



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

September 18, 2023

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Introduction

I can hardly believe it's been a year since my first day! I'm incredibly grateful to the Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Councilors, City leaders and staff, and so many in the community who I've gotten to work with over the last twelve months. I have felt the weight and demands of this job, but I have also continued to have a deep appreciation and respect for the role. I have worked hard to find consensus within the City Council, to follow their direction, to balance the many voices in our diverse community, and to bring forward the professional experience and expertise of City department leaders and staff.

One of my goals has been to bring greater transparency to our City and to help everyone understand what we are working on and how decisions are made. I provided an initial [90-day update](#) in December 2022 and a [Spring update](#) in April 2023. In this Fall update, I'm excited to highlight some of the major areas of work over the last six months.

FY24 Budget

The City's FY24 Budget was submitted in May, discussed across two and a half days of public hearings, and adopted in June. I'm thankful to Councilors Nolan and Carlone for their leadership as co-chairs of the Finance Committee and to David Kale, our Assistant City Manager of Finance who retired this past July after a long career in public service. David guided me through my first budget cycle and, over the last year, helped me understand the City's complex financials. He has been a steady hand and has left the City in a strong financial position and with the ability to continue to invest in our collective priorities.

Over the years, our budget document has become increasingly detailed and transparent, including dollars spent across priority areas, key initiative descriptions, data and trends, and long-term capital plans. Our [FY24 budget](#) reflects that continued practice and I encourage everyone who wants to better understand the City to engage with this document.



The FY24 budget reflects the Council's priorities, and we have made significant commitments across these major areas:

1. **Affordable housing continues to be one of our highest priorities.** We have allocated \$46 million in FY24, including \$41 million into the Affordable Housing Trust. We have a lot more work to do to address high housing costs and we are making unprecedented contributions, with our annual financial commitment more than tripling over the last decade.
2. **Supporting our unhoused community continues to be an important priority.** The City has allocated \$16 million across homelessness and housing stability. In FY24, we added \$2.8 million in new funding to maintain our shelter capacity coming out of the pandemic. Providing support to our unhoused while maintaining thriving city squares continues to be a focus across city departments.
3. **Universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) represents the largest new financial investment across FY24 and FY25.** The application and matching process for the City's UPK program will begin this year with classes beginning in Fall 2024 that would offer all four-year-olds and prioritized three-year-olds high-quality pre-school programs.
4. **We are facing a global climate crisis and Cambridge is rising to meet it.** We have allocated \$18 million in FY24 toward reducing building emissions, vehicle electrification, and investments in renewable energy with significant City ordinances and programs rolling out this year.
5. **Finally, making our streets safer for all is a key priority for the City.** We continue to invest in our urban infrastructure to repair damaged roads, improve accessibility, address dangerous intersections, and expand protected bike lanes.

This year, the City made adjustments to the budget process to increase transparency and engagement with the Council. The City worked closely with the City Council Finance Committee Co-Chairs and held several public hearings prior to budget submission. We also engaged in substantive discussions on the budget and the City Council made formal requests for budget increases for affordable housing and for the public health department. The City worked to meet these requests and built in additional funding in the final adopted FY24 budget. I believe this collaborative approach is a good foundation for us to build on and continue.

An area where we need to improve is developing greater community input into our budget process. We already have a robust participatory budget program and I'm excited about expanding this as we enter our [tenth year](#). We will also explore ways to bring greater community engagement into the overall FY25 budget process and will look forward to sharing more.

Climate Change

Climate change is the fight of our generation. Warnings from scientists are only getting more dire and 2023 is likely to be the [hottest year on record](#), driving extreme weather events both around the world and very close to home. The transformation we need is not going to be easy and we are facing a massive restructuring of our economy, energy production, and infrastructure.

The last five months have seen us grapple with climate action as a city. How do we set aggressive goals and policies while mapping a realistic path that is achievable for our businesses and residents? How do we act on a ten-year plan while recognizing that science and technology are rapidly evolving? And how do we balance the difficult trade-offs that we will have to make as a community?

I'm proud of where we have landed together and this has been an incredibly productive City Council term. We have adopted climate-resilient zoning that builds efficiency standards and protections against future heat and flooding into our building codes. We have amended our Building Energy Use and Disclosure Ordinance (BEUDO) to include a 2035 net zero target for large commercial buildings that

represent the largest portion of our carbon footprint. And we are on track to participate in the state's Fossil Fuel Free pilot which would eliminate fossil fuel installations for new construction and major renovations with limited exemptions. These ordinances were vigorously debated, and I have seen us bring together diverse voices into the conversation, rely on our hard-working staff and expert opinions, and make compromises and adjustments while staying true to our ambitious goals.

The city also continues to build programs to support our residents and businesses through this transition, especially with the new regulations we have passed. The City has launched [Electrify Cambridge](#), a new program that provides no-cost technical consultation to residents on clean and green home energy upgrades such as heat pumps, solar panels, and induction stoves. We have continued to build out public electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and even developed accommodations for [EV charging across sidewalks](#), recognizing the limited number of driveways in the city and the need for our sidewalks to remain accessible. And we are developing new technical assistance programs that can provide support to small business and property owners.

There is still so much work ahead of us and we are committed to doing this together as a community. This is a global challenge but the local work that we are doing is a critical piece. There can be federal and state policies and actions, but cities and towns are where we live and our decisions matter. I believe that the real changes we are making will become a model for municipalities and I'm excited about the path and work ahead.

Alewife Zoning

Alewife is the last large area of the city with opportunity for major planning and redevelopment. Prompted by the rapid acquisition of 35 acres of land by Denver-based developer Healthpeak, the City Council imposed a construction moratorium for new commercial development until new zoning was adopted. The Council asked City staff to convene an Alewife Zoning Working Group to build off the recommendations from the 2019 Alewife District Plan and provide zoning rules that would guide the creation of a vibrant new neighborhood that enabled commercial development while also advancing the City's goals of housing production, economic vitality, and environmental resilience.

Over the last 18 months, city staff led an inclusive working group process that brought together the diverse interests of residents, business community, institutions, property owners, and developers. I'm excited to report that the process resulted in a shared vision for a mixed-use district that balances economic growth with housing development and delivers significant infrastructure improvements. The final zoning that was adopted 9-0 by the Council creates the framework for a multimodal, resilient, and sustainable neighborhood with strong community amenities. The zoning incentivizes the construction of a bike/pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks and requires commercial development over a certain threshold to contribute to our housing supply and fund infrastructure improvements. Estimated development projections by 2040 would result in approximately 3,500 new housing units, including 700 affordable units.

This process showcases the tremendous work we can accomplish when we come together as a community, listen to differing opinions, and identify pathways to reach our shared goals and values. I'm incredibly thankful to the members of the Alewife District Working Group who spent so much time together over the last year to make this a reality, to the City Council for their leadership, city staff for their expertise and guiding an inclusive and effective process, and to Healthpeak for their engagement and vision for development that is collaborative and aligns with the community's needs and desire.

Final Reflections

I continue to be humbled by the dedication, efforts, and expertise across City leadership and staff and feel such privilege to be working for the City. We have accomplished a lot in just one year and I'm looking forward to continuing to make progress on Council and community priorities. Thank you to the City Council for this privilege, and to our community for their trust.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yi-An Huang", written in a cursive style.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager