

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 11, 2026**

ORDINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor McGovern, Chair
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor Flaherty
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Simmons
Councillor Zusy
Mayor Siddiqui

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Ordinance Committee was held on Wednesday, March 11, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 2:30 p.m. by the Co-Chair, McGovern. 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 Co-Chair, Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/Remote
Councillor Flaherty – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Simmons – Absent*
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Mayor Siddiqui – Present/Remote*

Present – 8, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Simmons was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 2:33p.m.

*Mayor Simmons went from remote participation to in person at 4:02p.m.

Co-Chair McGovern offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to have a conversation regarding zoning recommendations to strengthen active use requirements on Cambridge Street and Massachusetts Avenue as a follow-up to the recently adopted zoning petitions following the Our Cambridge Street Planning Study and Mass Ave Planning Study. Present at the meeting was Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Deputy Chief of Planning, Jennifer Caira, Director of Zoning and Development, Jeff Roberts, Acting Director of Community Planning and Design, Drew Kane, Senior Manager for Zoning and Development, Evan Spetrini, Director of Economic Development, Pardis Saffari, and Assistant City Solicitor, Franziskus Lepionka.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Evan Spetrini who gave a presentation titled “Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street Active Use Policy Order”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Co-Chair McGovern opened public comment.

Helen Walker, 43 Linnaean Street, Cambridge, MA spoke in favor of active ground floor use requirements and provided suggestions.

Justin Saif, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition and shared concerns that stronger requirements may discourage affordable housing.

David Hattis, 393 Broadway, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition and shared concerns about the impacts towards affordable housing.

Beryl Lipton, Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in strong support of continuing to support small, local businesses and finding balance between housing and retail.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition and shared concerns related to housing affordability and housing development.

Jason Alves, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of stronger active ground floor use requirements and finding a balance between affordable housing and retail.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who made a motion to close public comment.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler who expressed concerns about ground floor retail making Cambridge Street more restrictive than other areas of the City and may reduce affordable housing options. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler spoke in support of reviewing the possibility of having additional height limits, such as 7-8 stories, to have a better balance of retail and housing goals.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who pointed out the long history and role of local businesses along Cambridge Street and asked how CDD can support those legacy businesses during zoning changes. Pardis Saffari responded by sharing information about how Cambridge Street has a unique mix of legacy businesses and new businesses. Jeff Roberts shared

that zoning is used to regulate land use and certain design elements, but cannot regulate ownership of a business, such as a chain restaurant. Councillor Al-Zubi asked how inclusionary housing requirements would apply under the proposed options and what the trade offs may look like. Jeff Roberts provided an overview of how the inclusionary housing requirement would apply and that adding ground floor retail could result in few housing units being developed. Councillor Al-Zubi pointed out that the Massachusetts Avenue approach seemed more straightforward and spoke in favor of the second proposed option for Cambridge Street.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who shared that he agrees with much of what has already been said and shared similar concerns about ground floor retail limiting the production of affordable housing development. Vice Mayor Azeem spoke in favor of incentivizing ground floor retail to help with housing development, adding that the proposed language could make Cambridge Street more restrictive. Vice Mayor Azeem noted that he does support the goal of providing more ground floor retail but pointed out there may be unintended consequences that impact housing production.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who had questions related to economic factors that may impact Cambridge Street and more information related to property owners and property turnover. Councillor Zusy asked if land value on Cambridge Street is comparable to residential areas in East Cambridge and if ground floor retail would produce less housing on Cambridge Street and more production in neighborhoods. Pardis Saffari shared that they do not expect all properties to turnover, but there will be transitions over the years. Pardis Saffari added that there has been stable retail in the area supported by many residents. Melissa Peters explained that land value is usually based on what can be built, noting that adding more zoning requirements may factor into project development. Councillor Zusy asked for more information related to special permit requirements. Melissa Peters reviewed the process for special permit requirements on Cambridge Street. Councillor Zusy shared similar concerns related to ground floor retail, height limits, and housing production. Councillor Zusy offered suggestions related to looking into other ways to help support local businesses and the importance of thinking more broadly on how to support retail. Melissa Peters shared that Councillor Zusy's suggestions, such as seating areas and open space, are not addressed through zoning changes, but agreed there needs to be a good balance.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Flaherty who asked what factors, such as livability and neighborhood impacts, are considered when making zoning decisions. Melissa Peters explained that zoning studies do analyze certain factors, such as livability, streetscape, open space, and how people are using those areas. Melissa Peters added that zoning is a tool that is used to help achieve goals, but zoning also requires tradeoffs and balance. Councillor Flaherty emphasized how important it is to understand how zoning decisions impact residents, neighborhoods, and small businesses. Councillor Flaherty also shared concerns about losing the character of neighborhoods and the role small businesses play in supporting the community and that it is important to create and maintain spaces where families want to stay long-term. Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who noted that the purpose of the meeting today was to discuss the possible options and try and move forward with a decision. Councillor Nolan pointed out that both proposed options would encourage more active ground floor retail, but the zoning itself would not promise that there would be successful retail in the area. Councillor Nolan added that other factors, besides zoning, are already impacting small businesses which the City is trying

to address and support. Councillor Nolan spoke in support of moving forward so staff could continue their work and to avoid further delays. Pardis Saffari provided a brief overview of the support CDD and the Economic Development Department are providing to small businesses, such as financial assistance programs and training. Pardis Saffari added that from previous planning studies there was strong support from the community for active ground floor uses, noting that additional housing could also increase the demand for retail over time.

Co-Chair McGovern acknowledged a participant of public comment who was previously having technical difficulties.

Syed Jafry, 8 Winter Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition and shared concerns about the financial impact of zoning changes that are currently under construction.

Co-Chair McGovern emphasized the importance of being able to balance housing and development requirements, adding that it is important to increase housing supply to support middle income people. Co-Chair McGovern pointed out that having too many requirements may make it more difficult and impact on how many projects are developed. Co-Chair McGovern shared that requiring ground floor retail does not guarantee those spaces will be occupied and zoning cannot determine whether a business is successful. Co-Chair McGovern highlighted how important it is for the City Council to review the tradeoffs with the proposed zoning. Co-Chair McGovern asked why banks are not considered active uses. Evan Spetrini and Jeff Roberts explained that zoning is structured to prioritize more active uses and banks usually have less foot traffic. Co-Chair McGovern asked if a more restrictive option were to be adopted where there was a way to incentivize development and if existing ground floor retail could remain when buildings are being redeveloped. Melissa Peters shared that it would be difficult to preserve existing spaces and that zoning requires a more uniform approach. Melissa Peters added that even though different zoning approaches can be applied across areas, requirements can become complicated and harder to enforce. Melissa Peters noted that a “node” approach, where some areas have stronger requirements than others, could be a possibility, but a not a perfect solution. Melissa Peters explained that projects must be financially viable to move forward and noted that additional building height can help incentivize and offset costs, but emphasized again that it would require the City Council to review what the tradeoffs would be. Co-Chair McGovern asked CDD what option would result in more housing. Melissa Peters explained that if the goal is to produce more housing, then Option 1 would be the best option for that, with Option 2 being more restrictive towards housing, but helping with active ground floor retail uses.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Mayor Siddiqui who asked if a “node” approach would change the impact on housing production, Melissa Peters confirmed it would not. Mayor Siddiqui briefly pointed out that it would require six votes for an option to move forward and acknowledged the tradeoffs between supporting retail and more housing, adding that Councillors do have mixed positions with the two proposed options. Mayor Siddiqui emphasized the importance of keeping the character along Cambridge Street and supporting local businesses, while also producing more affordable housing. Mayor Siddiqui shared that she is in favor Option 2 over Option 1 but is also open to finding the right balance and could also revisit this again in the future.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who asked how the proposed zoning would apply to existing properties, such as the East Cambridge Savings Bank, if they were to redevelop. Evan Spetrini explained that the active ground floor use would only apply to projects that will be

