



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

November 20, 2023

To the Honorable, the City Council:

This communication aims to update the City Council on two related items, relative to the City's community engagement function:

- 1) Awaiting Report Item #22-40, which requests the City Manager to confer with appropriate City personnel to develop a standardized, transparent, and cohesive community engagement plan for the entire, department-wide municipal government,
- 2) and the City Manager's performance goal to hire a Director of Community Engagement and update the City's approach to community engagement to ensure greater consistency and best practice sharing across departments.

Recognizing the importance of community engagement to a healthy, functioning democracy, one of my early decisions as City Manager was to create a Director of Community Engagement role. At the time, this felt like a reasonable next step to address feedback I'd been hearing from the City Council to more proactively reach out to groups that have traditionally been excluded from discussions at City Hall.

However, as we interviewed candidates, a couple key dynamics became apparent:

- 1) Defining the vision for what community engagement represents is more complex than we had realized: community engagement looks different in human services compared to planning or traffic.
- 2) We did not know how the role would relate to departments and existing community engagement staff.
- 3) We had not articulated a clear picture of what success would look like.

Understanding that no candidate would have been set up to succeed with these dynamics at play, I put a pause on the search.



Leaning away from the more top-down approach of hiring a new leader that would have to define their own role as a first task, I instead took a step back and experimented with a more inclusive, collaborative approach: over the summer, I convened 10+ working meetings with community engagement leadership and staff to assess the current state and develop greater understanding of the function in the departments represented. This group worked collaboratively, engaging in discussion, information gathering, and best practice sharing around current practices.

Through this work, it became clear that the variation and specialization across the function has evolved because departments have very different community engagement needs and have tailored their approach accordingly. Different work, in different contexts, and with different people requires different approaches to engage constituents and to ensure community needs are being met. Additionally, each department is at a different point on its community engagement journey: the Department of Public Works (DPW) for example, started building its community relations team in the early 2000s, whereas the Department of Traffic, Parking, and Transportation (TP+T) did not have as strong a need until Cycling Safety Ordinance (CSO) amendments brought a new and different focus to community engagement. Similarly, the Community Development Department (CDD) implemented the Community Engagement Team (CET) model in 2022, while the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) has served as a long-time leader and continues to refine the City's first CET, which was created in 2006.

Critically, along this journey, the City has cultivated a robust community engagement function, with deep staffing and expertise across many departments. For example, we identified 35+ staff, full-time and part-time, that are primarily tasked with doing community engagement work across City departments, and I know there are many more staff who engage in this work even though it is not formally spelled out in their job descriptions. Moreover, several departments have developed rich best practice resources and standardized workflows, like the "Making Connections" training launched by DHSP or CET@CDD's "Equitable and Inclusive Community Engagement Handbook" and accompanying training.

That said, this is only the beginning of the City's community engagement journey: given the extensive reservoir of specialized knowledge that exists across departments, coordination emerged as both the primary challenge and opportunity. Together, the working group identified two areas where improved coordination could enhance the City's approach to community engagement:

- 1) **Improved coordination within the function:** streamlined best practice sharing, including shared resources for smaller departments.
- 2) **Improved coordination between the function and department leadership:** earlier coordination and a closer working relationship with departments that have community engagement needs.

From there, we identified three workstreams to help improve coordination in these areas:

- 1) **Tools:** creating a shared digital workspace for resource and best practice sharing among community engagement staff.
- 2) **Training:** launching a general citywide training program for staff to educate departments about community engagement, resources and best practices, and expectations for working with community engagement staff.

3) Success/Metrics: defining “success” in community engagement and identifying the appropriate metrics to measure success for different activities.

