



HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

The Health and Environment Committee will hold a public hearing to review and discuss the update to the Zero Waste Master Plan (ZWMP) 2.0.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Health and Environment Committee was held on Tuesday, March 25, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 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 Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber*

Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

Councillor Wilson – Present/Remote

Present – 4, Absent -1. Quorum established

*Councillor Azeem went from in person to remote participation at 4:32p.m.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the update to the Zero Waste Master Plan (ZWMP) 2.0. Present from the Department of Public Works (DPW) were Kathy Watkins, Commissioner, John Nardone, Deputy Commissioner, John Fitzgerald, Environmental Services Manager, and Michael Orr, Recycling Director.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks and read from the following statement (not verbatim).

I'm glad we're here today to talk about the update to the Zero Waste Master Plan (ZWMP 2.0). Waste reduction and recycling are essential parts of our environmental work, our public health work, our quality of life improvements, and many other important facets of our city. And this process to update our Zero Waste Master Plan has been the result of significant public process. In addition to the events and community work that DPW did throughout 2024, this is also our third Health and Environment Committee meeting I've held in the last three years discussing the update and ongoing progress on waste reduction.

It is important to note that many elements of the transition to zero waste can be challenging, and some are easy, and some save money and some cost money. We must balance all the needs as we develop the plan.

For us to reduce our overall pollution, since much of trash is pollution, we must include non-residential waste in our overall reduction strategy.

As a city we have done a lot - it is amazing - we have: 4 different curbside programs stop at my - and every - house to pick up trash, recycling, compost and yard waste. And I'm excited about the work already done and the potential of the Zero Waste Master Plan. WE must be multifaceted in our approach to reducing waste, and the attendant GHG emission pollution, and greening our city. We need to think about the big steps and the small steps that we can take - tackling the difficult problems and the simpler ones at the same time.

Trash reduction is a large part of that - in the best case, our trash ends up in landfills and adds to carbon and methane emissions. In the worst case, our trash ends up in our streets, our parks, and in our waterways - clogging up drains, causing many problems - not to mention adding other public health ailments to our city. This Zero Waste Master Plan update is essential to reducing our trash output, increasing our ratios of recycled and composted, and diverted materials, and protecting the public health of our city. And too often, e-waste esp. Ends up in developing countries, making people sick.

One part of that has to be not just recycling, but ZERO WASTE as in not using in the first place, especially reducing single-use plastics, and focusing on reducing consumption. Single-use plastics are made through fossil fuels and are designed to be disposed of as trash after use. These plastics then spend the rest of their lifespan decaying in landfills - adding to waste and as they decay over decades and decades, and depending on their composition, often end up as microplastics or emitting PFAS into our ecosystem. The myth that plastics can be or are recycled is one that has prevented programs to reduce plastic use. And it is largely a myth - funded by plastic manufacturers and fossil fuel companies. We need to include plastics reduction goals within our overall waste reduction strategy or we will continue to feed into a system that is literally poisoning us and contributing to our existential climate crisis.

By eliminating as many single-use plastics as possible, we can better protect our environment and our public health. We have had some success with our plastic bag ordinance and our ban of polystyrene takeout containers, but we need to continue: we can follow the example of state action to eliminate the purchase of plastic bottles by the city, we can limit the use of plastic utensils, and we can limit the sale of miniature liquor bottles. All these have the potential to minimize trash, reduce litter, and improve public health. We know this issue is important - this discussion has been ongoing for years - the city and council have discussed banning single use plastic many times.

we should have a systematic approach to tackling waste reduction from our largest commercial operators, who are not included in our residential waste reduction figures. We need to be proactive with institutions and large property owners like Harvard, MIT, Alexandria, our non-profit housing partners and others and ask them to report their waste profiles to us so we can set a course for regulating waste reduction commercially as well. I am excited to hear from DPW staff about especially the property manager zero waste plans.

goal for this meeting is to review the staff presentation and the ZWMP 2.0 draft, discuss possible changes or improvements, and once any appropriate edit/adjustment/amendments are made, to send this plan to the full city council for a vote and adoption as city policy. Once the plan is adopted as city policy I hope to begin the ordinance process as outlined in DPW's draft strategy.

