



HOUSING COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, April 30, 2024

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Housing Committee will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, April 30, 2024 from 3:00p.m. – 5:00p.m. to discuss the feasibility of municipally-funded housing vouchers as referenced in POR 2024 #24.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<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 type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input 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 Housing Committee was held on Tuesday, April 30, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Siddiqui. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 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, 2nd 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
- Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote
- Councillor Wilson – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present -5. Quorum established.

Co-Chair Siddiqui offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss the feasibility of municipally funded housing vouchers as referenced in Policy Order 2024 #24. Present at the meeting was Chris Cotter, Housing Director, Maura Pensak, Housing Liaison, Megan Bayer, Acting City Solicitor, Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for the Department of Human Services, Phoebe West, Project Coordinator, and Mike Johnston, Executive Director for the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) was joined via Zoom. Also present at the meeting was Councillor Pickett, Councillor Nolan, and Mayor Simmons.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Azeem who shared that he is excited for the conversation and to bring more inclusion and affordability into housing.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Chris Cotter who gave a presentation titled “Municipal Vouchers”, which was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of vouchers, existing programs and resources in Cambridge, different municipal voucher models with examples from Boston and Somerville, discussions and considerations, and an evaluation of approaches.

Co-Chair Siddiqui opened Public Comment.

Carolyn Magid, 61 Reed Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments of support for municipally funded vouchers.

Justin Saif, 259 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, shared they support the efforts to create municipal vouchers in Cambridge.

Richard Krushnic, 20 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments of support for municipally funded vouchers.

Glenna Wyman, 25 8th Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments on municipal vouchers and affordable housing in Cambridge.

Lee Farris, 269 Norfolk Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments of support for municipally funded vouchers.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who shared that he is very excited about the idea of municipal vouchers and additional affordable housing. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if vouchers would be able to expand the eligibility window for people who qualify for affordable housing. Chris Cotter responded and shared that funding and resources would factor into different eligibility limits. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if there was the possibility of having project-based vouchers for different populations. Chris Cotter explained that it would depend on the specifics of different situations if a voucher would be project-based or tenant-based, understanding the different priorities would be a way to potentially introduce a voucher into a building that provides affordable housing, what requirements come from the underlying funding source that the City would have to follow, flexibility with City priorities, and some challenges that could come forward. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if more information could be provided on how the referral service will work. Maura Pensak shared that it will be a network of community service providers and shared the process of how referral and selection may work. Mike Johnston provided additional information regarding the referral process.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Wilson who asked for more information on contracted rent and middle-income family eligibility. Chris Cotter responded and provided a breakdown of the example that was provided in the presentation on household income and eligibility, noting that it could help to better model what the City wants to look at when it comes to different payment standards. Councillor Wilson shared the importance of recognizing everyone who is impacted when it comes to assistance with housing. Councillor Wilson asked how ARPA funding is playing a role in municipal vouchers. Maura Pensak responded and shared how the funding has been used within the eviction prevention funds, the housing stabilization program, and legal services. Ellen Semonoff shared that DHSP is still discussing with the City Manager on how the ARPA funding will be spent by the end of this year and how much of the funding can continue to be spent after this year, and provided examples of where ARPA funding is currently being used. Councillor Wilson shared it would be good to discuss whether the assistance would be short-term or long-term, highlighting a model that the CHA uses with families. Maura Pensak shared some challenges that she has seen with short-term assistance and pointed out that they are always looking at ways to be creative about how funding is spent.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Azeem who shared some concerns that may arise with demand and competition towards the bidding of units. Councillor Azeem referenced packet page 17 and shared concerns about the information that was provided regarding subsidy spending. Councillor Azeem provided suggestions on ways the spending could be used with other housing programs, like inclusionary, and using a project-based approach. Chris Cotter shared that making the inclusionary program more affordable is something the Department can investigate further and as well as the funding source.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that she would like to look further into a project-based approach and that collecting as much data as possible to help with discussions moving forward would be beneficial. In addition, Councillor Siddiqui also noted the importance of community outreach to have conversations with those who would benefit from a voucher program.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Mike Johnston who followed up on comments made by Councillors during the discussion, sharing concerns about short-term programs, challenges that CHA sees with the growing list of people applying for housing, and highlighted the great housing programs that the City, and its partners, currently offers.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who echoed comments made by the Co-Chairs regarding project-based vouchers.

