

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
Monday, April 6 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 Monday, April 6, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:00 a.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 Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/Remote
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/Remote
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Mayor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 8, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Simmons was present and remote at 11:09a.m.

Co-Chair McGovern offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to continue the discussion that was held at the March 11, 2026 hearing regarding zoning recommendations to strengthen active use requirements on Cambridge Street and Mass Ave as a follow-up on the recently adopted zoning petitions. Present at the meeting was Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Melissa Peters, Director of Zoning and Development, Jeff Roberts, Senior Manager, Zoning and Development, Evan Spetrini, Acting Director of Community Planning and Design, Drew Kane, Director of Economic Development, Pardis Saffari, and Assistant City Solicitor, Franziskus Lepionka.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Melissa Peters who offered opening remarks. Evan Spetrini 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.

Suzanne Blier, 5 Fuller Place, Cambridge, MA, shared support for local businesses and suggested the creation of an Advisory Group.

Susan Markowitz, 20 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of formula business restrictions.

Justin Saif, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of having incentives to support affordable housing and development.

Jason Alves, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of Option 2 and in opposition of Option 3.

Patrick Magee, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to removing Warren Street commercial use.

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

Clerk of Committees Erwin 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 Simmons – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who had clarifying questions regarding the ongoing project on Winter Street and zoning requirements. Jeff Roberts explained that it is a complicated scenario and briefly reviewed the status of the project and how the owner and developer are adjusting the project to remain compliant. Vice Mayor Azeem shared concerns related to ground floor retail possibly limiting the amount of housing that is built and shared support for Option 1.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Flaherty who asked for clarification related to if the Grand Junction was considered in Option 3. Melissa Peters noted that it was, but was excluded to maintain balance within Option 3. Councillor Flaherty shared concerns about Option 3 creating smaller developments and spoke in strong support for maintaining the existing retail. Councillor Flaherty spoke in support of Option 2.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who asked how other areas of the City formula business rules compare to what is being proposed for Cambridge Street and if those rules help support local businesses and how they operate within the zoning. Jeff Roberts provided a

brief overview of formula business rules in Central and Harvard Squares and the process of what formula does to be compliant. Jeff Roberts added that similar requirements on Cambridge Street may push formula businesses to occupy ground floor retail spaces. Councillor Nolan shared support for Option 2 and spoke in opposition to removing Warren Street commercial zoning, highlighting the importance of mixed-use within neighborhoods.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler who pointed out that the current zoning is not producing affordable housing and retail and suggested moving forward with one of the Options so staff can draft zoning language. Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler also pointed out that all three Options may have minimum impact without using incentives, such as increased height or financial flexibility.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Mayor Siddiqui who asked for more information related to the Winter Street project, which Jeff Roberts provided. Mayor Siddiqui asked if Option 1 and Option 2 would be improvements over the current zoning and increase the possibility of having more ground floor retail along Cambridge Street. Melissa Peters explained how both Options would be improvements and have a clearer set of requirements for ground use. Mayor Siddiqui spoke in favor of Option 2 but shared she would be fine with moving forward with Option 1 in order for the Policy Order to move forward and have CDD prepare zoning language.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who asked for more information related to formula businesses restrictions such as Harvard and Central Squares, and if restrictions would help to support local businesses on Cambridge Street. Councillor Zusy spoke in support of creating an Advisory Group to help with the future of Cambridge Street. Councillor Zusy asked whether it would be possible to exempt specific sites, such as 8 Winter Street, rather than removing entire areas from the zoning proposal. Jeff Roberts explained that formula business regulations can provide an additional layer of design and permitting review, but do not limit chain businesses or promote local ownership. Jeff Roberts added that having site-specific exemptions can be challenging and complex. Councillor Zusy spoke in support of Option 2 and highlighted the importance of having stronger requirements for ground floor retail. Councillor Zusy added that having incentives, such as financial support, can help to ensure retail spaces are feasible.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who had clarifying questions on the process of reviewing zoning in the future, especially if whichever Option the City Council goes forward with is not producing outcomes as expected. Co-Chair McGovern explained that when staff drafts zoning language, we can direct them to include a review process similar to other Ordinance and Zoning reviews. Councillor Al-Zubi shared support for Option 2 and thanked staff for their work towards creating an Option 3 for the Committee to consider.

Co-Chair McGovern provided an overview of how the Committee can move forward, noting that the first step would be to have CDD draft zoning language, which would then come back to the Ordinance Committee for review and discussion before it goes back to the full City Council to be Ordained. Co-Chair McGovern agreed that even though there is currently no consensus on which Option to move forward with, the Committee does need to decide in order to keep the process going and have draft language created.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who asked if childcare would qualify as active ground-floor uses under the proposed zoning. Jeff Roberts confirmed that childcare would be considered an active use and would count toward meeting the requirement.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Vice Mayor Azeem, Councillor Nolan, and Councillor Zusy for motions related to the proposed language from CDD. The motions were disposed of in the following order:

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Zusy who made a motion that the Ordinance Committee recommend to the full City Council that the City Manager direct the Community Development Department and relevant staff to include a requirement for special permits for formula businesses on Cambridge Street.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Yes

Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent - 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who made a motion that the Ordinance Committee recommend to the full City Council that the City Manager direct the Community Development Department and relevant staff prepare a draft zoning petition to strengthen Active Use requirements on Massachusetts Avenue per the recommendations and Option 2 on Cambridge Street, while keeping Warren Street in the CAM-6 District. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – No

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – No

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Yes

Yes – 6, No – 2, Absent - 1. Motion passed.

