



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETINGS

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, October 8, 2025

2:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

**The Economic Development and University Relations Committee will hold a public hearing with the Community Development Department, Economic Opportunity and Development Division, to provide an update on the city’s efforts to support small businesses and commercial districts in Cambridge.**

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<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"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Economic Development and University Relations Committee was held on Wednesday, October 8, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 2:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Wilson. 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.**

- Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent
  - Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
  - Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote
  - Councillor Toner – Absent
  - Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.**

The Chair, Councillor Wilson offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing with the Community Development Department (CDD), Economic Opportunity and Development Division, to provide an update on the city’s efforts to support small businesses and commercial districts in Cambridge. Present at the meeting were Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for CDD, Pardis Saffari, Director of Economic Development, Allyson Allen, Senior Economic Development Manager, Matt Nelson, Director of Administration and Operations for the City Manager’s Office, Councillor Zusy, and Councillor Nolan. Present from various associations within in the City were Jason Alves, Executive Director of the East Cambridge Business Association, Nicola Williams, founder and owner of The Williams Agency, Denise Jillson, Executive Director of the Harvard Square Business Association, Andrea Taylor Dunkley, Principal and Founder of ATD Advisory, and Mike Monestime, Executive Director of the Central Square BID.

Councillor Wilson recognized Pardis Saffari who gave a presentation titled “City of Cambridge Community Development Department Economic Opportunity and Development Division.” The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Councillor Wilson recognized Jason Alves, Andrea Taylor Dunkley, Denise Jillson, Nicola Williams, and Mike Monestime who offered comments, suggestions, and concerns related to the City's partnerships and support with small businesses and commercial districts. Pardis Saffari responded to comments and shared that she appreciated all the feedback. In addition, Matt Nelson provided a brief overview of how ARPA funding previously became available as grant money for small businesses as a way for the city to continue its support.

Councillor Wilson recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who shared his appreciation for the presentation, learning more about the city's efforts to support small businesses, and receiving feedback from the business associations.

Councillor Wilson recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked for clarification on past programs where the city partnered with a law firm to provide legal advice to small businesses and why that program was phased out. Pardis Saffari explained that CDD is currently looking for a new law firm that specializes in small businesses, and the previous lawyer moved out of the country. Councillor Siddiqui asked if there would be any Serve Safe training courses in the future. Pardis Saffari shared that if you participate in the food business you can take Serve Safe training for free. Councillor Siddiqui asked for more information related to the E-Bike Cargo Business program, which was funded through ARPA. Matt Nelson explained that the program is a collaborative effort within City Departments that are working towards receiving small grants for e-bikes. Councillor Siddiqui shared concerns and challenges that have been shared with her related to the permitting process that businesses go through and suggested looking into an easier method for them.

Councillor Wilson recognized Councillor Zusy who asked how regularly CDD is meeting with business associations. Pardis Saffari shared how often CDD is in communication with business associations, noting that it can sometimes be daily, and provided examples of what is discussed. Councillor Zusy asked what feedback has been shared with CDD related to parking and the flexible parking corridor. Pardis Saffari shared that there is always a concern about parking and added that it is important to have communication and build relationships with lot owners and educate them on the flexible parking corridor. Councillor Zusy asked if there is any data related to knowing how much money is being spent towards online shopping. Pardis Saffari explained how data was collected in the post pandemic study, noting that it is not 100% accurate and can be used as a guideline.

Councillor Wilson recognized Councillor Nolan who thanked the City for all their services and for the business associations providing feedback. Councillor Nolan questioned outdoor dining fees and suggested that the different fees be reviewed by the City to understand if they are negatively affecting the city economically. Councillor Nolan asked for more information on employee ownership options, especially for legacy businesses, and the turnaround for grant reimbursement. Pardis Saffari provided an overview of the City's Succession Planning Program and shared that there has been a series of webinars and workshops that were offered in the spring. Pardis Saffari added that there are state programs available as well related to employee ownership. Pardis Saffari provided information on programs that assist with grant reimbursement, adding that it can be 4–6-week period to receive reimbursement if all the paperwork is filed correctly. Councillor Wilson recognized Nicola Williams who explained how many small businesses can not take advantage of some of the grant programs, such as the Green Equipment Program, due to financial challenges and urged the city and partners to think of creative ways to help accommodate small businesses who cannot take advantage of some programs. Pardis Saffari provided a brief overview of the Green Equipment Program and thanked Nicola Williams for the feedback while also sharing that she understands the frustrations that business owners have related to reimbursement. Matt Nelson added that the Green Equipment Program was a grant which was a part of ARPA that went to businesses and properties to help upgrade their sustainable infrastructure. Matt Neslon explained that many of those grants were partnered with already existing Mass Save reimbursement, which created challenges in how the City could grant those funds.

Councillor Wilson asked if food trucks were included in the City's efforts to provide support to businesses. Pardis Saffari explained that prior to the pandemic the City created a food truck program, but with limited foot traffic post pandemic in the business corridors it made it difficult for them to come back. Councillor Wilson asked for more information on the Cambridge Nights Program why it is only being offered during the summer and spring. Pardis Saffari shared that this program came from the post pandemic study as a result on how to support the nightlife industry. Pardis Saffari explained that it was piloted in the spring and there may be some

events happening in the fall. Pardis Saffari added that winter may be challenging due to weather but could be taken into consideration.

Councillor Wilson offered closing remarks and provided a brief overview of the topics that were suggested during the meeting. Councillor Wilson agreed with comments from Councillor Nolan related to fees and suggested that the city investigate further. Matt Nelson added that the City's outdoor dining fees are much lower than other communities.

**Councillor Wilson recognized Councillor Siddiqui who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.**

**Clerk of Committees called the roll.**

Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Absent

Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

**The Committee adjourned at approximately 3:43p.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:

[Oct 8, 2025 2:00 PM - Economic Development & University Relations Committee - Committee Meetings](#)

**A communication was received from Pardis Saffari Director of Economic Opportunity and Development , transmitting Community Development Department's presentation.**