Co-Chair Siddiqui offered closing remarks and summarized the goals and suggestions that were made throughout the discussion. Chris Cotter and Maura Pensak shared that the conversation was very helpful as they continue to move forward.

Co-Chair Siddiqui made a motion to close public comment.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

Co-Chair Siddiqui made a motion to recess the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

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

The Cambridge City Council’s Housing Committee went into recess at 4:35p.m.

On Tuesday, October 15, 2024, the Cambridge City Council’s Housing Committee that recessed on April 30, 2024, reconvened at 11:00a.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Siddiqui. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 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, 2nd 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 McGovern – Present/Remote

Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Wilson – Absent*

Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Wilson was marked present and in the Sullivan Chamber at 11:06a.m.

Co-Chair Siddiqui offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to continue discussion from the meeting that was held on April 30, 2024 on the feasibility of municipally funded vouchers as referenced in Policy Order 2024 #24. Present at the meeting were Chris Cotter, Housing Director, Maura Pensak, Housing Liaison, Phoebe West, Project Coordinator, Maria Melo, Case Manager, Alexis Buckley, Senior Inclusionary Rental Housing Manager, and Megan Bayer, City Solicitor. Also present at the meeting remotely were Councillor Zusy and Mayor Simmons.

Co-Chair Siddiqui opened Public Comment.

Stephanie Guirand, 67 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of municipal vouchers and shared concerns about the proposal.

Richard Krushnic, 20 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of municipal vouchers and shared concerns regarding no expansion of inclusionary housing.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Chris Cotter who gave a presentation titled “City-Funded Rental Subsidy Recommendations”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation included a summary of the April 30, 2024 presentation, considerations and program gaps, recommendation for Cambridge Pilot Program, and next steps. After the presentation Chris Cotter and the Housing team were available to respond to Committee members during discussion.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked for more information on the flexibility of the proposed program, noting that it does not sound like it is project based or tenant based. Chris Cotter provided additional information on the vision of the proposal and shared that the idea is to allow more flexibility within the affordable stock and what goals the housing team is trying to achieve with tenants who are provided with housing through a voucher run program. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked for clarification on qualifying events to apply for assistance, which Chris Cotter was able to provide examples of reasonable circumstances and shared that ideas from the Committee are welcomed. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if any information could be shared on what the annual budget for this program may look like. Chris Cotter explained that the annual budget is not something that has been looked at in great detail due to the different factors that could affect the number but shared that in the near future an appropriation request could be around 1 million dollars. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared that he would like to see more data in the future on what type of impact this program would have on current residents who are paying more than 30% of their income towards rent and more information on who would qualify.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Wilson who shared her appreciation for the presentation and all the work that has been put into this program. Councillor Wilson asked how many units Boston was providing with their 11 million in funding. Maura Pensak and Chris Cotter shared that there are 500 units between project and tenant based vouchers. Councillor Wilson agreed with comments made by Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler about collecting data in regard to how many residents right now would fall into this program. Councillor Wilson noted that this information would be important to achieve the goal to help as many people as possible and noted that information could help with the pilot program. Councillor Wilson asked for clarification around the AMI, which Maura Pensak was able to provide. Councillor Wilson offered the suggestion of expanding inclusionary access to allow more people to qualify and asked how that threshold could be expanded. Chris Cotter explained how they are trying to work with people in the program currently to make housing more affordable to them and noted the challenges that could arise with inclusionary housing and voucher programs. Councillor Wilson asked it would be possible to expand the number of immigrant vouchers. Chris Cotter and Maura Pensak explained how they got the number for immigrant vouchers, noting that it is a really important population the City wants to assist, but also pointing out the importance of helping those who are currently on the housing wait list, and provided additional information on the process of the housing wait list.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Vice Mayor McGovern who thanked the staff for their presentation and all the work that has been done. The Vice Mayor asked for clarity regarding how vouchers could move around to different units with the same resident. Chris Cotter explained that the current goal is to maintain stability and shared what would happen if circumstances changed and someone does need to move to a different development or out of the city. Vice Mayor McGovern shared how a voucher program is necessary and sees it as an opportunity to help people stay housed, and shared concerns about the program relative to those who are on the current waiting list for housing. The Vice Mayor stressed how important it is to help those who have been on the waiting list and need housing.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zusy who asked if the inventory of housing is available to provide to the number of vouchers that will be available. Maura Pensak explained that they currently do not have an exact number, but in the past few years it has significantly increased and provided further information on the payment standard. Chris Cotter provided additional information regarding vouchers staying in Cambridge and mobile vouchers.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Co-Chair Azeem who thanked the staff for their ongoing work around municipal vouchers. Councillor Azeem echoed comments about trying to help those on the waiting list to qualify for a voucher program and inclusionary housing. Councillor Azeem shared his support towards assistance for households who are not eligible for federally funded housing. Councillor Azeem shared he looks forward to more conversation with his Co-Chair and the housing team to help reach goals and keep moving forward with the recommendations.

Co-Chair Siddiqui shared that she agreed with many of the comments that have been said by Committee members and appreciated all the work that has been done to get to the recommendations. Councillor Siddiqui asked how current funding could help or work with the tenancy preservation subsidy within the voucher program. Maura Pensak responded by sharing it is not something that has been discussed in detail but would not foresee those who have received other funding being impacted to not qualify towards a voucher. Maria Melo provided additional information related to rental assistance and municipal voucher applicants. Co-Chair Siddiqui echoed comments made by the Vice Mayor regarding helping those who are currently on the housing waiting list and agreed with Co-Chair Azeem about the Co-Chairs meeting with the housing team to discuss the proposed recommendations in more detail. Co-Chair Siddiqui also summarized many of the comments and concerns that were brought forward by Committee members.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Wilson who offered additional comments on how the City can continue to move forward with these recommendations and how this will be a beneficial opportunity for people in the future to improve the lives of residents. Councillor Wilson also reiterated the importance of collecting and sharing as much data as possible and agreed with Co-Chair Siddiqui and the Vice Mayor on how the program can be expanded to help those on the current housing waiting list.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Chris Cotter who shared his appreciation for the feedback and discussion. Chris Cotter stated that there can be more conversations about expansion and will take the feedback that was received today and put together proposals in more detail to come back to the Committee with.

Both Co-Chair Siddiqui and Co-Chair Azeem offered closing remarks and agreed it would be good to review the recommendations in more detail and debrief further after this hearing. The Co-Chairs shared that they will discuss with the housing team further what the next steps will look like.

Co-Chair Siddiqui recognized Councillor Wilson who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Yes – 5. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:35p.m.

Attachment A – Written communications from the public from both the April 30, 2024 and October 15, 2024 hearings.

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record. The video for these meetings can be viewed at:

April 30, 2024

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/739?view_id=1&redirect=true

October 15, 2024

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/864?view_id=1&redirect=true

That the City Manager is hereby directed to confer with the City Manager's Housing Liaison, Community Development Department, and the Cambridge Housing Authority on the feasibility of municipally-funded housing vouchers.

A communication was received from Chris Cotter, Housing Director, transmitting a presentation regarding the feasibility of municipally-funded housing vouchers.

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

From: Sharon deVos <sharondevos@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 11:33 PM
To: City Council; City Clerk; City Manager
Subject: Municipal Voucher Program

Dear City Councillors

Like so many Cambridge residents, I am very concerned about the very real housing crisis for low and moderate income people who can not afford to continue to live in Cambridge. So I am urging you to support establishing a municipal voucher program. I also support the Affordable Housing Trust Zoning petition which has been proposed by the Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition.

Thank you,
Sharon deVos
118 Antrim St.
Cambridge

Erwin, Nicole

From: Andy N <anash18@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:47 PM
To: City Council
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Municipal housing vouchers

Good evening councilors,

I am writing to express strong support for efforts by the city to create a municipal voucher program. Although increasing the stock of affordable housing is key to a long-term solution, we know that Cambridge is falling far short of meeting its Envision target for new affordable housing. Since 2018, 474 new units have been built, and the target is 3175 units by 2030.

I support initiatives to build more affordable housing as quickly as possible, but we simultaneously need short-term efforts to keep Cambridge families housed and prevent displacement. Municipal housing vouchers, as demonstrated in Somerville and Boston, are an effective tool to do that.

