

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 25, 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 Wednesday, March 25, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.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/Remote
Councillor McGovern – Absent*
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/Remote

Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor McGovern was present and remote at 3:23p.m.

Chair Nolan offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss CMA 2026-21, related to Cambridge Municipal Code Ch. 8.28, “Regulation on Youth Access and Sale of Tobacco Products and on Smoking in Workplaces and Public Places,” in order to (1) update the current ordinance to conform to widely adopted municipal policies, new state laws, and court decisions, as well as (2) to discuss the recent regulatory landscape in Massachusetts regarding tobacco products. Present at the meeting were City Solicitor, Megan Bayer, and Director of Environmental Health, Sam Lipson. Mayor Siddiqui was also present.

Chair Nolan recognized Sam Lipson who reviewed information related to the policy review of Nicotine Free Generation and Teen Health Survey Data. This information, along with a memo to the Cambridge City Council, was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Sam Lipson began by providing an overview of the proposed changes to Cambridge Municipal Code Ch. 8.28. Sam Lipson and Megan Bayer were available to respond to questions related to the proposed changes.

Chair Nolan asked when and how the City Council would be notified of any regulatory changes if authority is shifted. Sam Lipson and Megan Bayer explained that the process will be coordinated with the City Council and any updated language would be available for the Council to review before it is approved.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who asked if the proposed changes would go beyond youth access and sales and if there would be any additional changes made in that section. Sam Lipson explained that there may be some other minor changes outside the main section, but the proposed changes are mostly focused on the youth access and sales section of the Ordinance.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who asked if these proposed changes in the youth access section would also affect the workplace areas, public places, and restaurant sections. Sam Lipson confirmed that changes are only going to be made to the youth access and sales section. Councillor Al-Zubi asked if changes to the youth access and sales section would impact on the additional proposed changes recommended by the City Manager and Law Department. Sam Lipson explained that the policy choices should remain with the City Council, while the Cambridge Public Health Department would still handle point of sale enforcements, adding that the policies are less about who enforces the rule and more about who decides the direction of the policy.

Chair Nolan pointed out that the proposed changes would make the Ordinance more consistent.

Chair Nolan made a motion that the Health and Environment Committee recommend to the full City Council that the City Manager be and hereby is requested to direct the Law Department to work with the Cambridge Public Health Department to amend and update language in Chapter 8.28 of the Cambridge Municipal Code as discussed in the March 25, 2026 Committee meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Yes – 5. Motion passed.

*This motion was submitted as a Policy Order for the March 30, 2026 Regular City Council Meeting (POR 2026-65) and was passed unanimously.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who asked for clarification related to the exemptions in the regulation that were previously adopted, such as establishments that rely on hookah and outdoor smoking. Sam Lipson explained that those regulations would fall under the restaurant section and not the youth access and sales section, so they would not be affected. Councillor McGovern asked if an establishment whose business relies on hookah or outdoor smoking would still be exempt under the current proposal, which Sam Lipson confirmed they would be.

Chair Nolan recognized Sam Lipson who reviewed the proposed changes to the Nicotine-Free Generation.

Chair Nolan opened Public Comment.

Stephen Helfer, 3 Crawford Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the generational tobacco ban by birthdate that could negatively impact small businesses.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who asked if the proposed changes would be to ban tobacco sales to anyone under the age of 21. Sam Lipson explained that State law already bans the sale to anyone under 21 and that this proposed change would create more of a restriction, adding that people below a certain age would continue to be prohibited from buying tobacco products as they age. Councillor McGovern asked if the Health Department has reached out to businesses for feedback related to this possible change. Sam Lipson shared that there has not been any outreach at this time because this policy is only being proposed. If the Council decided to move forward, staff would conduct outreach and gather feedback. Councillor McGovern asked if it would be possible to push back the age of sale of tobacco products to be older, such as 25, noting that many people pick up smoking when they are younger, not older. Sam Lipson shared that it could be possible but noted that 21 is a significant age tied to many other adult rights and privileges. Chair Nolan pointed out that data that was shared in the packet shows that smoking and vaping use among high school students is lower than marijuana and alcohol use.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who shared that she would not be in favor of moving forward with this proposal at this time and it could be something the City Council revisits later. Councillor Zusy shared that she was not in favor due to the rules and regulations around marijuana and alcohol use being different than tobacco use.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who pointed out that having this policy in Cambridge may not be as effective as it is intended to be because people could go to a neighboring community to purchase tobacco products. Councillor Al-Zubi spoke in strong support of educational ways to address youth vaping and nicotine use.

