



# NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Thursday, October 10, 2024

1:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Neighborhood and Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee will hold a public hearing on Thursday October 10, 2024 to discuss preliminary recommendations from the Central Square rezoning process.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee was held on Thursday, October 10, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 1:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, 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 Co-Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
- Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

**Present – 5. Quorum established.**

Co-Chair, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss preliminary recommendations from the Central Square rezoning process. Present at the meeting were Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Chief of Planning Strategy, Brian Gregory, Urban Designer, Jeff Roberts, Director of Zoning and Development, and Claudia Zarazua, Director of Arts and Cultural Planning. Also present remotely was Vice Mayor McGovern.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized the team from CDD and Brian Gregory gave a presentation titled “Central Square Rezoning”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered a detailed overview of the work around community engagement, preliminary recommendations, and the next steps to move forward.

**Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler opened Public Comment.**

Carolyn Magid, 71 Reed Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the preliminary recommendations.

Derlyn Moronta, 62 Norfolk Street, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the preliminary recommendations and spoke in support of all the diversity Central Square offers.

Rabbi Yoni offered comments relative to housing and building height as well as tenant rights.

Dan Totten, 54 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the preliminary recommendations and highlighted the importance of Central Square cultural district.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and concerns relative to proposed zoning changes.

Lee Farris, 269 Norfolk Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments regarding community engagement and spoke in favor of affordable housing.

James Williamson, 30 Churchill Avenue, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the preliminary recommendations and offered comments regarding community engagement.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan who shared her support for the proposed vision and continuing to move forward, noting that setbacks make a difference when looking at building height. Councillor Nolan shared the importance of the information that is gathered during city-wide events, highlighting that not only will this have an impact on those who live in Cambridge, but also those who use and visit the City. Councillor Nolan provided suggestions for different groups that could be involved in these conversations, such as the Chamber of Commerce and neighborhood groups across the City, pointing out that the end result of this proposal could be stronger if more groups were involved in the engagement process. Brian Gregory noted that the engagement piece was more reflective of those who are currently in Central Square and agreed that inviting others to engagement events would be beneficial.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Azeem who offered comments related to height and geographic limits of Central Square, noting that they are both important to address. Councillor Azeem shared he would be in favor of increasing geographic limits. Councillor Azeem offered suggestions on providing initiatives to developers who provide additional space in buildings for more mixed-use purposes. Councillor Azeem asked during this process if there would be an opportunity to close the Central Square and Harvard Square overlay gap. Brian Gregory noted that the gap would remain as is, but it is something that would continue to be looked at. Brian Gregory shared that the City is being mindful about how to provide more opportunities for housing and to look at Mass. Ave more holistically. Councillor Azeem shared he was looking forward to getting zoning language and continuing the conversation in more detail.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Zusy who thanked CDD for their community outreach work and asked for clarification on the process going forward. Iram Farooq shared that the goal is to get the Committee's general thoughts and start forming recommendations for moving forward. Co-Chair Zusy shared concerns around the height of buildings, noting the potential of taller buildings casting shadows, but did speak in favor of more housing. Councillor Zusy asked staff if they had an idea of how many units they would be looking to create. Melissa Peters shared that they are currently working on projections for the squares and corridors and would hope to have information in the future. Iram Farooq pointed out that the biggest opportunities will be in the municipal lots and that there will be many factors that go into decision making. Co-Chair Zusy thanked the staff for all their information and appreciated that there have been conversations around open space. Co-Chair Zusy offered comments that were in favor of adding more green space in Central Square during development changes.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Siddiqui who echoed many of the comments made by Committee members and noted the importance of using feedback from previous meetings and including it in the process going forward. Councillor Siddiqui provided feedback that was in support of height development and more affordable housing and suggested that work with the Affordable Housing Trust and developers should be a priority moving forward. Councillor Siddiqui also noted the importance of Starlight and how similar concepts should be incorporated with new developments, highlighting the importance of being intentional with space and the possibilities that are available to keep cultural spaces. Councillor Siddiqui shared that collecting demographic data during engagement is important in the community outreach process. Councillor Siddiqui shared support for the preliminary recommendations and the opportunities that are available to help the housing crisis.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who thanked CDD for the presentation and all the outreach that has been done and noted the importance of continuing to update residents throughout the process. Vice Mayor McGovern indicated that it would be important to see the comparison of units relative to height and would be in favor of increasing height limits to maximize as many affordable units as possible. Vice Mayor McGovern pointed out that the vision that is being discussed today won't unfold for many years, and it is important to plan now for what Cambridge is going to look like in the future. The Vice Mayor provided suggestions on engagement with Cambridge Local First and those who are employed by local businesses and shared he looks forward to the conversation moving forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if it was possible to continue to give affordable housing an advantage over market rate as it relates to the Affordable House Overlay (AHO). Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler also asked if the City has looked at advantages for affordable housing, such as allowing more commercial use in all affordable buildings. Jeff Roberts responded by sharing an overview of some of the discussions that have happened regarding the AHO and noted that it could be difficult to mix commercial use and affordable housing, but it is something that can be investigated further. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler offered comments relative to the heights of buildings, noting that Central Square is already one of the densest parts of the City. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler highlighted the importance of including parcels that do not currently have housing but have the potential to have housing. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler pointed out that the conversation on this topic will continue to move forward, and there will be additional discussions with staff to get to more specific zoning language.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked for more information and the process moving forward as it relates to inclusionary zoning. Iram Farooq shared that for changing the inclusionary requirement there is the possibility to go lower than what the current number is based on a previous study, but it would require a new study to go higher.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Iram Farooq who provided clarity on areas of the City, such as Vail Court, that were recommended by Committee members as potential developments. Iram Farooq noted that there will be additional studies about potential parcels that could be included in the future.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Zusy who stressed the importance of knowing the number of residential units that would become available if this zoning were to go forward.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan and Councillor Siddiqui who offered comments related to mixed income housing and affordable housing.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler thanked City staff for all their work.

**Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Co-Chair Zusy who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

**Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed**

**The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:55p.m.**

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