Vouchers are also important in the long-term as a complement to deed-restricted affordable housing that is still out of reach for families of the lowest incomes. Vouchers and new affordable housing construction can work together to create units that are truly affordable to all of the households that need them.

I also support the Affordable Housing Trust Zoning petition proposed by the Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition, which would enable the Trust to fund such a city voucher program.

Thank you for prioritizing housing solutions on the council,
Andy Nash
18 Worcester Street

Erwin, Nicole

From: Puja Kranz-Howe <pkranz-howe@ywcacam.org>
Sent: Tuesday, October 15, 2024 11:01 AM
To: City Clerk; City Council; Huang, Yi-An
Subject: Cambridge City Voucher Testimony

Dear City Manager, Mayor E. Denise Simmons, and Cambridge City Councilors,

I am honored to testify today on behalf of YWCA Cambridge, a non-profit organization with a mission to eliminate racism and empower women. Through our 103 single-room occupancy (SRO) rental units in the Tanner building, we are the city's largest affordable residential housing provider for single women. We also provide emergency shelter to ten families.

Policy and initiatives impacting our residents and families are core to our mission. YWCA Cambridge supports POR 2024 #24, which creates tenant and project vouchers for our low-income community members. Not only is Cambridge lacking in affordable housing options, but the rent prices continue to increase while family income stays stagnant. Currently, [45%](#) of residents in the Greater Boston area are cost-burdened renters, with [12.1%](#) of our community living in poverty.

Our YWCA Cambridge staff receives countless calls each week from the community asking for affordable housing opportunities. The need for affordable housing is vital. Currently, 6,000 residents or workers in Cambridge are on the federal Section 8 waiting list. Many families and community members are struggling to find affordable housing and are forced to relocate or can't find housing.

We strongly urge the city council to vote to create a city housing voucher program, and also work on expanding the program, as low-income options are scarce. As the cost of living continues to increase, we must ensure individuals and families have access to adequate and affordable housing opportunities.

Sincerely,

Puja Kranz-Howe

YWCA Cambridge

7 Temple Street,

Cambridge, MA, 02139

Puja Kranz-Howe | he/him

Advocacy and Youth Leadership Manager

T: 781-885-4023

E: pkranz-howe@ywcacam.org

YWCA Cambridge
7 Temple Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

www.ywcacam.org

Erwin, Nicole

From: Steve Wineman <steven.wineman@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 15, 2024 10:26 AM
To: City Council
Cc: Huang, Yi-An; City Clerk
Subject: Rental voucher program

Dear Councillors,

I am writing to urge you to support a \$6 million per year pilot rental voucher program targeting people who earn too little to meet current eligibility for inclusionary housing, as well as those who can't access affordable housing due to their immigration status.

This voucher program is a practical, common sense way to make affordable housing accessible to those most in need. In a city with Cambridge's resources, this is the least we can do,

Sincerely,
Steve Wineman
26 McTernan St.

--

This email communication is made possible by the labor of the people of the Congo, including thousands of children, mining cobalt for rechargeable lithium batteries in conditions tantamount to slavery. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/02/01/1152893248/red-cobalt-congo-drc-mining-siddharth-kara>

Erwin, Nicole

From: Becca Schofield <beccascho@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 15, 2024 8:26 AM
To: City Council; City Clerk
Subject: PO #24, Municipally Funded Housing Vouchers

Dear Councillors,

Thank you for considering a municipally-funded voucher program. Over the spring/summer, I had an opportunity to discuss the feasibility of this type of program with City staff, FOAH, and several other housing experts. In my experience as an affordable housing developer, I've seen huge gaps in the applicant pool for affordable units and the tax credit rents for "affordable projects" - there's a widespread misconception that most low-income people are eligible for and/or can afford the tax credit (60% AMI) rents for affordable developments. In reality, the vast majority of applicants cannot afford this rent and will not be able to live in the new units we're building.

I believe you all understand and recognize the need for more deeply affordable units. I also believe it is financially feasible to subsidize lower rents in existing affordable properties. After modeling the gaps between 30% AMI rents and 60% or 80% AMI rents at various unit sizes, this seems like an affordable and worthwhile use of City funds. For example, it's only \$10k/year to write down the rent of a 60% two-bedroom apartment to 30% AMI - the subsidy would make the apartment affordable to a Cambridge family that otherwise would be displaced, underhoused, or severely rent-burdened.