With that, I'd like to introduce DPW Commissioner, Kathy Watkins and her team for their presentation.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Kathy Watkins and the team from DPW who gave a presentation titled "2025 Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0". The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation included an overview of data and state of waste in Cambridge and information on the ZWMP 2.0. Also included in the Agenda Packet was a draft version of 2025 ZWMP 2.0.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan opened Public Comment.

Cynthia Hubbard, 23 Ellsworth Avenue, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and suggestions related to the different strategy plans and shared support for ZWMP 2.0

Alexandra Bradley, 7 Marble Faun In, Windsor, CT, shared support and strongly advocated for changes to be made. Provided suggestions to strategy #4.

Diane Martin, 34 Madison Avenue, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about kitchen waste and the compost program and looks forward to changes being made with ZWMP 2.0.

Joel Nogie, 94 Clifton Street, Cambridge, MA, Climate Committee, shared excitement for the ZWMP 2.0 and indicated the Committee will be reviewing the plan and provide recommendations and suggestions.

Debby Galef, 93 Hammond Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments and suggestions to the proposed strategy plans.

Amy Waltz, 12 Blakeslee Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments related to composting and encouraged households to make changes.

Judy Nathans offered comments related to commercial and residential waste.

Melissa Ludky offered comments and suggestions on the ZWMP 2.0

The Chair, Councillor Nolan read a statement from Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler (**Attachment A**) who was unable to attend the meeting. Councillor Nolan asked Commissioner Watkins if she could clarify terminology relative to Food Waste Diversion and concerns about the PFAS in food waste. Commissioner Watkins explained that there have been many conversations on the naming of the Food Waste Program but feels that Compost Program is easier for residents to understand. Commissioner Watkins noted that there was an update to the City Council on PFAS in the Greater Lawrence Sanitary District where weekly collections are disposed, sharing that a very small percentage of the waste goes to sludge. Commissioner Watkins added that testing continues to be done through Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to collect data on what changes need to be made.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Azeem who asked what the difference would be between compostable plastic bags versus thick plastic bags, which was being proposed as a change in Ordinance 8.68 (Agenda Packet page 29). Commissioner Watkins shared that with the proposed Ordinance change plastic bags would not be available at check out. Michael Orr added that compostable plastic bags are made from a corn product and can be reused as part of the Compost Program and pointed out that compostable products are not desired by composting facilities. Councillor Azeem asked if red solo cups are polystyrene material and where they would be banned from (Agenda Packet page 30). Michael Orr explained that they would be banned for personal use and would not be sold at stores such as Target and Star Market. Councillor Azeem shared that he supports the goal of limiting plastic use and having better outcomes in waste management. Councillor Azeem shared that he would like to learn more information on lab and industrial buildings' contribution to waste. Commissioner Watkins explained that they are in the process of collecting information on large commercial buildings to help create strategies that would support their waste management.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked if there have been any updates made regarding mattress recycling. Commissioner Watkins provided an update and explained what efforts are being made to get larger residential buildings to participate in the City's free mattress recycling program. Councillor Siddiqui shared that there should be a decision made on the naming of the Food Waste Program and agreed there should be further conversation related to PFAS in food waste. Councillor Siddiqui asked for more information on the possibility of having pay as you throw program or something like it. Commissioner Watkins indicated that the City would like to see how effective the different strategies are first before a pay as you throw program was created, noting that there needs to be changes made to current Ordinance language to help reach the goals of reduced trash.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Wilson who asked what type of outreach is being conducted in Cambridge for residents and if there have been conversations with neighboring cities related to waste reduction regionally. Michael Orr stressed that education and outreach are extremely important to figure out the best method to have residents more involved and want to participate in the composting program. Michael Orr shared that Cambridge works with Boston and other surrounding communities and provided examples of cities