To move this work forward, I will hire for a community engagement leadership role that will sit in the City Manager’s office and report to Lee Gianetti, the Director of Strategic Planning and Communications. Through continued dialogue with staff, we developed a clearer picture of the work head for this role and are confident that it is better set up for success. Furthermore, given the synergies between communications and community engagement, I’m confident that this is the right structure to effect the City Council’s desired outcomes, including a standardized, transparent, and cohesive community engagement plan that is responsive and inclusive of the tremendous diversity in our City.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi-An Huang', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager

Attachment(s)



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Community Engagement Update

City Council

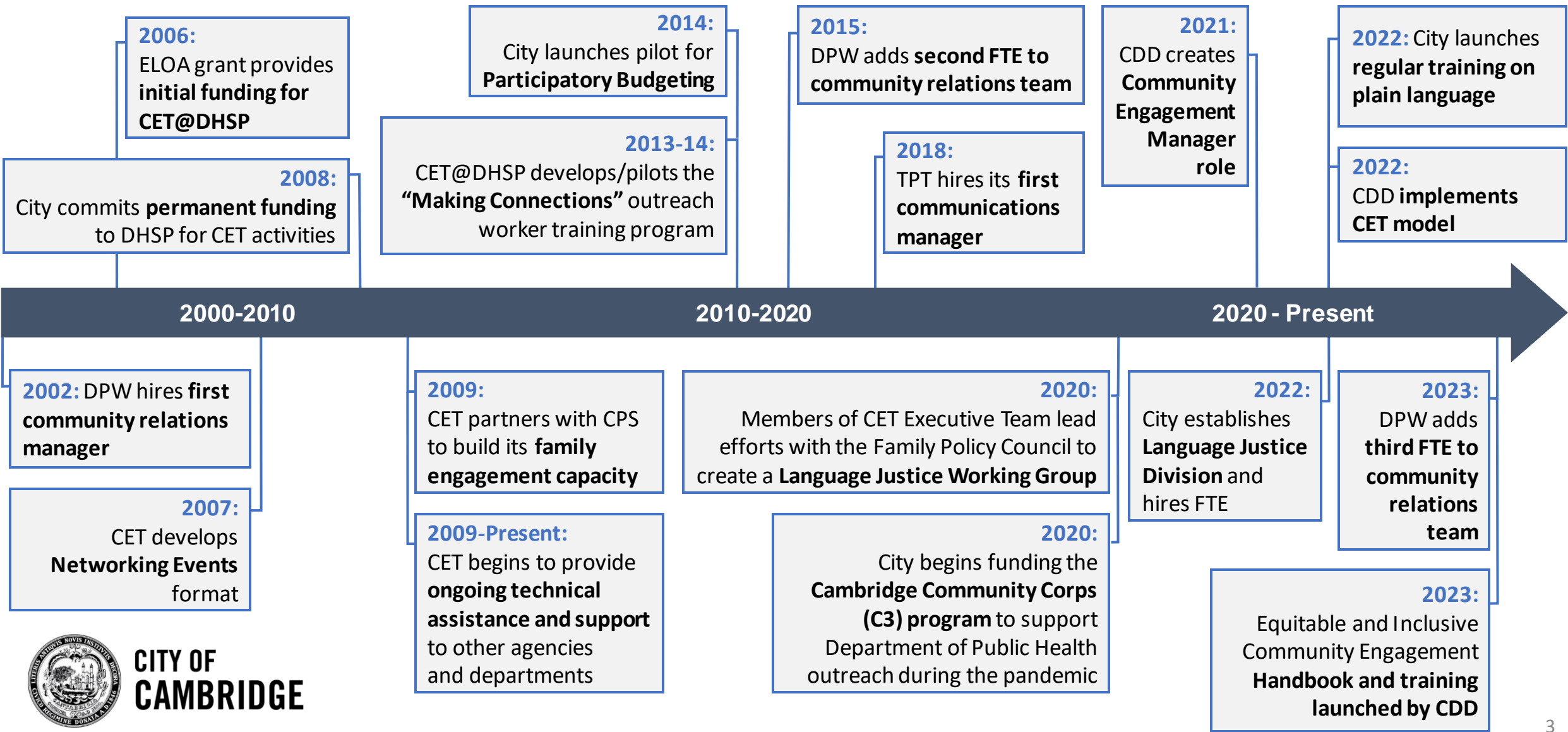
November 20, 2023

Executive Summary

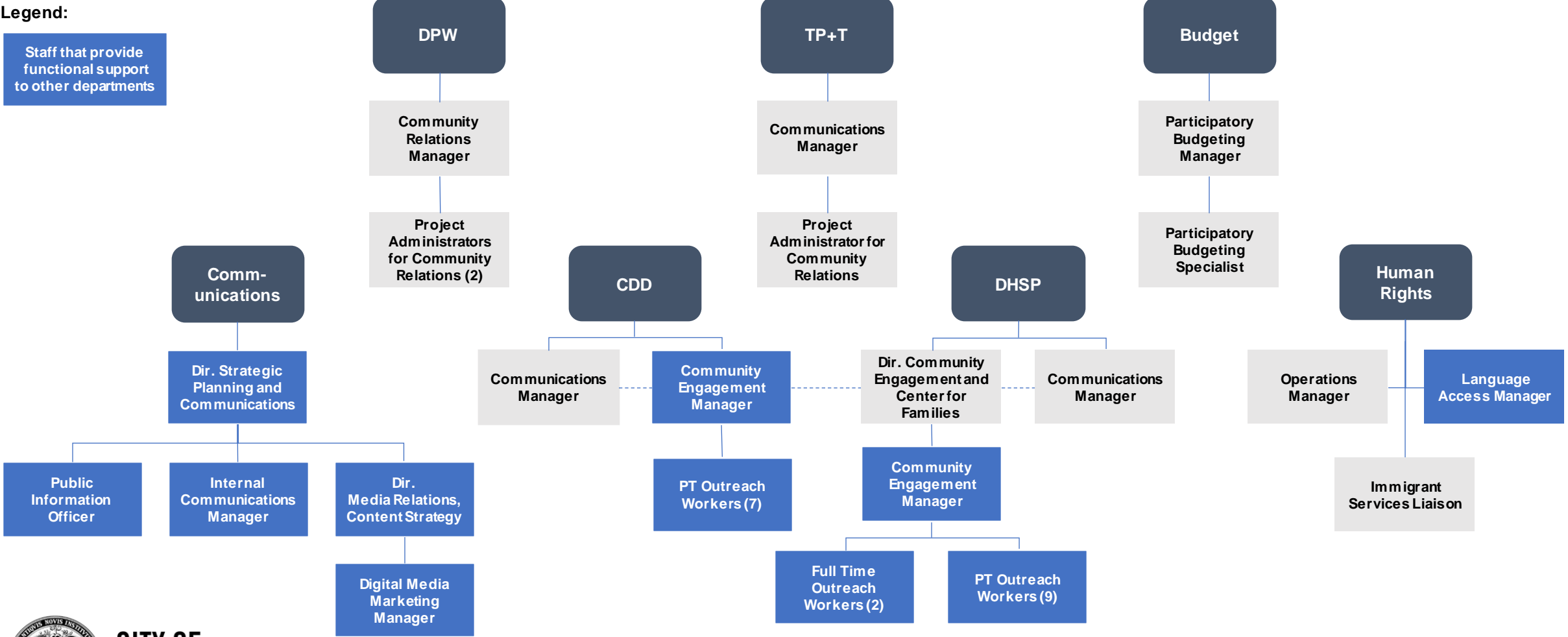
- This document provides an update on the City's approach to community engagement and next steps
- Over the last twenty years, the City has cultivated a robust community engagement function, growing staffing and expertise across many departments
- And we'd like to share snapshots of how some departments are doing community engagement at each of its three levels:
 - **Outreach:** DPW, CET@DHSP
 - **Engagement:** CET@CDD, TP+T
 - **Empowerment:** Budget, Human Rights
- ... But this is only the beginning: over the summer, the City Manager's office convened community engagement leadership to assess the current state of that function in the organization, and we identified two areas where improved coordination could enhance community engagement across the City:
 - **Within the function:** Streamlined resource and best practice sharing, including shared resources for smaller engagement teams
 - **With departments:** Earlier coordination and closer working relationship with departments that have community engagement needs
- From there, we have identified three workstreams to help us improve coordination in the aforementioned areas:
 - **Tools:** creating a shared folder in One Drive for resource and best practice sharing among community engagement staff
 - **Success/Metrics:** defining successful community engagement and identifying the appropriate metrics for different engagement activities
 - **Training:** launch a training program for City staff to educate departments about the community engagement function, resources/best practices, and expectations