A couple more quick points: first, our experienced local nonprofits have a portfolio of tax credit units and current residents who will benefit from this subsidy - the City has many willing participants in an Affordability Enhancement Voucher Program! With skilled and knowledgeable partners, I think this program will be very successful.

Finally, I want to highlight the PO's description of similar programs in neighboring cities - we can learn from other programs and tailor these findings to fit Cambridge, and it's essential that we adapt to better support low income residents in our regional (and statewide/regional/national) housing crisis. Other states (namely RI) have already started two separate subsidy programs to fill the gap between 30% AMI and 50% or 60% AMI rents, encouraging the development of more deeply affordable units. This is already working!

Please consider a municipal subsidy to enhance the affordability of our housing - this is an innovative, impactful solution to a long-standing challenge for affordable housing developers and residents, and I hope the Council will pursue this approach to helping more low-income households live and stay in Cambridge.

Many thanks,
Becca Schofield
35 Magee St

Erwin, Nicole

From: Lida Griffin <khalida.griffins@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 15, 2024 5:20 AM
To: City Council; City Clerk; Huang, Yi-An
Subject: A letter to support city vouchers
Attachments: kgs.pdf

My name is Khalida Griffin-Sheperd, and as a signer of this petition, I first would like to say that I am truly thankful to have the opportunity to live in a city full of rich resources that are meant to give me, my family, and many other community members, the support we need so that we may be able to have the opportunity to positively thrive, live full healthy lives and to also be a member of our community without feeling excluded or shame for being low income. However many of this would have not happened if it weren't for affordable housing.

Twelve years ago, my grandmother who cared for me after the passing of my mom when I was a teen, began to battle Alzhiemrs severely. Being her eldest grandchild, I moved into her low income housing from my studio apartment to care for her and work full time. I didn't bother to place my name on the lease until I realized my grandmother needed 24 hour care. I wanted to take care of my nana, but I was also pregnant with my first child and wanted to make sure we had a home to call ours as well.

When I applied to be placed on my grandmother's lease, I was denied due to my credit score and at that time I only had college loans that were in deferment. This made my credit score low. I didn't know what to do or how to fix my credit with the student loans, appeal a decision letter or how to support my grandmother's health. Eventually I had no choice but to place my grandmother into a nursing home and I was homeless until I found somewhere I could afford to stay.

Although I was working full time and going to school part time, I could no longer afford a single studio or bedroom on my salary in the inner city area. I couch surfed and lived with family relatives and friends, renting rooms and sometimes sleeping in my car so that I would be able to pay for bills and child care, until my name approached the top of the waitlist for Cambridge Housing Authority low income mobile section 8 voucher. I was very excited, however there was no place I could afford for housing in the city of Cambridge even with a voucher and took the mobile voucher and moved to a rural city of Massachusetts to afford housing.

However, living further away from my support groups and my grandmother's nursing home left me without a lot of resources and access to things like transit transportation and child care because I was so far away. Unfortunately I was able to move back into Cambridge with my mobile voucher because of my circumstances. I was only allowed back into Cambridge because of the resources I found to help me to escape my circumstances. Again I am very thankful for this but as I thrive and continue to heal from my past, I also battle with my fear of not being able to one day afford to live in this city and will have to relocate because of the cost of living in this city and will not be able to give my children the foundation of a happy childhood full of resourceful city that I fighting hard to give to them.

Having affordable housing has allowed me to feel safe, work, continue to learn and be a part of my community. Living in a city that prides itself for being inclusive, diverse and constantly evolving given example to many other cities, I hope that we can take the time to see how many

of our community members that are already living in the city but are homeless with no criminal records or drug addictions, young couples with no children but establishing credit for their future, and families that are living in overcrowded space so that can help one another because the cost of living is unaffordable alone, will not take advantage of the opportunity to have affordable housing in this city and can make great contributions to the community as well when given the grace to have the opportunity to afford a home.

It took me 7 years after receiving my mobile voucher from CHA to be able to afford to live in Cambridge and I still couldn't afford to live here but I did receive the support at the time and my credit score was not a factor due to my circumstances.

