

December 2, 2024

Yi-An Huang, City Manager  
Cambridge City Hall  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

**Re: Response to Awaiting Report No. 24-24 of 05/20/2024 requesting that the City Manager explore whether Cambridge could facilitate a porchfest event**

Dear Mr. Huang:

I have prepared this memorandum to provide feedback and ideas on the opportunity to facilitate a Cambridge PorchFest event for the city in response to the City Council Policy Order of May 20, 2024, which indicates that the City Manager, “is requested to work with relevant City departments and the Cambridge Arts Council to consider whether Cambridge could facilitate a porchfest event.” This memorandum will address the background of the porchfests and similar events and share the steps taken to date to explore implementing a **Cambridge PorchFest** as an opportunity to positively engage local artists, musicians, residents, and visitors in the city with dynamic, community-driven and neighborhood-based performing arts events.

**I. Background**

Porchfest is a general identifier for local, community-driven, neighborhood-based music and performing arts events that generally occur on and in the vicinity of privately-owned porches, patios, and driveways. During porchfest events, audiences stroll from one active location to another and block to block within a neighborhood to enjoy and engage with participating artists and bands. The Commonwealth of MA is home to approximately forty (40) porchfest events with some occurring in neighboring cities and towns to Cambridge, including: Somerville, Arlington, Watertown, Belmont, Lexington, and Newton. Currently, porchfest events take place in just about every region of Massachusetts from Cape Cod to Western Mass. The hallmark of porchfest is that events are primarily community-driven, occur on privately-owned properties, and reflect the character and local artist representation in the host town or city. This arrangement generally ensures broad and equitable representation by participating artists, a lower barrier for participation since there is no fee for participation, and a minimal need for permitting from local municipal or state authorities. The community-driven nature of porchfest also amplifies a “local” character for events and celebrates a less “professionally produced” outcome. Information on current porchfest events in MA can be reviewed here: [Porchfest!](#)

## II. Steps Taken to Date

In response to the Policy Order of May 20, 2024, Cambridge Arts staff met with several residents who have identified a direct interest in producing porchfest in Cambridge. These conversations presented an opportunity to better understand the thinking and production needs and to keep the focus on a community-generated perspective for the event as opposed to Cambridge Arts and other City Departments creating and implementing an official City-driven program. Cambridge Arts staff also shared information with the residents on funding opportunities available to the community through the *Cambridge Arts Grant Program* and the City's *Participatory Budgeting* program. In addition to direct financial support, responding through these programs would support applicants in focusing their thinking, refining production planning, and clarifying desired outcomes. Both programs also provide positive partnership with City departments that can lead to safe, sustainable, and successful results with a Cambridge PorchFest program.

From those conversations and positive response, Cambridge Arts has received an application for funding and partnership that describes a Cambridge PorchFest “demonstration project” for the Cambridgeport Neighborhood as follows:

*Music brings people together across different cultures. In porchfests, local musicians play for their neighbors, in yards and in driveways. Audience members attend as many of these performances as they choose, free of charge. Kind of like a neighborhood-wide block party, porchfests bring neighbors out of their houses and gives them a chance to learn more about one another and their community. A diverse pool of artists and attendees will be recruited through outreach to area religious communities, community-based organizations and nonprofits, and local music venues including the Lily Pad, Club Passim, Middle East, Lizard Lounge, and the Cantab Lounge, among others. The outdoor, street-level performances will also present minimal mobility barriers to audiences attending the performances.*

In addition to soliciting and reviewing this community-driven porchfest plan for the Cambridgeport Neighborhood, Cambridge Arts staff have researched area porchfest events and begun conversations with colleague arts councils and other organizations that are currently supporting porchfest events in neighboring communities and other cities and towns around the Commonwealth. This outreach has led to a better understanding of what is required to ensure successful outcomes with porchfest events and to provide details that assist in quantifying what supports are needed from city departments and other community partners.

Cambridge Arts staff have also been in contact with partners at the Central Square Business Improvement District (Central BID), to discuss the porchfest concept and explore

opportunities to have the inaugural Cambridge Porchfest event amplify and connect to the *Central Square Cultural District* and the positive work of Central BID in connecting residents and visitors with local retailers and restaurateurs. These conversations have brought up an opportunity to also partner on “DeckFest”, a Cultural District-based initiative that would leverage outdoor dining infrastructure that is already in Central Square along with the City’s longstanding *Cambridge Street Performer Program* that encourages and allows buskers to activate local retail districts with live music and artistic performances.

**III. Conclusion**

Cambridge Arts will work together with Central BID to fund and support an inaugural community-driven Cambridge PorchFest and DeckFest in summer 2025. The event will take place in Cambridgeport, Central Square, and other neighborhoods connected to and served by the *Central Square Cultural District*. The timing for the event is generally aligned with the community-driven plan developed by residents of the Cambridgeport Neighborhood and considers the dates and timing of other citywide festivals and events that occur between June – September annually.

**Proposed Schedule for 2025 Citywide Arts Events & Festivals**

- June 21, 2025: Cambridge Arts River Festival
- June 28, 2025: City of Cambridge Dance Party
- July 2025: Inaugural PorchFest & DeckFest**
- July 26-27, 2025: Cambridge Jazz Festival
- September 2025: Central Square World’s Fair
- September 20-21,2025: Cambridge Arts Open Studios

Based on the outcomes of the 2025 demonstration project, Cambridge Arts will work together with the City Manager, Central BID, colleague city departments, local nonprofit partners, and through the FY2027 City Budget Planning process to expand and support a citywide event for 2026 and beyond.