Although community engagement is a relatively new function, we’ve been on a long journey, and it’s only the beginning



... Which has cultivated a robust community engagement function, with deep expertise embedded across many departments



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Note: Many staff embedded in these departments regularly do community engagement work, even if that is not their primary function (e.g., TPT Street Design Managers, CDD Project Managers, DHSP Youth Programs, Mayor's Summer Jobs Program)

Community Engagement Team (CET) outreach workers are our colleagues on the front-line

CET @ CDD



CET @ DHSP



Over time, we've developed a good sense of what successful community engagement looks like, and it spans three areas: outreach, engagement, and empowerment

Community Engagement: The process of using different strategies to make decision-making and collaboration in a community more accessible for all

1



Outreach: to provide information regarding opportunities, issues, and/or solutions to the community in ways that are accessible to its members

2



Engagement: two-way communication between community leaders and members to gain opinions about issues, projects, processes, or ideas that can inform policy discussions and decision-making

3



Empowerment: to give community members the tools, resources, and support to participate in the spaces where the key decisions that affect them are made



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Source: Inspired by Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) framework

DPW Spotlight: the DPW's outreach raises awareness around routine maintenance, construction, infrastructure projects, and new services and initiatives



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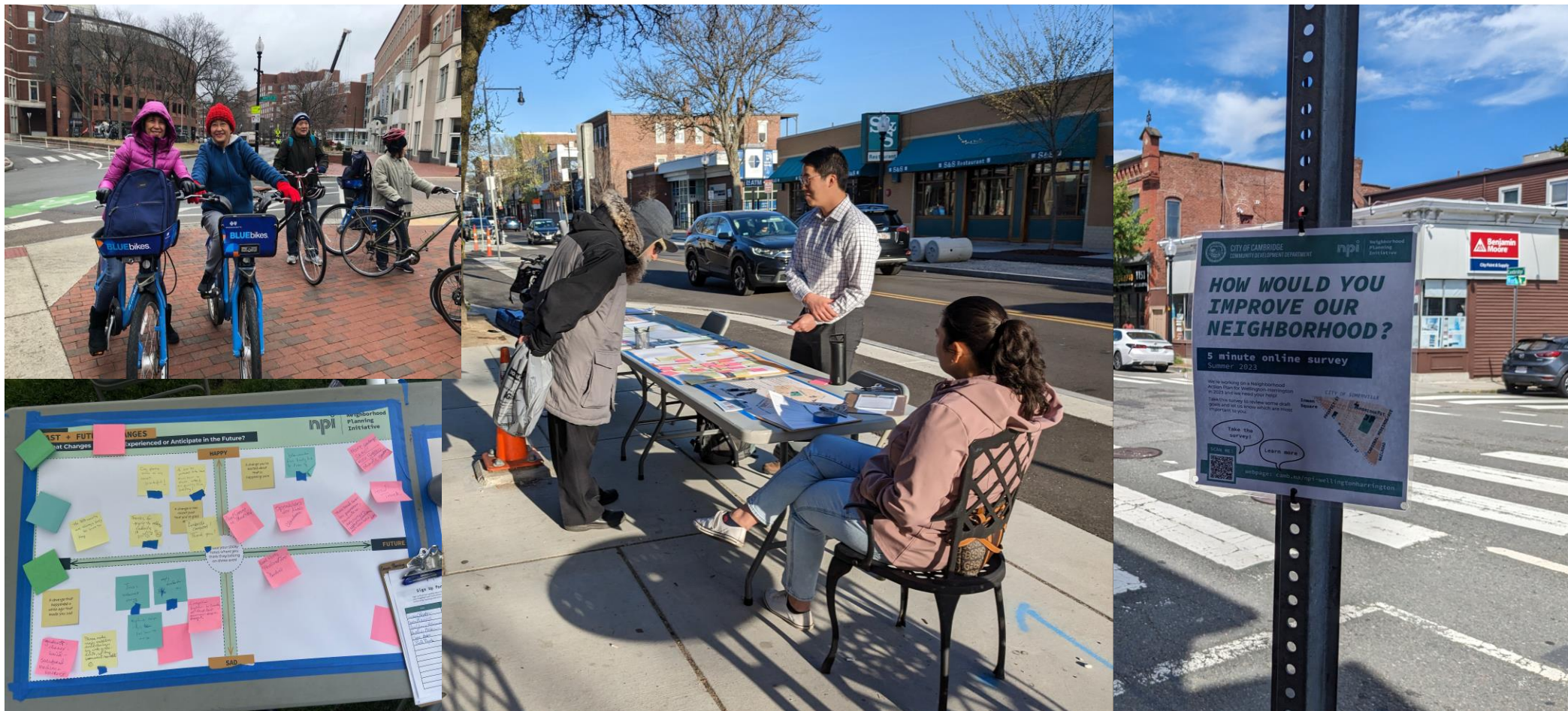