And now I am working very hard to maintain my credit score and cost of living so I am not pushed out of the city due to me being of low income and a single mother that completely depends on all the resources Cambridge has provided low-income families for this can all be taken away by a vote one day if there isn't enough advocacy to show how important the significant changes the city can go through when we choose to invest in our community that is already living here but in need of just a little more support.

I hope the city takes time to think about investing in more affordable housing for low income community members and not see it as a burden to the community to help continue to keep our city safe, thriving, and an example to others that it can be done and it doesn't mean that Cambridge will no longer be the prestigious place to live. Cambridge will truly live in its glory as a community built on equity and inclusiveness for all.

Erwin, Nicole

From: Lee Farris <Lee@LeeFarris.net>
Sent: Monday, October 14, 2024 11:26 PM
To: City Council
Cc: Huang, Yi-An; City Clerk
Subject: Residents Alliance letter to Council supporting a stronger voucher program
Attachments: CHJC letter to Council on Vouchers, 10-14-24.pdf

Dear Mayor, Councilors, and City Manager,

The Cambridge Residents Alliance supports the points made in the attached CHJC letter on CDD's proposed voucher program.

We would like to see a city voucher program that would enable over 200 households per year, focused on those whose income is too low to access Inclusionary housing or who can not access subsidized housing due to their immigration status. We think this many vouchers are needed to prevent displacement of current residents.

I regret another commitment prevents me from attending the hearing. I look forward to continuing to work with the Council and CDD staff on developing a robust city voucher program.

Thanks,

Lee Farris, President

Cambridge Residents Alliance: *Working for a Livable, Affordable and Diverse Cambridge*

<https://www.cambridgeresidentsalliance.org/>

To the City Council:

After reviewing the CDD presentation on municipal vouchers for Tuesday's Housing Committee hearing, here are our thoughts.

Tuesday's hearing is a milestone, in that we finally have a specific proposal to establish municipally funded housing vouchers in Cambridge. It is exciting that the conversation may be moving forward after what has felt like years of silence from the city. We deeply appreciate the councilors and staff who have prioritized this important work.

In particular, we applaud the city's proposal to provide municipally funded vouchers for households who do not qualify for federally subsidized housing opportunities due to their immigration status. Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition (CHJC) has long advocated for filling this gap that was created when certain state resources were lost, following in the footsteps of Somerville. However, only 10 vouchers for this group seems small.

We also support the concept of a tenancy preservation subsidy, though the details matter and we have some questions about specifics. This is another important gap to close.

We are very disappointed, however, that there is no consideration of using vouchers to expand access to Inclusionary Housing for low-income residents who are below the 50% of AMI income threshold. This is the central piece of CHJC's voucher proposal because we see it as the most important housing gap that needs to be filled. We want to significantly expand the pie by housing more low-income people off the waiting list. This is essential in the larger context of proposed citywide zoning changes, which will accelerate the displacement of market renters.

We've proposed a pilot of \$5 million for this purpose, enough to benefit 200-250 households, which we believe is a necessary and just commitment. We are somewhat flexible on the initial dollar amount, but firm on the concept that there must be a more substantial component that serves low-income residents who are waiting for affordable and stable housing. This approach is necessary to meet the moment in the context of the proposed citywide zoning reform.

We also note the importance of preserving Inclusionary Housing access for tenants in the 50-80% AMI range. Our proposal would expand the percentage of low-income residents in Inclusionary Housing from 50% to 62.5%, leaving almost 40% of the units for moderate-income households. We believe that a modest shift in the ratio is warranted by the huge demand from low-income people, including the 6,000 low-income Cambridge residents and workers on CHA's waiting list.

In conclusion, we're open to a discussion about the size of the voucher pilot. Even if the city thinks it cannot spare \$5 million to entirely accomplish this right now, the concept is not all or nothing, and the council needs to have the full picture before they make a decision.

The following page contains our specific questions for each component of the presentation.

-Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition

Here are the questions that CHJC hopes will be answered by staff at the hearing.