a certain height and further explained the requirements under each option. Vice Mayor Azeem pointed out that Inman Square and Cambridge Street already have strong ground floor retail and that development and redevelopment would happen over time and not all at once. Vice Mayor Azeem shared concerns about unintended consequences with the stricter requirements. Vice Mayor Azeem offered the suggestion of the City Council considering a more flexible approach along Cambridge Street and reevaluate the zoning in the future based on the results.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who acknowledged comments made during public comment and asked if a partial requirement would be possible. Melissa Peters provided a brief overview of the current zoning requirements and noted that a partial change may not make a difference with outcomes. Councillor Zusy offered comments related to Cambridge Street in the long term and the importance of including open space, trees, and wider sidewalks, while also sharing concerns about zoning consistently changing.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who shared she would like to move forward with Option 2 so staff can begin to draft language.

**Co-Chair McGovern made a motion to extend the meeting to 4:45p.m.
On a voice vote of eight members the motion passed. Councillor Simmons was absent.**

Co-Chair McGovern asked about the process of moving forward if different options were receiving equal support. Councillor Al-Zubi had a point of information and asked if other ideas could be considered. Co-Chair McGovern explained they could be introduced in a separate motion, but Councillor Nolan's motion to move Option 2 forward needs to be addressed first. Co-Chair McGovern shared he would like to keep the topic in Committee with the possibility of a third option being discussed in the future. Mayor Siddiqui asked if a third option was possible. Melissa Peters explained a "node" approach could be explored, but may have challenges associated with it.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Flaherty who pointed out that the Council most likely will not reach a full agreement on which option to move forward with and agreed a compromise approach that balances housing and retail may be best. Councillor Flaherty shared he would not support options that limit housing development. Councillor Flaherty asked if a special permit process would be able to provide flexibility for some developments. Evan Spetrini and Jeff Roberts shared that a special permit could be used to address some situations but could also create challenges with the intent of the zoning.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who shared it might be best for the Committee to have another meeting to continue the discussion. Melissa Peters agreed that an additional meeting would be beneficial and that it would allow for staff to explore and create language for a "node" option.

Co-Chair McGovern made a motion that the Community Development Department evaluate the possibility of creating active use nodes along Cambridge Street and report back to the Ordinance Committee.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Simmons – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Siddiqui – Yes
Yes – 7, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who withdrew her motion to move forward with Option 2.

Co-Chair McGovern offered closing remarks and added that the Ordinance Committee would meet again once CDD had proposed zoning language for a third option to present to the Committee.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes
Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent
Councillor Flaherty – Yes
Councillor McGovern – Yes

In City Council April 13, 2026.
Affirmative Vote of Nine Members
Attest:- Paula M. Crane, Interim City Clerk

Councillor Nolan – Yes

A true copy;



Councillor Simmons – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

ATTEST:-

Paula M. Crane
Interim City Clerk

Yes – 7, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

The Ordinance Committee adjourned at approximately 4:45p.m.

Attachment A – 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:

[Mar 11, 2026 Ordinance Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment A

From: Heather Hoffman <heather.m.hoffman.1957@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2026 4:30 PM
To: City Council
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Councillor Azeem needs to check his facts

The right to rebuild is a matter of state law (" A zoning ordinance or by-law may define and regulate nonconforming uses and structures abandoned or not used for a period of two years or more."). That was not the issue with the condo that burned down. Discussion works better if people have their facts straight before they go off constructing entire arguments based on fallacies when they could and should have known better. I would have thought that watching national politics for the past several decades would have taught us that much at least.

Heather Hoffman

Erwin, Nicole

From: Syed jafry <sasjafry@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 9:28 AM
To: City Clerk; Patrick W Barrett III; Carlos Ferreira
Subject: Fw: March 11, 2:30 pm City council meeting (public comments)

Honorable mayor and Cambridge city Council, my name is Syed Jafry and I am the developer of a six Story, 23 condominium building at 8 winter street. My comments are about ORDINANCE 2025-17.

Since last year, We have built the foundation and are almost done with the framing.

