

MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING COMMITTEE
Thursday, October 1, 2026

HOUSING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Vice Mayor Azeem, Co-Chair
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Co-Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Councillor McGovern
Councillor Zusy

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Housing Committee was held on Thursday, October 1, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 2:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, 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 Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Absent*

Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/Remote

Councillor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Al-Zubi was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 2:08 p.m.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler offered opening remarks (**Attachment A**) and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a roundtable discussion with several arts and cultural institutions in Central Square on planning and cultural preservation in Central Square. Present at the meeting was Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Senior Urban Designer, Brian Gregory, Deputy Chief of Planning, Jennifer Caira, Director of Community Planning and Design, Daniel Messplay, Senior City Planner, Drew Kane, Economic Development Specialist, Jared Staley, Director of Arts and Cultural Planning, Claudia Zarazua, Director of the Arts Council, Jason Weeks, and Tom Evans, Executive Director of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority. Jeff Roberts, Director of Zoning and Development, was present via Zoom. Panelists that were present in the Sullivan Chamber included Michael Monestime, Executive Director for the Central Square BID, Catherine Carr Kelly, Executive Director of the Central Square Theater, and Peter DiMuro, Executive Artistic Director for The Dance Complex. Panelists that were present via Zoom included Ziad Sater, representative from the Middle East, Kylie Connors, General Manager for the Cantab Lounge, Kevin Treanor, owner of the Phoenix Landing, Dennis Benzan, owner of LaFabrica, and Andrea Taylor Dunkley from ATD Advisory.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Brian Gregory who gave a presentation titled “Central Square Rezoning”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler opened public comment.

Rayna Jhaveri, 92 Magazine Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of preserving and expanding arts and cultural spaces in Central Square and offered suggestions on the proposal.

Lee Farris shared concerns about the proposed Central Square upzoning and suggested ways to support the arts without additional development.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, urged the City to protect the character of Central Square and to reconsider the proposed zoning timeline.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Ziad Sater, Kylie Connors, and Kevin Treanor who gave brief introductions and provided an overview of their roles in Central Square. The panelists shared strong support for preserving the arts, music, and cultural community while also sharing concerns related to local businesses being able to stay in the area. They also emphasized the importance of support from the City as costs continue to rise and the financial challenges businesses may face during the proposed redevelopment.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Michael Monestime, Peter DiMuro and Catherine Carr Kelly, who shared their support for the City's efforts to preserve and strengthen arts and culture in Central Square. Michael Monestime raised concerns about how the proposed zoning could affect existing businesses and suggested that the City consider protections to help businesses remain in Central Square during redevelopment. Peter DiMuro agreed that protections for existing businesses would be beneficial and highlighted The Dance Complex as an important home for diverse forms of dance and cultural expression. Catherine Carr Kelly noted that additional cultural space and potential funding from new development could have a positive impact, while also raising concerns about how development could affect the character of Central Square. The panelists spoke in favor of receiving additional financial assistance to help local businesses address long-term challenges.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler explained that redevelopment can already happen in Central Square under the current zoning and that the proposed zoning changes would allow buildings to be built taller. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked how the proposed development would be able to provide benefits for Cambridge residents and the local arts and cultural organizations. Melissa Peters shared that the City is looking at how zoning could be used to provide additional development opportunities while also providing benefits for the community. Melissa Peters added that zoning is only one part of the process, and it is important for the City, the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, and local businesses to maintain a strong partnership to help preserve the culture of Central Square.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Dennis Benzan who thanked the City Council and the Central Square community for their work and shared the ongoing challenges businesses face. Dennis Benzan noted that many of the issues and challenges being discussed have existed in Central Square for years and added that improvements and developments could help support local businesses, housing, and the cultural district by bringing more people into Central Square.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who asked for clarification on how the development in the proposed Central Square zoning changes would be different from the recent zoning changes. Melissa Peters explained that the proposed zoning changes would still require a Special Permit on developments over 75,000 square feet. Vice Mayor Azeem added that most of