1. **Expanding Inclusionary Access** - Why isn't some version of this third proposal receiving consideration? Can the city present it as an option to the council for their consideration?
2. **Immigrant vouchers** - is the target of 10 based on anticipated demand? What percentage of those who qualify at the onset of the program will be served?
3. **Immigrant vouchers** - is there anticipated flexibility to get to a higher number over time as will inevitably be warranted by cumulative demand?
4. **Tenancy preservation** - what constitutes a "qualifying event"? Specific examples?
5. **Tenancy preservation** - what constitutes "a sudden onset of a long-term disabling condition or situation"? Specific examples?
6. **Tenancy preservation** - Is the target of 30-40 vouchers based on anticipated demand from seniors, families with children, and the narrow subset of others who will qualify? What percentage of those who qualify at the onset of the program within those target populations will be served?
7. **Tenancy preservation** - We believe that there is a compelling reason for a single person under 65 who moved into the YMCA off the street using a voucher to qualify for tenancy preservation, just like there is a compelling reason for people with disabilities to qualify for a voucher regardless of their age or family composition. Can the city approximate the number of these vouchers that would be needed to accommodate 100% of the households who are completely eligible aside from their household composition, IE single people and couples who are younger than 65? Who is that carefully worded clause leaving out, and why?
8. **Overall** - what is the anticipated cost of the two proposals outlined in the presentation?

Erwin, Nicole

From: Dan Totten <dantotten@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 14, 2024 9:13 PM
To: Richard Krushnic
Cc: City Council; City Clerk; City Manager
Subject: Re: CHJC letter to Council on vouchers

I regretfully won't be able to attend tomorrow morning, but I agree with the points raised in this letter.

Staff have presented two great ideas, but there is notably no consideration of vouchers that would allow more low-income people to live in Inclusionary. That piece is important in the context of the zoning reform. If we're going to build all of these new units, more of them should be accessible to low-income residents. There is plenty of room to accomplish this while maintaining a balance with moderate-income households. The whole point was that vouchers could be a tool to address displacement, which will be accelerated by the zoning proposals on the table. But the presentation goes out of its way to avoid that conversation, which is disappointing.

Don't get me wrong, I do think that these two proposed ideas are important, of course we should do them. But I don't think this gets us to a place where we've met the bigger picture moment. There's no connection back to the zoning, at least not yet.

Best,

Dan Totten
54 Bishop Allen Drive #2

On Mon, Oct 14, 2024 at 7:44 PM Richard Krushnic <rkrushnic@gmail.com> wrote:
See attached letter on vouchers:

Erwin, Nicole

From: Carolyn Magid <cmagid@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 14, 2024 8:09 PM
To: City Council; City Clerk
Subject: Comment on CDD plan for municipal vouchers to be discussed at Housing Committee tomorrow 10/15

Dear Councillors:

I am writing about the CDD plan for housing vouchers to be discussed at the Housing Committee Meeting tomorrow (Tues 15 October).

I am very happy to see that Cambridge is exploring providing some tenant-based and project-based municipal housing vouchers. There are currently more than 6,000 people who live or work in Cambridge [waiting for federal Section 8 rental vouchers](#), as well as others whose status does not allow them to apply. Municipal vouchers could fill some of the gap between need and availability and keep people from being displaced from Cambridge. **However the plan as envisioned would support only 40-50 vouchers. This is much too small to begin to address community needs.**

I support Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition's proposal that the city make an initial pilot of \$6 million. That allocation would support 200-250 new households entering Inclusionary housing, and 20-30 immigrant families/year, for a total of 220-280 households. This would be a very significant step towards keeping low-income residents in Cambridge.

As I understand it, the CDD plan for vouchers would allocate them to people who previously qualified for inclusionary and 100% affordable housing then lost income. It also would allocate 10 vouchers to immigrant families who do not qualify for Section 8 vouchers. **These are important objectives but they do nothing to meet the needs of people who haven't had access to inclusionary or 100% affordable housing because they didn't have vouchers and were too low-income to qualify without them.**

In the ongoing discussion about multifamily housing, the zoning plan from CDD assumes that the new zoning will produce more affordable housing, specifically more inclusionary units. Affordable housing is consistently a top priority of residents. **The question is: affordable housing for whom? Unless we provide more vouchers for low-income people who weren't able to get inclusionary units before, they will be locked out of the inclusionary program.** To be clear, low-income people already living in inclusionary or 100% affordable developments may be helped if their income drops, but **low-income people who haven't had access to vouchers also need vouchers to live in the new units created by zoning changes. They need these vouchers in greater numbers and more eligibility categories than the CDD plan envisions.**

Low-income people in Cambridge are the hardest hit by the housing crisis and most in need of affordable housing. If we can spend \$77 million on a fire station renovation, surely we can spend \$6 million to establish a more robust voucher program that will make housing more affordable for those who need it the most.

