# MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
# HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
# Tuesday, October 20, 2026

**HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS**
Councillor Nolan, Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor McGovern
Councillor Zusy

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Health and Environment Committee was held on Tuesday, October 20, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:30 a.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. 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, 2nd 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.**
Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor McGovern – Absent
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
**Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.**

Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks (**Attachment A**) and noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the landscape of Thermal Energy Network (TEN) planning in Cambridge, including from the Cambridge networked geothermal feasibility study. Present at the meeting were Deputy City Manager, Kathy Watkins and Clean Energy Manager, Erina Keefe. Chief Climate Officer, Julie Wormser, was joined remotely via Zoom. Panelists that were present in the Sullivan Chamber included Sarah Gallop, Director of Government and Community Relations for MIT, Annalisa Bhatia, Associate Director of Government and Community Relations for MIT, Joe Higgins, Vice President for Campus Services for MIT, Kevin Haggerty, CEO of Vicinity, Eric Bosworth, Consultant from HEET, Audrey Schulman, Executive Director of Black Swan Labs, and Leen Hayek, from Eversource. Panelists that were present via Zoom from Salas O'Brien included Vice President, Lindsey Olsen, Director of Geothermal Operations, Brian Urlaub, and Director of Energy Planning and Development, Rob McKenna. Panelist present via Zoom from Boston Green Ribbon Commission included Executive Director, Lindsey Butler and Director of Decarbonization and Energy Transition, Erich Yaeger.

Councillor Nolan recognized Erina Keefe who gave a presentation titled “Exploring a Thermal Energy Network for Cambridge Neighborhoods”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Councillor Nolan recognized Eric Bosworth who provided a brief overview of the feasibility study, noting that the findings did not necessarily determine if thermal energy networks are viable in Cambridge and were based off specific assumptions. Eric Bosworth encouraged the City to explore alternative thermal resources while also considering future investments into the electrical grid to help reach the City’s long-term climate goals.

Councillor Nolan recognized Audrey Schulman who gave a presentation titled “Black Swan Lab, Practical Solutions to Change the System”. (**Attachment B**)

Councillor Nolan recognized Kevin Haggerty who gave a presentation related to Thermal Energy Network planning. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Councillor Nolan recognized Joe Higgins who provided an update on the efforts being made towards decarbonization on the MIT Campus. Joe Higgins shared that MIT is exploring large-scale electric heat pumps, waste heat recovery, and geothermal resources to help further reduce emissions and to help modernize energy systems. Joe Higgins emphasized the importance of regional collaboration, infrastructure investments, and coordinated planning and strong partnerships to help achieve long-term goals.

Councillor Nolan recognized Lindsey Butler who gave a presentation related to Thermal Energy Network planning. (**Attachment C**).

**Councillor Nolan opened public comment.**

Anoushka Tamhane, MIT, spoke in support of including institutions and alternative thermal energy resources in future studies.

Rupal Jain, 54 Creighton Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of expanding thermal energy networks in Cambridge.

Councillor Nolan recognized Kevin Haggerty who emphasized the importance of affordability when reviewing and analyzing energy solutions, adding that affordable technologies are more likely to encourage widespread adoption.

Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who asked for more information related to Eversource’s involvement in Cambridge’s thermal energy network planning, the Framingham Pilot, and funding opportunities. Leen Hayek provided a brief overview of the engagement between Eversource and Cambridge as well as the Framingham Geothermal Pilot. Leen Hayek shared that the Pilot service has around 135 customers and has been performing well since December 2024. Eric Bosworth added that HEET, Eversource, and Framingham are collaborating on a federally funded expansion that would double the existing geothermal

network. Councillor Al-Zubi asked for more information on why most geothermal projects use boreholes, and if other options would help to lower costs. Councillor Al-Zubi shared support for exploring existing resources in Cambridge that could make thermal energy more affordable. Brian Urlaub explained how the type of geothermal system being used depends on the conditions of each location. Audrey Schulman shared that wastewater heat recovery could be a more affordable option and emphasized the importance of keeping energy costs affordable. Audrey Schulman spoke in strong support of the City negotiating agreements with energy providers that can protect residents from high costs in the future.

Councillor Nolan recognized Kevin Hagerty who shared the benefits of being a private utility company and highlighted the work being done by Vicinity Energy in Kansas City. Kevin Hagerty shared that in Kansas City, waste heat from data centers can provide heat and pointed out that similar opportunities are being explored in Boston and Cambridge. Eric Bosworth added how waste hear, waterways, and underground water sources can provide energy, but noted that a thermal energy network is needed to be able to distribute the heat throughout the community.

Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who shared concerns related to HEET and Black Swan Labs not being involved earlier in the Study and encouraged better collaboration moving forward. Councillor Zusy asked why the estimated cost for the Pacific Street Park project, which was estimated to be between $51 million and $71 million, was higher than the Framingham Pilot and questioned who would fund and operate Pacific Street. Leen Hayek provided an overview of costs related to the Framingham Pilot, noting that the total estimated cost would be around $30 million. Kathy Watkins explained that the City's study was intended to help determine if a geothermal system such as Framingham's could work in Cambridge and reviewed the challenges associated with ownership, operations, and funding. Kathy Watkins added that having Eversource operate the system would be beneficial. Leen Hayek shared how Eversource was able to support the Framingham Pilot and how the planned expansion is expected to double the network's capacity at half the cost. Erina Keefe added that MIT participated in the Study by providing building information to help with estimating the cost of connecting one of its buildings to a thermal energy network. Rob McKenna explained that the cost estimates for Cambridge were only preliminary because the project had not reached the detailed design phase. Rob McKenna added that rising construction costs contribute to higher estimates. Brian Urlaub shared that the estimates were based on similar projects, regional construction costs, and unexpected expenses. Audrey Schulman encouraged the City to consider thermal energy networks that use lower cost heat sources.

Councillor Nolan asked for more information related to MIT's progress towards eliminating fossil fuel use in its newer buildings, such as the MET, and asked if it would be possible for MIT to capture and reuse waste heat from its nuclear reactor. Joe Higgins shared that the MET is fully electrified and close to 99% fossil fuel free, and that there are similar expectations for the quantum research facility. Joe Higgins noted that MIT is planning to recover waste heat from its campus cooling system to meet 30-40% of its heating needs. He added that MIT is also exploring ways to capture heat from its nuclear reactor's cooling system. Joe Higgins highlighted the importance of creating larger, regional thermal energy networks that have clear ownership, operations, and funding through collaboration between cities, utilities, and state officials.

Councillor Nolan asked what factors contributed to Vicinity Energy's adoption of clean energy technology and if improvements in technology, financing, or customer demand played a role in the fast adoption. Kevin Hagerty explained that affordability and supportive City regulations have both been factors as to why there has been fast customer adoption. He added that lower than expected energy costs and improved technology have allowed Vicinity to offer more affordable energy which has resulted in an increase of demand. Kevin Hagerty emphasized that keeping costs affordable is important to help encourage more buildings to start transitioning to cleaner energy systems.

Councillor Nolan asked how Eversource considers long-term savings when planning for future infrastructure and how Cambridge's limited gas infrastructure connections could affect the City's future decarbonization efforts. Leen Hayek explained that teams from Eversource work together to identify cost savings and noted that savings are considered in geothermal projects and future development planning. Leen Hayek shared that she would follow up with questions related to Cambridge's gas infrastructure.

Councillor Nolan asked how the public health benefits and possible healthcare cost savings associated with reducing fossil fuel use could be incorporated into thermal energy network planning. Councillor Nolan asked if these health benefits could be given financial value when evaluating the overall costs and benefits of clean energy projects. Eric Bosworth shared that those types of savings are not usually incorporated into individual project financing. He emphasized the importance of finding better methods to calculate these types of benefits and apply the savings toward project costs. Audrey Shulman shared the importance of considering the impact on public health when reviewing clean energy alternatives. Audrey Schulman offered the suggestion of exploring ways to install thermal energy systems at schools that are undergoing renovations that could serve the surrounding neighborhoods and help with project costs. Joe Higgins explained that MIT researchers are developing methods to calculate the economic and public health benefits of clean energy projects, including job creation, reduced emissions, and avoiding premature deaths. He noted that these methods could also be used to evaluate the broader benefits of future thermal energy projects. Kevin Hagerty explained how environmental and public health benefits can help attract funding for clean energy projects, which can help advance sustainability and improve community health. Councillor Nolan emphasized that public health benefits should be considered an important part of evaluating clean energy investments.

Councillor Nolan thanked the participants for their presentation and shared that she looks forward to future conversations as the City continues to explore opportunities for thermal energy networks.

**Councillor Nolan made a motion to adjourn the meeting.**

**On a voice vote of three members, the motion passed. Vice Mayor Azeem and Councillor McGovern were absent.**

**Attachment A –** Opening remarks from Councillor Nolan (not verbatim).

**Attachment B –** Presentation from Black Swan Labs.
**Attachment C –** Presentation from BosTEN.
**Attachment D –** Communications from the public.

**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 20, 2026 Health and Environment Committee - Cambridge, MA**

Attachment A

Councillor Nolan opening remarks (not verbatim)

Welcome.  I cannot be more excited about this meeting and this topic.  From early understanding of HEET's work – which was a key element of CCWG and a city application – to incredible explosion of interest and work in TENs – which we will hear about from the city and HEET and Black Swan. This meeting will provide an update on the City's feasibility study, exploring what it would take to build a neighborhood-scale Thermal Energy Network in Cambridge. For me the study is the first stop to having a TEN. We have participation from several important players in this space including Eversource, MIT, Vicinity Energy, Salas O'Brien, HEET, Black Swan Labs, and representatives from the BosTEN project. The City of Cambridge has been studying whether a shared local network of underground pipes could provide safe and reliable heating and cooling for buildings without using fossil fuels.