and towns that have compost programs. Councillor Wilson shared that DPW should reach out to the City Council to help with community efforts towards waste reduction.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan shared excitement for the coordination being made between Boston and other communities and suggested that cities and towns should try to have their composting programs be named the same. Councillor Nolan provided comments on the importance of having smart goals. Councillor Nolan asked if large, subsidized housing buildings are included in the data. Michael Orr shared the different options larger buildings have for recycling and composting, noting it is not easy to make the programs accessible in some of the larger buildings. Michael Orr added that a mandatory food waste diversion program will be a big change and will take efforts to implement soon. Councillor Nolan noted how it should be easy to collect data from institutions and commercial buildings such as Harvard University, and large property owners such as Alexandria Real Estate. Councillor Nolan offered comments and suggestions on how the City can rethink the timeline for having the larger buildings being involved with data collection sooner rather than later. Councillor Nolan provided additional suggestions on how the City should move forward with ZWMP 2.0 and be a regional leader in waste reduction and management.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who made the 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 Department of Public Works to work together with the Chair of the Health and Environment Committee based on the comments from today's meeting and any public input including the Climate Committee to make appropriate changes to the draft of the Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0 and forward a final draft to the full City Council for approval as the city's policy document on zero waste. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

Councillor Wilson – Absent

Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

The Chair Councillor Nolan made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

Councillor Wilson – Absent

Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

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

Attachment A – Written statement from Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler

Attachment B – 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:

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/987?view_id=1&redirect=true

I. Discussion

A communication was received from Commissioner of the Department of Public Works, Kathy Watkins, transmitting the 2025 Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0 Presentation.

A communication was received from Commissioner of the Department of Public Works, Kathy Watkins, transmitting the Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0 DRAFT March 2025.

Attachment A – Written Statement from Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler

Chair Nolan,

I'm sorry not to be able to join today's Health and Environment Committee meeting because I have a surgery follow-up appointment at the same time. I wanted to share that I hope the Zero Waster Master plan continues to be strengthened and includes a specific call to reduce the use of plastics in Cambridge. While the City sometimes has limited authority to issue regulations, the state government has actually made clear that municipalities have broader authority on health issues as cities and towns are laboratories of public health measures as understood by the Commonwealth. Plastic pollution is a serious public health for issue for our residents and the health of our environment, and I hope we can accordingly act on it with urgency.

Best,

Jivan

From: Grow To Consume <growtoconsume@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 1:55 PM
To: City Council
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Comment re: Health and Environment Committee Meeting

Hello,

My name is Saskia and I am a Cambridge resident. Also cofounder of Grow to Consume, our mission is to advocate for climate justice through sustainable food systems for marginalized people in urban areas. I am aware that the Health and Environment Committee is discussing the updated Zero Waste Master Plan, 2.0. In review of the ZWMP 2.0 Stakeholder Engagement document and the Draft zero waste master plan 2.0 I have the following comments for feedback:

- The engagement process with stakeholders produced limiting results with only one public event and the rest online. I believe if the city developed a more robust engagement process that participation would be higher and data obtained would increase as a result. I believe that the city needs to adopt a community led participatory process to obtain the research necessary as part of establishing a feedback loop with local stakeholders, especially with residents, landlords, and local business owners. The city should work with local organizations as part of stakeholder engagement.
- The city needs to incorporate cultural advocacy into stakeholder engagement with residents as part of public education. The city of Cambridge is a very diverse city and many residents have a natural circular process of recycling food scraps as part of cultural practices. I recommend that the Health and Environment Committee work with cultural organizations that have a history of environmental/climate justice advocacy **and** working with marginalized residents as part of public education that can help the city meet its zero waste goals for 2030 and 2050.
- I hope that the city can move to support waste management as part of developing a circular waste economy. Recent research shows that "Industrial waste gases, long seen as a major contributor to climate change, could soon be captured and repurposed into everyday household products such as shampoo, detergent, and even fuel. However there is a the need for *further investment* in renewable energy infrastructure." <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/03/250313130756.htm> I believe the city should introduce an ordinance that charges for single use plastics from restaurants. The funds from this could go towards green job training and incubator programs for Cambridge residents thus supporting a circular carbon economy.
- Also the city of Cambridge should conduct a study exploring the impact of non-recyclable containers from grocery stores, as it is our grocery stores that are contributing to a large amount of plastics ending up in our landfill. Solutions that support buying in bulk, like at Cambridge Naturals or at Whole Foods should become more accessible. I also recommend the city to explore public water stations where residents can refill glass containers instead of having to purchase water at the grocery store.
- More solutions that the city can employ are:
 - Provide small business grants for food upcycling companies
 - Partner with Cambridge School of Culinary Arts to teach low-waste cooking methods. The city could fund free workshops on creative cooking with food scraps.

- Zero Waste Innovation Grants (Example: *San Francisco's Zero Waste Grants* help businesses develop waste-reduction solutions.)
- Establish a city-backed venture fund to invest in local circular economy startups. (Example: *Amsterdam Circular Innovation Fund* supports waste-to-product businesses.)
- **Support Circular Economy Incubator Programs** to increase residential interest and participation in the green industry. These incubator programs can provide coworking spaces, mentorship, and funding opportunities for green startups. We should prioritize investment into Cambridge residents for innovation in the green industry. Financial reward is a real motivation. More residents will care about the zero waste plan when they understand it is economically beneficial and has a lot of job opportunities. (An example: *ReTuna* in Sweden is a mall exclusively for upcycled and repaired goods. Imagine Cambridgeside Galleria being converted into the first mall in the U.S. exclusively for upcycled and repaired goods!)
- Citizenship Recognition Awards. The city asks for a lot of volunteering - there should be several awards created recognizing residents for their advocacy work. This can help support them as they pursue jobs/create jobs through innovative startups in the green industry.

Thank you for considering my recommendations. I look forward to working with the city for sustainable food systems as part of its zero waste plans for climate justice.

Saskia Vann James (she/they)

(c) (617) 221-6397

Executive Director, [Grow to Consume](#)

"In the city, where we don't have access to rich farmland, composting is how we create our own soil, our own life, and feed our own communities." - Ron Finley

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Erwin, Nicole

From: Alexandra Bradley <alexrb@bu.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 1:14 PM
To: City Clerk
Subject: Public comment- Meeting March 25th 3pm

Hello,

My name is Alexandra Bradley and I registered for a public comment for the March 25th Health and Environment Committee meeting at 3pm. Here is my comment below:

Hi, my name is Alexandra Bradley, I live in Windsor, CT and I am an intern at Run On Climate working alongside Cambridge City Councillor Patty Nolan. I am here today to express my support for Cambridge's ZWMP 2.0 and to advocate for further changes within Strategy #4, addressing the reduction of waste from food establishments. As part of the adoption of a single-use ordinance, I would like to push for an amendment to strengthen Cambridge's current polystyrene ordinance, which bans the use of polystyrene food service containers, to include language stating that all takeout containers and utensils must be reusable, recyclable, and compostable. This avoids the use of other types of plastics that are non-recyclable such as black plastic containers, plastic straws, and plastic plates. Examples of this language can be found in Newton, Brookline, and Northampton's ordinances on single use plastics.

I would also like to address the topic of Nips and advocate for the banning of plastic and glass nip bottles, as both are non-recyclable and end up either within our waste streams or discarded as litter. Newton and Chelsea have taken action to successfully ban both plastic and glass nips, with Brookline banning the sale of only plastic nips.