Vice Mayor Azeem withdrew his motion for CDD to draft a zoning petition to strengthen Active Use requirements on Massachusetts Avenue per the recommendations and Option 1. **Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who made a motion that the Ordinance Committee recommend to the full City Council that the City Manager direct the Community Development Department to create draft language to propose changing the section of O'Brien Highway to B.A. Zoning District.**

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Simmons – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Yes
Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent - 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Mayor Siddiqui who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

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

Councillor McGovern – Yes
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Simmons – Absent
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Simmons – Yes
Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent - 1. Motion passed.

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

A true copy;



ATTEST:-

Paula M. Crane

Interim City Clerk

The Ordinance Committee adjourned at approximately 12:55p.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:

[Apr 06, 2026 Ordinance Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)

Erwin, Nicole

From: Jason Alves <baecamb@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 6, 2026 10:44 AM
To: City Council; City Clerk; Peters, Melissa; Huang,
Yi-An Subject: Cambridge St Active Use - Please go with
Option 2

Dear Councillors and Ordinance Committee

As you consider ways of protecting Small Business activity along Cambridge Street at Ordinance this morning, Know that Option 2 remains the superior option in accomplishing this, (even though it still leaves potential for 3 story building with no active use)

Please don't confuse options 3 as "compromise", It's just a 3rd option that is not as good at ensuring small business space is protected in the event of parcel assemblage and redevelopment, which is being encouraged by the recent zoning changes.

If you are worried about housing production, I think I've done my best to explain how the "more restrictive option can help ensure that a parcel is built to its full potential and guard against developers underdeveloping in order to maximize profit. Option 2 is the best option. While still exposing a chance for a 3 story building with no commercial, the

Cambridge St, as described in Our Cambridge Street is complex and has to fulfill a lot of needs. We need to be comfortable recognizing that this is one of very few miles in the city where small business space can be built. It's ONE MILE. It needs uniform rules, dividing it up even further highlights, without much discussion how it's problematic and arbitrary.

You will still be able to build lots of housing on Cambridge St thanks to the upzoning. This regulation will not prevent housing. This regulation will provide a balance to the full spectrum of needs that Cambridge St is under the pressure to deliver. Move forward on option 2 and let Cambridge Street continue to attempt to fill all the roles it needs to.

Small Cambridge Street retail should not be viewed as the loss leader it is claimed to be in areas like Kendall. It's not the same situation.

In summary

It's ONE MILE lets move along the best protections
option 3 exposes the strongest retail node in Eastern Cambridge (while treating Inman better, lets not do that) that will only get stronger with Grand Junction Path connections

Adding Small Business Protection and not refiling the last petition was the stated plan. Don't go back on it.

Starting a restriction at 3 stories would be better, that's not before us. So Option 2 is the best option.

Erwin, Nicole

A developer can always ask for relief and make their case. Dont make the community go fight for active uses in a business district every time there is a project.

This is a back stop to discourage an undesirable scenario, housing will still be built.

Apologies for the hastily written email. See you
shortly. Im happy to chat with anyone.
Cell 617-686-8367

Jason Alves
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ie_c_ome a Member of the.ECBA Today!
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Erwin, Nicole

From: Annette LaMond <annettelamond@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 6, 2026 10:30 AM
To: Zusy, Catherine; Al-Zubi, Ayah; Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan; Simmons, Denise; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Nolan, Patricia; McGovern, Marc; Flaherty, Timothy; Azeem, Burhan
Cc: City Clerk; City Manager
Subject: Please Save NSM & CAA: Invest in 25 Lowell as a Community Space

Dear Councillors,

I am writing to urge you to consider all the costs of transforming 25 Lowell Street into housing. The New School of Music and the Cambridge Art Association contribute greatly to the West Cambridge community.

The CAA provides fellowship and exhibition space for the city's painters, printmakers, sculptors and photographers. And Cambridge has many artists.

As for the NSM, it is a musical hub where many Cambridge children - from the neighborhood and beyond - have been introduced to music in the early grades and then benefited from lessons (at reasonable cost) beyond what is available in their schools. Three of my children took lessons at the NSM (one, piano for 12 years; one, violin for 6 years; and one, recorder for 5 years). The school also provides much-needed teaching opportunities for local musicians.

