City of Cambridge
Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026-316
IN CITY COUNCIL
November 9, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am writing to provide an update on-going Emergency Management efforts. While we often think of Emergency Management as how we respond to emergencies, it is critical to note that a key part of Emergency Management is Emergency Preparedness, which is not reactive, but rather it is a continuous, pre-disaster process that integrates risk assessment, capability building, and community engagement.

The City has strong department resources dedicated to planning for and responding to emergencies. And while all departments play a role in emergency preparedness and response, the key responsible departments include our public safety departments (Community Safety, Emergency Communications, Fire and Police), our operating departments (Inspectional Services, Public Works, Sustainability, Transportation and Water), Communications, the Commission for Persons with Disabilities, the Public Health Department and Information Technology Department. Each of these departments is committed to the upfront work of planning for emergencies, as well as the response work that occurs when an emergency occurs.

The City has been actively working to increase capacity and coordination in emergency management over the past several years. We have identified areas where we have strong protocols, systems, and employee resources to plan, prevent, mitigate, respond, and recover from various emergencies within the community. Additionally, we have identified areas where we need to build additional capacity and evolve in planning for the future. Below is a summary of existing protocols, initiatives, and plans, followed by key next steps.

Overview of Key Existing Emergency Management Efforts

The City has several existing emergency plans in place in various departments and program areas.

1. **Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP),** Emergency Communications Department (ECD)
   Required by the State 911 Department for all Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) to provide emergency services to residents during an emergency when the PSAP is

compromised/damaged. ECD has developed and implemented a COOP to provide the following:

- Backup site for 911 (warm site) – Water EOC established in 2025
- Plan for evacuation of the 911 Center
- Succession planning
- Devolution
- Testing/Training/exercise the plan

The department has regularly exercised this plan as part of the COOP requirement.

2. **Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), Police Department**
   Required by CALEA Standard 46.1.13, the Police Department's COOP plan aims to ensure continuous performance of the department's essential functions and operations during emergency or critical circumstances. This includes:
   - Protection of facilities, equipment, vital records and other assets
   - Reduction or mitigation of disruptions to operations
   - Assessment and minimization of damage and losses
   - Facilitation of decision-making during periods of an emergency

2. **Water Reservoir, Emergency Action Plan (EAP) Cambridge Water Department (CWD)**
   The Water Department's Emergency Action Plan outlines responsibilities and procedures for identifying unusual and unlikely conditions, which may endanger Cambridge Reservoir Dam and Stony Brook Reservoir Dam, and infrastructure ultimately preventing risk to our supply and residents. CWD has developed and implemented an EAP to provide the following:
   - Mitigation
   - Notification procedures
   - Reduce damage to property/life

3. **Resilient Cambridge Plan (Office of Sustainability)**
   Roadmap to reduce the risks from climate change and prepare the community for impacts that cannot be avoided. Focus is on threats from increasing temperatures, precipitation, and sea level rise.
   - Heat Risk
   - Heat Strategies
   - Flood Risk
   - Flood Strategies
   - Climate Resilience Toolkits

   In 2026, the City implemented a new Heat Protocol to establish a clear and coordinated protocol for how the city prepares for, monitors, and responds to extreme heat. By streamlining responsibilities, decision-making steps, and communication pathways, we aim to ensure an efficient, equitable and timely response that protects residents,

especially those most vulnerable to heat-related illness.

4. **Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (2025) (Office of Sustainability)**
   The Natural Hazard Mitigation plan identifies strategies to reduce the risk of injury, loss of life, and property damage from natural hazards such as floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes.

5. **Cyber Security (Information Technology Department)**
   Led by the Information Technology Department (ITD), the City has been monitoring our defenses against cybersecurity attacks that could impact our ability to respond to the community and maintain continuity of business. ITD has taken steps to ensure planning and development of procedures are in place to operate in the event of a cyber-attack. We continue to identify core operations and protocols that allow our operations to resume during recovery. There are also various prevention measures that are in place, including cyber defense solutions, penetration testing and tabletop exercises. We are currently underway with our annual cybersecurity education and awareness efforts to educate employees on how their daily efforts can keep our systems safe. These efforts will help us continue to evolve and grow our emergency planning, disaster recovery and continuity planning related to cyberattacks. This work will also align with our greater efforts to build and innovate in our emergency planning efforts.

6. **Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP)**
   The Cambridge Fire Department is working with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on updating the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP). CEMP is an all-hazards plan to address the natural and human-caused hazards that threaten Massachusetts. These efforts align with our overall capacity to prevent, mitigate, respond and recover from emergencies in our community.