CET @ DHSP Spotlight: Strong focus on supporting families with young children and providing both individual and community-wide support



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CDD Spotlight: CET @CDD and creating flexible opportunities for building relationships and engaging community members



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TP+T Spotlight: Cycling Safety Ordinance sparks need for increased engagement capacity

TP+T hires first Communications Manager

TP+T builds our engagement capacity and improves our outreach, learning more with each project

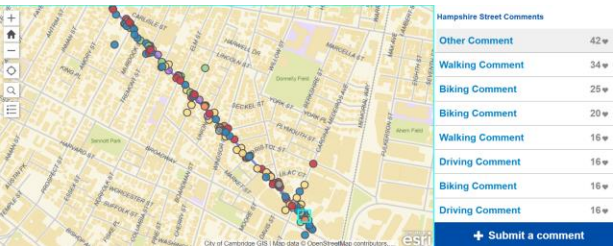
2020

2018

2020–2023

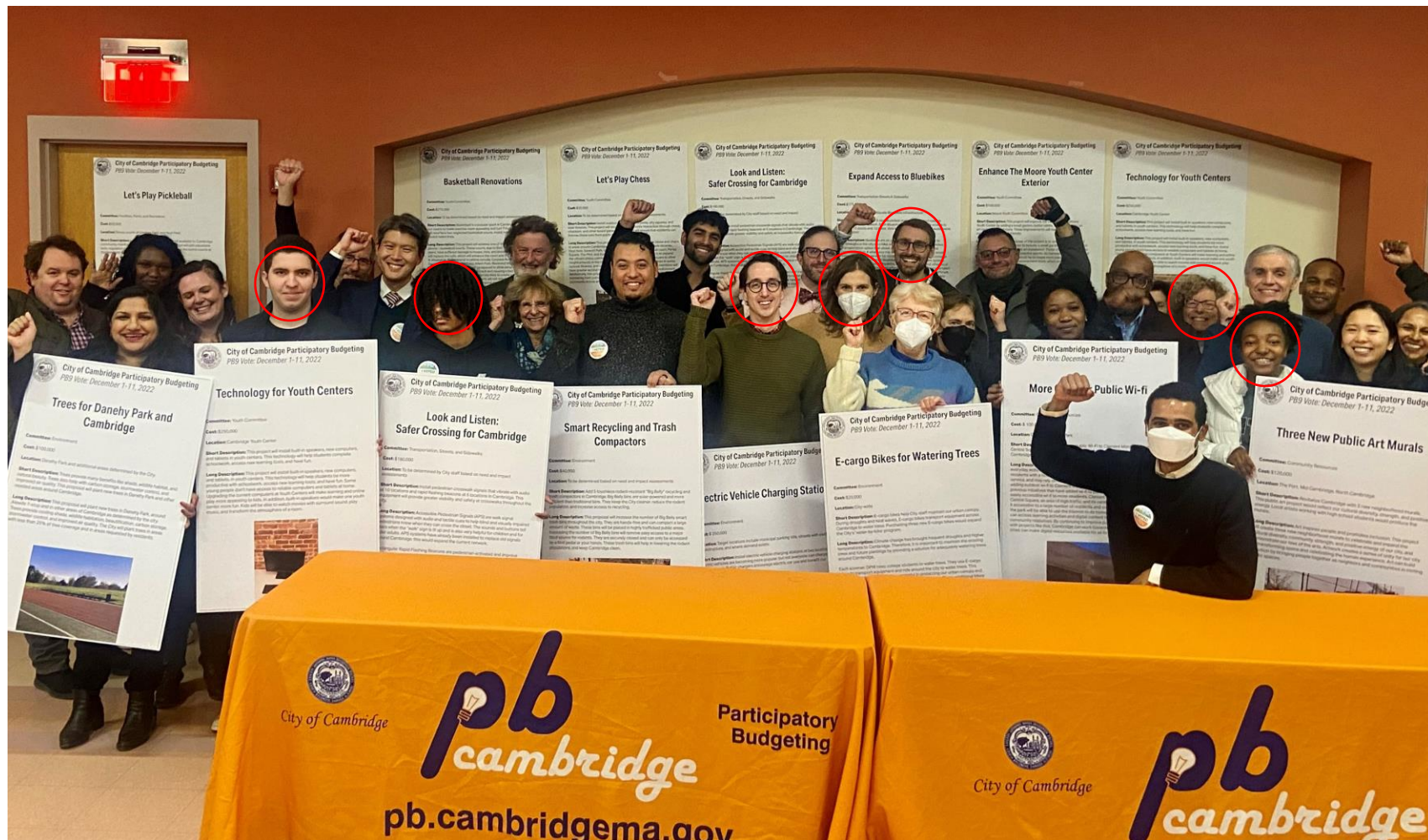
Cycling Safety Ordinance precipitates TP+T-led community engagement