Chair Nolan recognized Vice Mayor Azeem shared that he would be open to the proposal if it does not negatively affect small businesses and take away current customers. Vice Mayor Azeem pointed out how adults have more freedom to make unhealthy choices, adding how addictive nicotine is, and that it does not have the same type of social benefit that some people may associate with alcohol. Vice Mayor Azeem highlighted that Massachusetts already has strict rules on vaping and that it may be beneficial to explore ways to slowly push out regular tobacco sales over time, but also acknowledged how this policy raises larger questions related personal freedom, public health, small businesses, and how far the City Council should go in regulating adult choices.

Chair Nolan recognized Sam Lipson who reviewed the proposed changes to Citywide Caps on Tobacco Sales Permits. Sam Lipson added that Cambridge does not currently have a cap but

shared that the number of licensed establishments has remained steady and has not changed much over time.

Chair Nolan reviewed the possible options, which included continuing with no cap, setting a cap at the current number, or allowing the number of permits to decrease over time as existing permits are not renewed.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who asked how many stores currently sell tobacco and if they must pay for those permits. Sam Lipson shared that permits are paid through the Inspectional Services Department and noted that he does not have the number of stores that sell products but can obtain that number to share after the meeting. Councillor Zusy asked Sam Lipson if he could review the pros and cons if this policy were to be adopted, which he did. Councillor Zusy shared that she does not want people smoking tobacco products, but because the numbers are going down, she is unsure if the City should have a citywide cap at this time.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who asked if current businesses would be affected if a cap were to go in place. Sam Lipson explained that a cap would not affect a business unless it were to give up their permit or let it lapse.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who explained that he does not feel comfortable taking a position on this proposal until more information is available, such as if the number of stores selling tobacco has increased in the last few years. Chair Nolan agreed that it would be helpful to have more information on permit numbers and trends, adding that it is important to have education available and continue to enforce current regulations.

Chair Nolan recognized Sam Lipson who reviewed the proposed changes to Restricted Sales Zones Near Schools or Other Locations.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who shared that she believes cigarettes should not be sold around the high school, adding that making tobacco harder to access near the high school may help to reduce numbers. Sam Lipson shared that it is hard to know if restrictions near schools would reduce smoking with the small percentage of students who do report smoking.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who shared that more information and data would be helpful to understand the number of businesses with permits and their distance from schools in Cambridge. Councillor Al-Zubi noted that having a better understanding of how youth are receiving access to tobacco products could help the City Council decide if more restrictions are needed. Councillor Al-Zubi added that having more information on enforcement and education would also be helpful with Council decision making. Sam Lipson noted that the youth survey does not ask how tobacco products are being obtained but he would be open to an outside study to get more information related to access. Sam Lipson provided a brief overview related to how enforcement and violations are handled, adding that if the Public Health Department had more flexibility to make small updates it would help keep strong compliance. Councillor Al-Zubi offered additional comments related to education.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who pointed out that even if stores do sell tobacco products around the high school, the age of sale is 21, and high school students are under 21. Councillor McGovern shared that before creating additional restrictions, it would be beneficial to know if the businesses around the high school are compliant and offered suggestions on how to approach businesses that are in violation around the high school.

Chair Nolan agreed and shared that the Committee needs more information on the total number of permits, the number near schools, and compliance history. Chair Nolan asked what the consequences are if an adult buys a tobacco product and gives it to someone underage, similar to providing alcohol to minors. Megan Bayer explained she was not 100% certain but believes it may not be the same type of consequence for giving tobacco to someone underage as there is for providing alcohol.

Chair Nolan recognized Sam Lipson who reviewed the proposed changes to the Smoking Ban in Retail Establishments or Bars. Chair Nolan shared that she does not believe there are many establishments that would qualify for this and questioned if the City Council should remove the remaining exception, adding that she does believe adults should have the choice if they want to participate in certain settings.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who provided a brief overview of the history of banning smoking in restaurants and the concerns around secondhand smoke, adding that establishments that do allow smoking may rely on that type of activity to help run their business. Councillor McGovern shared that if there is no secondhand smoke risk within these establishments, he does not see a need to change the current regulations. Sam Lipson shared that he does not believe there are currently any establishments within Cambridge taking advantage of this. Councillor McGovern asked if having a ban will impact future cannabis social consumption establishments if the State allows it. Megan Bayer shared that the City should review the Ordinance in more detail if it were to go forward with cannabis social consumption. Councillor McGovern noted that this matter does not seem urgent if there are no establishments currently doing it.

Chair Nolan offered closing remarks and Sam Lipson shared that he wrote down questions raised during the discussion and believes staff will be able to respond quickly.

Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

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

The Health and Environment Committee adjourned at approximately 4:45p.m.

In City Council May 18, 2026.

Adopted by Affirmative

Vote of Nine Members:-

Attest:- Paula M. Crane, Interim City Clerk

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula M. Crane".

ATTEST:-

Paula M. Crane
Interim City Clerk