7. **Special Event Planning and Significant Incident Response**
   City leaders collaborate and support special events throughout the year. This requires coordination in advance of these events, safety planning and resource allocation. There are approximately 15 – 20 large-scale events per year that require Incident Action Planning (IAP) to account for security measures, plans, policies, procedures, emergency preparedness, and threat or vulnerability assessments. During these events, there is interagency cooperation and a high level of planning and preparation to ensure the safety of all attendees and personnel, mitigate traffic and community impacts, and ensure Incident Command System (ICS) protocols are followed.

   Monthly Special Event Planning meetings occur to coordinate these efforts and share necessary information related to these events. Depending on the event and anticipated attendance, event organizers are invited to participate and engage with departments to ensure successful events. These large-scale events include but are not limited to July 4th, Cambridge Carnival, Taste of Cambridge, Thai Market, Oktoberfest, Head of the Charles, Half Marathon, May Fair, Dance Party, and university commencements. In addition, this past summer, the City hosted seven (7) watch parties which required additional planning efforts to ensure safe and successful events in our community.

Our operations and public safety departments plan and collaborate during our winter months for snow operations and to address issues during extreme cold events. This annual preparation begins in October and runs through the winter season. These efforts include advance procurement of contracts, equipment maintenance, salting operations, snow plowing, bicycle and pedestrian operations, snow removal and hauling, towing operations, clearing fire hydrants, communication to residents and employees, assessing business operations, school operations, and supporting our unhoused residents.

8. **Public Health – Resilience and Emergency Preparedness**
   Public health plays a vital role in emergency preparedness. After major disasters, public health workers are often called upon to participate in a coordinated response. They also work to protect residents from disease outbreaks and other hazards due to contaminated food and water, chemical releases, insect-borne diseases, and unmet medical needs.
   In Cambridge, the Health Department works closely with other first responders on the city's disaster preparedness efforts. The department is focused on communications, as well as health emergencies that could potentially harm many people, such as pandemic flu, foodborne illnesses, hazardous releases, natural disasters, and terrorism.
   In addition to city preparedness activities, the Cambridge Public Health Department is a member of the state-funded Metro Regional Preparedness Coalition, which fosters regional health and medical readiness for emergency events in 60 communities, including Cambridge.

New Internal Emergency Management Working Group / Recommendations

Based on feedback from the City Council, city departments, and recommendations from a 2024 emergency management tabletop exercise, we recognize that the overarching coordinating piece of emergency management in our organization could be strengthened. To that end, I have prioritized enhancing our capacity in emergency management and included it as one of my annual goals with the City Council for this year.

To further this work in a thoughtful way, we have convened an Emergency Management Working Group led by Deputy City Manager Watkins. The Working Group includes representatives from Police, Fire, Emergency Communications, Public Health, Public Works, Commission for Persons with Disabilities, Office of Sustainability, and Communications. Over the next 9-12 months, this group will support the development of clear and actionable recommendations for enhancing our emergency management program; identifying opportunities and priorities.

To support the Working Group, we are working with a consultant experienced in emergency management structures to assess our emergency management programs and resources. This assessment will develop both short- and long-term strategies for building and exercising our emergency management program.

Upcoming Incident Command Structure Training

The City has been collaborating with various public safety agencies, including the Harvard University Police Department, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police Department, and public health stakeholders including Cambridge Health Alliance and Mount Auburn Hospital post-COVID, to identify any public safety or public health concerns requiring a unified response.

This Cambridge Public Safety/Public Health Partners Group meets monthly to share, collaborate, and plan events impacting public safety or public health. Although this group does not hold an official charter, it does strive to improve relationships and response capabilities within the region. To that end, they organized and planned the 2024 large-scale tabletop exercise to identify strengths, as well as gaps in the City of Cambridge's response infrastructure. As part of their work, they provided draft recommendations to improve our efforts, which we have been organizing and planning to address over the next few years.

The Cambridge Public Safety/Public Health Partners Group is designing a training program for city leaders to provide additional education on Incident Command Structure (ICS), National Incident Management System (NIMS), and exercising our capabilities and learning through small tabletop sessions beginning in early 2027. These standardized emergency management frameworks were developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and managed by FEMA. These systems are utilized as a framework to organize agencies during incidents. This additional training across our organization will enhance our capabilities within the organization and with our local and regional partners.

Over the next 9 to 12 months, we will be working on strengthening our Emergency Management program through these efforts and will report back to the City Council with short- and long-term actionable steps that we can take together to prepare and recover in the future.

Very truly yours,



Yi-An Huang
City Manager