy urged the outreach team to engage with everyone in the community, not just specific demographics. Councillor Zusy provided suggestions on engagement and how to receive and use feedback. Additionally, Councillor Zusy highlighted how important it is to be transparent with the public, so people know what issues are being addressed.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who thanked staff for holding this meeting. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler pointed out that it is important to look at ways to incorporate community feedback. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler added that there is always room for improvement related to community engagement. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler noted that there is room for the City Council to improve their outreach and engagement efforts as well. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared concerns related to comments made by Councillor Zusy on specific demographics within Cambridge.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan and noted that Councillor Nolan had provided questions in advance of the meeting (Attachment A). Jackson Price and the Community Engagement team responded. Councillor Nolan pointed out how important it is to look at benchmarks to improve. Councillor Nolan emphasized that the community needs to feel like they are being heard, even if the decision is not what they agree with, highlighting that feedback is part of the communication process.

Vice Mayor McGovern thanked staff for their presentation and their hard work, noting that engagement will never be done perfectly in this City or others. Vice Mayor McGovern offered comments on the importance of transparency and being clear about what the goals are for the City. Vice Mayor McGovern explained that there are difficulties balancing both specific neighborhood goals and city-wide goals, and how different neighborhoods can be impacted. The Vice Mayor offered suggestions regarding meeting spaces and using the appropriate equipment. The Vice Mayor noted that he understands the City does not like to use reverse 911 unless it is an emergency but explained it could be a useful tool to use when trying to promote neighborhood meetings. Vice Mayor McGovern agreed with Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler on comments made by Councillor Zusy related to specific demographics in the City. Additionally, the Vice Mayor disagreed with the narrative that residents think the City is doing a bad job communicating, noting that the data from the annual City Survey shows positive results. Vice Mayor McGovern asked what the City's role is when incorrect information is being shared and if the City tries to correct that information. Lee Gianetti noted that it depends on the circumstance and explained Jeremy Warnick's role with the different media outlets. Lee Gianetti pointed out that with different social media platforms available to the public, it can become a challenge to correct information. Lee Gianetti added that the best way to get accurate information out to residents is to build relationships with trusted sources. City Manager Huang noted that the weekly City Council meetings are a good forum for residents and the public to learn correct information on facts and policies related to the City and by listening to the many conversations between the City Council and City Administration. Vice Mayor McGovern spoke in favor of using different neighborhood groups to help with providing informed outreach and offered suggestions for hosting meetings similar to town halls. The Vice Mayor pointed out that town hall type meetings would be an opportunity for residents to express concerns, provide feedback, and be engaged with communication.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who shared support for digitizing city records to improve accessibility. Councillor Zusy stressed that there needs to be clear and consistent data to help build public trust. Councillor Zusy agreed that neighborhood groups and neighborhood associations are a good resource to use for sharing information and creating more engagement. Councillor Zusy pointed out that there needs to be community engagement in all city work, both through staff and by making information transparent. Councillor Zusy asked how many staff are dedicated to community engagement. Jackson Price referred to Agenda Packet page 15 which provided information on the different Communications and Community Engagement positions throughout the City. City Manager Huang explained how many of these roles are doing more than just community engagement and can be tied into additional roles such as language access and immigrant services. Vice Mayor McGovern agreed with Councillor Zusy related to being consistent with data across all departments and provided housing as an example.

Vice Mayor McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who emphasized the importance of having smart goals and working with existing neighborhood groups as a good way to move forward. Councillor Nolan shared she would be interested in seeing benchmarking data from other cities and agreed that updating the City's website would be challenging, but it would be more efficient and user friendly.

The Vice Mayor and City Manager both offered closing remarks, both agreeing on how important it is to continue to engage with residents and finding a consensus between the City and residents where everybody feels they are being heard, even if they do not agree with the outcome.

With no further business, Vice Mayor McGovern adjourned the meeting at approximately 2:00p.m.

Attachment A – Questions from Councillor Nolan

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/1063?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Director of Community Engagement, Jackson Price, transmitting a Community Engagement presentation.