TP+T hires Street Design Project Managers with a community engagement role



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Budget Spotlight: Participatory Budgeting empowers community members to decide how to spend part of the City's budget



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HRC Spotlight: the Human Rights Commission creates opportunities to empower residents with information and access to City services



This annual collaboration led to the development of the citywide Housed IN Cambridge campaign.

In FY23, we expanded access and engagement with the help of both Community Engagement Teams and regular outreach at the Community Learning Center.

Which resulted in:

- Record doubling of attendance at the annual event
- Translation and interpretation use for 11 different languages
- Quarterly drop-in hours at the library with regular use of interpretation to increase access to vital housing information



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Annual Fair Housing Event

Through our work over the summer, we identified two areas where improved coordination can enhance the City's community engagement function

... Within the community engagement function

- Varied access to City resources (e.g., outreach workers, like C3 and CETs, and contact lists) and varying familiarity with different engagement methods and best practices (e.g., writing in plain language, managing contentious public meetings)
- Limited awareness of what's happening in other departments (e.g., events, projects)

... With departments

- Community engagement not always embedded in early project planning
- Inconsistent, broad definitions of community engagement and success and few standards for measuring and collecting data
- Varied levels of community engagement expertise and training among project teams



... And we propose three workstreams, community engagement tools, training, and metrics, to capitalize on these opportunities:

Tools

- 1 **Create a shared folder** in One Drive for community engagement staff, collating the following:
 - “How to” guides on different community engagement methods (e.g., public meeting, pop-ups, plain language) leveraging existing content and resources
 - Excel spreadsheet summarizing City technology and other resources (e.g., language access) that can be used for community engagement
 - Excel spreadsheet summarizing physical assets (e.g., easels) and their location
 - Excel spreadsheet documenting different outreach contact lists and who to contact
 - Calendar documenting outreach events across all departments

Success/ Metrics

- 2 **Finalize a definition of community engagement** in the City of Cambridge, **define success**, and **identify the appropriate metrics** for different engagement activities through conversations with departments and community engagement staff

Training

- 3 **Launch a training program for City staff** to educate departments about the community engagement function, resources/best practices, and expectations for frontline staff when engaging the community
 - Work with community engagement staff to develop learning objectives and a curriculum, leveraging existing resources like DHSP’s “Making Connections” training and CDD’s handbook/training
 - Leverage meetings like Leadership Together or CAELL to elevate importance



Questions?



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