Further, the NSM and CAA are, in effect, the neighborhood's only community center. Rather than banishing the NSM and the CAA from our neighborhood, I urge the City Council to consider funding for more community programming and developing the school building as a "third" space. With renovations, the school building could be a smaller scale example of what the Foundry has become in East Cambridge.

And next to the school house is a small public park that provides a play space. (The next closest playground-at Larch Road - is three-quarters of a mile away, while Longfellow and Lowell Memorial parks are for passive recreation.) I don't agree with the City's statement that the park "is tucked behind [a] parking lot with no access from Mt. Auburn Street and poor access from Lowell Street." The fence along Mt. Auburn provides shelter from a heavily trafficked arterial road. And the assertion that access from Lowell Street is poor is baffling.

The wooden school building, built in 1883, has been part of the fabric of the neighborhood for over 140 years. It is part of the city's architectural heritage-the only remaining wooden school building in Cambridge that is intact. It should remain in service as an educational and community-gathering spot. A new four-story structure in the small space behind the school building would diminish the older structure.

Consider also the pressure that a new apartment building without parking would place on the neighborhood-a neighborhood that already accommodates the cars of visitors to the Mt. Auburn Hospital, many of whom are Cambridge-residents.

Further, current residents who live near the proposed development did not anticipate a 20-unit building when they bought their homes. The impact on immediate abutters will be especially severe. Property values for single-family homes in the area may be predicted to fall, promoting a developer free-for-fall to divide properties and cram in more "luxury" units. (As a resident of the neighborhood, I can testify that there has been an uptick in solicitations from would-be developers since the multifamily zoning ordinance was passed in early 2025.)

The proposal to add 20 units of housing at 25 Lowell Street-a small number in the scheme of things - recalls Aesop's fable of the "Goose Who Laid the Golden Eggs." Don't take away the neighborhood's art and music

Erwin, Nicole

center; don't take away the pleasant green space behind the school building; don't redesign a successful park; don't destroys historic neighborhood. Residents of this neighborhood have long made generous contributions to the city and its nonprofit organizations; don't encourage them to leave Cambridge.

While I understand the imperative to spread affordable housing throughout the city, including in West Cambridge, 25 Lowell Street is not a good option. Look closer to Harvard Square, specifically to Harvard-owned buildings. The College has been reducing its staffing, and therefore, its need for space. The City should work with the College to see which properties might become housing. That housing would have an important associated benefit - bringing more life to the Square and support for its struggling businesses.

Please save 25 Lowell Street as a historic building and develop its potential as a
community center. Sincerely,

Annette LaMond 7
Riedesel Avenue

Erwin, Nicole

From: Richard Krushnic <rkrushnic@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 5, 2026 8:07 PM
To: City Council; City Clerk; City Manager
Subject: Orinance Committee-Cambridge Street Active first floor use, meeting 11:00
Monday
April 6th.

Under the Cambridge St. zoning recently passed, it is assumed that new, taller residential buildings will replace small retail and significant foot-traffic offices (e.g. insurance agent) with significantly larger spaces, with increased rent per sq ft. Developers will replace small retail and office spaces with larter ones attractive to formula (chain) retail and larger office uses (e.g architecture) which can afford the higher rents new buildings demand, spaces and rents unaffordable to smaller current commercial tenants.

We request that such small retail and offices that are displaced by such new construction, be offered the right to return to the same property, with the same square footage, or a minor square footage adjustment requested by the displaced entity. This would apply to all buildings, residential or non-residential. This alone will not allow the vast majority of small retail and office uses to continue on the street, because they will not be able to afford the higher rent demanded in the new buildings.

However, many might be able to adjust if new buildings in the two retail/commercial zones in CDD's option 3 above three stories and above 18,000 sq ft, either residential or non-residential, reserve at least 20% of Cambridge St. frontage for such small retail and office uses, with an average unit space of 1,100 sq, or the square feet of a small business displaced from the demolition at the site. Such a new space that remains unoccupied for three years, could be eliminated via combination with a larger space. But even with this added requirement, displaced small businesses would be unlikely to return to the street because of higher rents in the new construction.

Such displaced small retail and office uses seeking to return to the same site, or to continue elsewhere on Cambridge St. would be allowed the pre-displacement rent for 6 months, followed by increases that could not exceed 8% a year for three years.

Further, to retain much of the small business character of the street, and to further protect small retail and office uses, the same regulations used by the City in Harvard Square and Central Square to limit formula business spaces should be applied to the two retail/commercial nodes in CDD's option 3 on Cambridge Street.cc

Erwin, Nicole

From: Ethan Frank <ethandf2@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 5, 2026 12:43 PM
To: Cc: City Council
Subject: City Clerk
Housing on city-owned property 8i strengthening commercial uses

To the City
Council,

I'm glad to see a focus on housing for the City's underdeveloped properties, while also taking into account department needs.

I hope we can strengthen commercial uses on Mass ave without overly impeding new housing construction.

Sincerely,
Ethan Frank