In looking at the advancements that neighboring cities have made, I believe that the elimination of single use plastics including plastic food-ware and nips along with supporting businesses in their transition to more sustainable alternatives and providing support to business that are currently reducing plastic waste is not only doable for Cambridge, but necessary in order to transition to a more sustainable economy, divert waste from our landfills, and reduce the harmful effects of plastic waste pollution on our health, local communities, and the environment.

Thank you,
Alex Bradley

Erwin, Nicole

From: cshibbard79@gmail.com
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 1:08 PM
To: City Council
Cc: City Clerk; anaya.raikar@winsor.edu; 'Mallorie Barber'; 'Joel Nogie'; 'Steven Nutter'
Subject: Comment Letter for March 25 City Council Health & Environment Committee Meeting - Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0 Update
Attachments: Hibbard ltr to Health and Environment Comm Cambridge re ZWMP 2.pdf

Dear Health and Environment Committee,

I am writing to express my support for, and to submit a few questions about, the draft Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0 being discussed at your meeting today.

Thank-you for your consideration!

- Cynthia Hibbard

March 25, 2025

Cambridge City Council Health and Environment Committee

VIA EMAIL: citycouncil@cambridgema.gov; cityclerk@cambridgema.gov

Subject: Questions on the Draft Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0

Dear Health and Environment Committee:

My name is Cynthia Hibbard, and I live at 23 Ellsworth Ave., #2. I am deeply appreciative of the work and the impressive progress the City has made toward our Zero Waste goal. I am eager to support the ongoing work being done by the City staff and the Council in developing and implementing this Zero Waste Master Plan 2.0.

I am a new member of the Cambridge Climate Committee, and also volunteer for 350 Mass, Mothers Out Front and Green Cambridge. I am here today primarily to learn, and hopefully to be a conduit for engagement and support by these groups. I am, however, only representing myself today, and have a few questions about the Plan:

Strategy #1: Require Property Manager Zero Waste Plans, and Strategy #8 Provide Technical Assistance to the Commercial Sector. I learned from the ZWMP 2.0 that 80% of the City's solid waste comes from commercial, institutional and large residential (13+ units) that the City does not manage or provide collection services for. This strikes me as the most important issue to address. I strongly support requiring these property managers (hopefully including colleges and universities) to submit annual Zero Waste Plans. Will targets be set in the initial Plans? Will there be reporting relative to the targets? Inspections? Enforcement? Trash picks? The Strategy #8 Plan of Action refers to collecting data from large properties to "establish clear, measurable, and achievable diversion goals for the commercial and institutional sectors in ZWMP 3.0." Given that ZWMP 3.0 is five years away, could this data collection and goal setting be done more quickly?

Strategies #2 and #6: Require/Enforce Food Waste Diversion. I wholeheartedly support requiring food waste diversion for ALL residential and commercial buildings. This is a terrific strategy and a quadruple win!

- Saves the City money, reduces rats, provides energy, and reduces landfill waste.

Strategy #3 Reduce Move-In/Move-Out Waste, and Strategy #5 Improve Accessibility to the Recycle Center. Could the Recycle Center be expanded to include a Take-It-Or-Leave-It Marketplace? The Town of Wellesley has a very successful free exchange area organized into departments, such as furniture, appliances, toys, and electronics. The proposed mobile recycling van could collect furniture and other items left on the curb and bring them to the center. This would also be consistent with Strategy #9. Would physical space be a constraint for this idea?

Strategy #4 Reduce Waste from Food Establishments (including updating the Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance). Is the City considering an outright ban on plastic shopping bags? 500 cities and 12 states in the U.S. have this. I understand that Councillor Nolan is interested in updating the City's ordinance to be based on the new California standard to totally ban all plastic shopping bags. I would support this idea, and would like to learn more about its pros and cons for Cambridge.

Thanks for your ongoing work finalize this plan and recommend ordinance changes!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Cynthia Strong Hibbard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cynthia" being the most prominent.

Cynthia Strong Hibbard
23 Ellsworth Avenue, #2
Cambridge, MA