

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND UNIVERSITY
RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, June 9, 2026

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
UNIVERSITY RELATIONS
COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Councillor Flaherty, Co-Chair
Councillor Zusy, Co-Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Simmons

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Economic Development and University Relations Committee was held on Tuesday, June 9, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Zusy. 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 Co-Chair Zusy, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

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

Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

*Councillor Flaherty was present and remote at 3:17p.m.

Councillor Zusy offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to convene a roundtable of representatives from the Cambridge and Greater Cambridge startup ecosystem to provide insight into current conditions, emerging needs, and specific ways the City can strengthen its support for startups and enhance the local innovation environment. Present at the meeting was City Manager Yi-An Huang, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Director of Economic Development, Pardis Saffari, and Economic Development Specialist, Jared Staley. Also present were Councillor McGovern, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Vice Mayor Azeem, and Mayor Siddiqui.

Panelists from the Cambridge and Greater Cambridge startups that were in attendance included Emily Knight from The Engine, Maggie O'Toole from Lab Central, Annalisa Bhatia from MIT,

Tom Lucey from Harvard University, Ankit Gupta from Y Combinator, Alexandra Husted from the MA Office of Business Development, and Jason Kelly of Gingko Bioworks

Councillor Zusy recognized City Manager Huang for opening remarks.

Panelists introduced themselves and shared information relative to the companies they were there to represent. Melissa Peters and Pardis Saffari thanked the panelists for attending the meeting and shared their appreciation for the conversation. Councillor Al-Zubi emphasized the importance of keeping Cambridge affordable and strengthening the connections between the City and innovation businesses. Councillor McGovern highlighted the role Cambridge plays as a leader in innovation and noted the importance of supporting startups.

Councillor Zusy opened public comment.

Suzanne Blier, 5 Fuller Place, Cambridge, MA, highlighted the history Cambridge has at being a leader in many areas.

Councillor Zusy recognized City Manager Huang who shared he would like to frame the discussion around a combination of questions, including, what is going well in Cambridge's innovation economy, what changes and risks have emerged over the last couple of years, and what actions can the City take to help in a meaningful way. Panelists went around the table to respond. Panelists agreed that Cambridge continues to be a leader in innovation but shared some of the challenges businesses are facing. Challenges included rising costs, less research funding, permitting delays, and competition from other cities and states. Panelists offered suggestions such as making it easier for businesses to grow by improving the permitting process, creating more affordable spaces for innovation, supporting entrepreneurs, making the City more fun afterhours, and expanding housing. Many emphasized the importance of trying to keep startups in Cambridge as they grow and shared that the City should continue working with universities, nonprofits, and the private sector to help strengthen the innovation ecosystem and to help support long term economic growth. Tim Rowe shared that Cambridge's innovation space zoning, requiring developers in district like Kendall Square to set aside 10% of new commercial space for startups, was unique and important.

Councillor Zusy recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who shared ideas on ways Cambridge can make itself a more attractive place for startups and innovation. The Vice Mayor offered comments related to vacant lab and office spaces, creating a more welcoming environment in Kendall Square, promoting entrepreneurs, and reviewing how zoning changes could help support new technology. Panelists responded by pointing out the challenges businesses are facing, such as high housing and rental costs and limited research funding, and provided suggestions on how to repurpose vacant spaces to be more inviting for innovation. Panelists added that Cambridge is an attractive place to start a business, but it is challenging for companies to stay and grow, adding that competition in other cities and states offer financial incentives for businesses. They also emphasized the importance of creating a long-term economic strategy to help Cambridge remain competitive and continue attracting innovation businesses. The City Manager agreed with what was shared by panelists and shared that the City should continue to support its existing priorities while also exploring new ways to encourage and support innovation. He emphasized that it will

help to strengthen the local economy for the future. Councillor Zusy shared that these will be ongoing conversations and pointed out how startups play an important role in Cambridge's economy.

Councillor Zusy thanked the panelists for their feedback and suggestions and summarized what she heard throughout the discussion, such as affordable housing, tax incentives, a better permitting process, more affordable innovation space, and creating a welcoming environment. Councillor Zusy added that it would be important for the City to understand how they can help support university-led innovation.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor McGovern who emphasized the importance of the conversation and the feedback the City is receiving regarding start ups and innovation. Councillor McGovern agreed there should be more support and suggested the City evaluate their approach to economic growth as it relates to innovation. Councillor McGovern recognized the importance of having a welcoming community for businesses and for their employees and working towards affordable housing.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who acknowledged the hard work panelists and their companies do to be successful. Councillor Al-Zubi shared that it is important for the City to strengthen its connections within Cambridge's innovation ecosystem, including stronger collaboration with universities and entrepreneurs. Councillor Al-Zubi asked panelists how they are adapting with changes in technology, such as AI, and how the City can approach and support innovation. Panelists responded by sharing how innovation ecosystem can grow successfully through collaborations, attracting the right talent, and investment. They suggested Cambridge work towards celebrating and promoting local startups, while also continuing their partnerships with universities, noting it is important to support scientists and researchers who may want to become entrepreneurs in the future.

Councillor Zusy recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who shared that he agreed that the City should be doing more to support startups, but believes Cambridge is successful with helping companies get started and less successful at helping them grow. Vice Mayor Azeem asked how the City can be more supportive after the startup stage and if affordable vacant space in the City could be used for the next stage of growth, pointing out the possibilities of space within Central Square. Panelists agreed that there is the challenge of finding affordable spaces for companies that need to grow into a larger space when they start to grow. They added that many businesses leave Cambridge because there are not many options between being in a startup space and large commercial leases. Panelists emphasized that it would be beneficial for the City to work with developers to help create ways to make more space available for growing businesses.

Councillor Zusy recognized City Manager Huang for closing remarks. The City Manager thanked the panelists for their feedback and noted that the discussion provided many of ideas that the City can try and build on to offer more support. City Manager Huang agreed that it is important for the City to continue investing in and strengthening Cambridge's innovation ecosystem, adding that the innovation ecosystem is part of what has made the City's larger economy successful. The City Manager shared he looks forward to continuing the conversation.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Absent

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

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

The Economic Development and University Relations Committee adjourned at approximately 4:55p.m.

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/390470>