the larger developments as a result from the proposed changes would require Planning Board review through the Special Permit process.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Zusy who shared examples of other communities who have developed a strong art and cultural district and asked how the City would be able to provide more long-term support for the arts in Central Square. Councillor Zusy asked what type of incentives, such as tax incentives, could be used to help support organizations. Claudia Zarazua explained that the City is working on ways to help organizations build the skills and resources that are needed to help manage and maintain their spaces, such as the Cultural Space Readiness Pilot. Claudia Zarazua added that the City is using zoning to help address the displacement of businesses and to also create a space for the arts and culture by working with the community of the types of spaces they need. Claudia Zarazua shared that receiving input and feedback from organizations and residents will be helpful when deciding how the funding is used.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor McGovern who highlighted the importance of protecting existing arts, culture, and local businesses within Central Square as it is being redeveloped. Councillor McGovern agreed that construction and possible displacement could make it difficult for businesses to stay in the area. Councillor McGovern noted that it is important to find a balance between community requirements with enough development to make projects financially possible. Councillor McGovern encouraged the City to continue to bring in visitors into Central Square through housing, restaurants, events, and other activities that help support local businesses and the arts and culture. Councillor McGovern suggested using properties owned by the City as a resource to secure additional community and cultural benefits from future development.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who thanked staff for their presentation. Councillor Al-Zubi shared concerns about private development and voluntary zoning incentives as a way to preserve and create cultural spaces in Central Square. Councillor Al-Zubi encouraged the City to review stronger protections for existing organizations to provide them with an opportunity to return after development. Councillor Al-Zubi added that it is important to keep new cultural spaces affordable and accessible as well as continuing to involve local artists. Councillor Al-Zubi suggested City-owned properties in the City Lot Study as an opportunity for the City to have more control over affordability and cultural space.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked the panelists what concerns they have about their long-term future in Central Square and what kind of help could keep them in the area. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared concerns related to renting a space versus owning a space and noted that zoning and planning can be part of that solution. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler encouraged the City to consider other tools that may be available to help support local businesses and cultural organizations. Michael Monestime agreed that there is some uncertainty about the future of organizations and businesses but acknowledged that staying with the current condition of Central Square may not help to protect them from certain challenges. Michael Monestime offered suggestions on ways the City may be able to help support businesses, such as creating more artist housing and live/work spaces in Central Square. Michael Monestime asked for more information related to how new development can be designed to help accommodate the current nightlife and cultural venues. Brian Gregory shared that staff have been discussing the possibility of a Planned Unit Development (PUD) process that could help to provide more flexibility with development rights. Brian Gregory explained that with this approach, it would allow development and uses to be across multiple commonly owned properties and keeping goals towards preserving the culture and arts within Central Square. Jeff Roberts added that the PUD approach would allow flexibility which could help the City accomplish preservation and development goals that may be otherwise

difficult to achieve.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who suggested that the City consider historic preservation approaches as a way to help preserve the existing, lower portions of buildings, while still allowing additional height above them. The Vice Mayor provided examples of other cities who have been successful with this approach and shared that it would help maintain the character of Central Square. Vice Mayor Azeem asked what the next steps would look like moving forward and how the feedback and input from the public and stakeholders would be considered when moving forward.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Jason Weeks who thanked the Committee and staff for bringing together the different organizations within Central Square and discussing resources that can help strengthen the cultural community. Jason Weeks highlighted the importance of creating housing for artists and cultural workers so they can live in Cambridge and be part of the arts community.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Peter DiMuro who agreed that cultural spaces need more than just a building to be successful and added how The Dance Complex depends on artists, teachers, and staff to create a strong community. Peter DiMuro shared that without that support it would not be the space that it is today, Peter DiMuro noted the importance of supporting artists through affordable housing and artist guest housing so Cambridge can bring in more people and maintain the arts community.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Zusy who asked Tom Evans how Cambridge can help the arts and cultural organizations continue to grow and remain in the city. Tom Evans explained that the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority is reviewing options on how to support both art workspaces and artist housing. Tom Evans shared that with high development costs it does become challenging and would need a combination of different support, such as public and private funding, tax incentives, and reduced land or financing costs.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Brian Gregory who provided an overview for the next steps for the Central Square planning process.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler offered closing remarks.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Zusy who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

Councillor Zusy – Yes

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

The Housing Committee adjourned at approximately 3:36p.m.

Attachment A – Opening remarks from Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler (not verbatim).
Attachment B – Communications from the public.

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:
[Oct 01, 2026 Housing Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)