Best regards,

Carolyn Magid
71 Reed St

Erwin, Nicole

From: Richard Krushnic <rkrushnic@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 14, 2024 7:44 PM
To: City Council; City Clerk; City Manager
Subject: CHJC letter to Council on vouchers
Attachments: Camb CHJC voucher letter to council.pdf

See attached letter on vouchers:

To the City Council:

After reviewing the CDD presentation on municipal vouchers for Tuesday's Housing Committee hearing, here are our thoughts.

Tuesday's hearing is a milestone, in that we finally have a specific proposal to establish municipally funded housing vouchers in Cambridge. It is exciting that the conversation may be moving forward after what has felt like years of silence from the city. We deeply appreciate the councilors and staff who have prioritized this important work.

In particular, we applaud the city's proposal to provide municipally funded vouchers for households who do not qualify for federally subsidized housing opportunities due to their immigration status. Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition (CHJC) has long advocated for filling this gap that was created when certain state resources were lost, following in the footsteps of Somerville. However, only 10 vouchers for this group seems small.

We also support the concept of a tenancy preservation subsidy, though the details matter and we have some questions about specifics. This is another important gap to close.

We are very disappointed, however, that there is no consideration of using vouchers to expand access to Inclusionary Housing for low-income residents who are below the 50% of AMI income threshold. This is the central piece of CHJC's voucher proposal because we see it as the most important housing gap that needs to be filled. We want to significantly expand the pie by housing more low-income people off the waiting list. This is essential in the larger context of proposed citywide zoning changes, which will accelerate the displacement of market renters.

We've proposed a pilot of \$5 million for this purpose, enough to benefit 200-250 households, which we believe is a necessary and just commitment. We are somewhat flexible on the initial dollar amount, but firm on the concept that there must be a more substantial component that serves low-income residents who are waiting for affordable and stable housing. This approach is necessary to meet the moment in the context of the proposed citywide zoning reform.

We also note the importance of preserving Inclusionary Housing access for tenants in the 50-80% AMI range. Our proposal would expand the percentage of low-income residents in Inclusionary Housing from 50% to 62.5%, leaving almost 40% of the units for moderate-income households. We believe that a modest shift in the ratio is warranted by the huge demand from low-income people, including the 6,000 low-income Cambridge residents and workers on CHA's waiting list.

In conclusion, we're open to a discussion about the size of the voucher pilot. Even if the city thinks it cannot spare \$5 million to entirely accomplish this right now, the concept is not all or nothing, and the council needs to have the full picture before they make a decision.

The following page contains our specific questions for each component of the presentation.

-Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition

Here are the questions that CHJC hopes will be answered by staff at the hearing.

1. **Expanding Inclusionary Access** - Why isn't some version of this third proposal receiving consideration? Can the city present it as an option to the council for their consideration?
2. **Immigrant vouchers** - is the target of 10 based on anticipated demand? What percentage of those who qualify at the onset of the program will be served?
3. **Immigrant vouchers** - is there anticipated flexibility to get to a higher number over time as will inevitably be warranted by cumulative demand?
4. **Tenancy preservation** - what constitutes a "qualifying event"? Specific examples?
5. **Tenancy preservation** - what constitutes "a sudden onset of a long-term disabling condition or situation"? Specific examples?
6. **Tenancy preservation** - Is the target of 30-40 vouchers based on anticipated demand from seniors, families with children, and the narrow subset of others who will qualify? What percentage of those who qualify at the onset of the program within those target populations will be served?
7. **Tenancy preservation** - We believe that there is a compelling reason for a single person under 65 who moved into the YMCA off the street using a voucher to qualify for tenancy preservation, just like there is a compelling reason for people with disabilities to qualify for a voucher regardless of their age or family composition. Can the city approximate the number of these vouchers that would be needed to accommodate 100% of the households who are completely eligible aside from their household composition, IE single people and couples who are younger than 65? Who is that carefully worded clause leaving out, and why?
8. **Overall** - what is the anticipated cost of the two proposals outlined in the presentation?