Two weeks ago I was informed that our project has now moved from BA zoning to CAM6 zoning and the city Council is considering further changes that might require us to have active commercial space at ground level. Our location is at the intersection of Winter Street, 3rd Street and O'Brien Highway. It is such a high traffic busy corner with almost no public parking available.

At this stage of our project, if we have to make structural changes and adjustments that can have a disastrous financial impact for us.

These zoning changes have already stalled and threaten to halt a project that the city counts among their already completed affordable housing stock. We now may have to seek a variance to build housing. thank you

Erwin, Nicole

From: McGovern, Marc
Sent: Monday, March 9, 2026 5:09 PM
To: Speight, C; City Council; City Clerk
Cc: Hallie White Speight
Subject: Re: concerns about Cambridge Street zoning/ground floor use

Dear Mr. and Ms. Speight;

Below is the call for the Ordinance Committee meeting on Wednesday. The issues you raise are not part of the call of the meeting, therefore will not be discussed. I have suggested to Councilor Zusy that she should schedule a Neighborhood and Long Term Planning Committee meeting, which she chairs, if she wants to re-open these topics, but they will not be discussed on Wednesday.

Here is the call: The Ordinance Committee will hold a public hearing to have a conversation regarding zoning recommendations to strengthen active use requirements on Cambridge Street and Mass Ave as a follow-up to the recently adopted zoning petitions following the Our Cambridge Street Planning Study and Mass Ave Planning Study

Marc McGovern
Cambridge City Councillor
795 Mass. Ave
Cambridge, MA 02139
617-349-4280 (office)
617-642-1731 (cell)

All emails to and from this email address are subject to the Public Records Law and may be made available to members of the public. Anything you do not want subject to that law should be sent to me at marcmcgovern@gmail.com

From: Speight, C <casps8@bu.edu>
Sent: Monday, March 9, 2026 2:05 PM
To: City Council <CityCouncil@CambridgeMA.GOV>; City Clerk <cityclerk@Cambridgema.gov>
Cc: Hallie White Speight <hwhitema@yahoo.com>
Subject: concerns about Cambridge Street zoning/ground floor use

Dear Councillors,

We are two Inman residents who continue to be concerned about the lack of regulation for future Cambridge Street development. We urge that you include discussion of the following key issues at the upcoming ordinance committee meeting about ground floor active use:

1. Cambridge Street and environs are heavily residential, so no lab development should be allowed merely as of right.

2. Project review should be made essential to **all** future development: we would like to see at least one community meeting for buildings above 3 stories and two community meetings for buildings above 4 stories
3. Given your commitment to being data-driven, a form of annual reporting for future development is a must: how many affordable vs market units are being created under this new policy each year? How much new retail has been created/destroyed? How many trees have been added or destroyed? The City should report all of this data transparently and carefully.

With thanks,
Allen and Hallie Speight
33 Antrim Street

Erwin, Nicole

From: Hugh Russell <hughadamsrussell@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, March 7, 2026 4:19 PM
To: City Council
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Cambridge Street

At the next Ordinance Committee meeting you will discuss ground floor active use on Cambridge Street. We support this and the following important proposals:

- a. No labs as of right;
- b. Rear setbacks - 10 feet to prevent "dead zone" of weed infestation;
- c. Stepbacks - On South side of street - stepback of 45 degree angle above the 4th floor- that means 10 foot stepback on 5th floor and 10 foot stepback on 6th floor;
- d. Open space - specifically adjacent to Millers River apts which should be rezoned as open space (elderly people need open space)
- e. Project review - one public meeting when building is above 3 stories, two public meetings when building is above 4 stories or more.
- f. Annual report - According to Melissa Peters, the following is already required in an annual housing report of Cambridge Street - market units created, affordable units created, and units destroyed. We want this annual information recorded.

In addition, we want the Cambridge Street annual report to include:

- * retail footage created, and what could be/will be destroyed by the current plan,
- *annual active first floor space created and destroyed,
- *annual street trees planted and destroyed and annual street trees that died.

Hugh Russell