



HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

12:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Health and Environment Committee will hold a public hearing to discuss regional coastal flood resilience interventions required to address increased vulnerability due to climate change risk.

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

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Health and Environment Committee was held on Wednesday, March 27, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 12:00 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, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
- Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Siddiqui – Present/Remote
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler-Present/Remote
- Councillor Wilson – Absent

Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks (Attachment A) and shared that the Call of the meeting was to discuss regional costal flood resilience interventions required to address increased vulnerability due to climate change risk. Present at the meeting was Deputy City Manager Owen O’Riordan, Kathy Watkins, Commissioner for the Department of Public Works (DPW), Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for the Community Development Department (CDD), Jim Wilcox, Assistant Commissioner of Engineering/City Engineer for DPW, and Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and Transportation for CDD. Also present at the meeting were Indrani Ghosh, Senior Technical Leader with Weston and Sampson, Julie Wood, Climate Resilience Director for the Charles River Watershed Association, and Julie Wormser from Mystic River Watershed Association. Joined via Zoom was Catherine Woodbury, Project Manager for DPW, and Sarah White and Rob Lowell from the Department of Conservation Resources (DCR).

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Kathy Watkins, Julie Wormser, and Julie Wood who gave a presentation titled “Regional Coastal Flood Resilience Interventions to address increased

vulnerability due to climate change risk”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation included information on how Cambridge is working both locally and regionally to improve the resiliency to flooding, and offered information on precipitation and coastal flooding, along with strategies, a review of plans, updates on the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) plan, information on the roll dams play with coastal flooding, projected flooding elevations, and coastal intervention. To conclude the presentation, Kathy Watkins pointed out that it is important to support the regional work that directly benefits Cambridge, the dams are critical for protection from coastal flooding, and improvements significantly reduces risk from coastal flooding for Cambridge and other communities.

Kathy Watkins recognized Sarah White and Rob Lowell who shared that they are happy to be part of the regional collaboration and offered a quick overview of the work that is currently being done and future goals.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Susanne Rasmussen who pointed out that this past December the City Council updated the City’s Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan which reflects much of the work that is being discussed at the meeting and encouraged people to view the report which provides more insight into current and future plans relative to flooding.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan, asked for a review of how efforts in Boston are critical to Cambridge. Julie Wormser responded and provided examples on the efforts being made by Boston to tackle climate change and flooding. Indrani Ghosh provided additional feedback and more information relative to Logan Airport and the work that the massport has been doing in coordination with other agencies. Councillor Nolan noted the importance of all the work that is being done regionally and how critically important it is to work collaboratively to intervene and address all the challenges.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked for more information on an emergency plan for when the 1% of flood storms do affect Cambridge, or if there were an issue with the Amelia Earhart Dam. Owen O’Riordan responded and shared that a discussion relative to this came up during the updates to the Hazard Mitigation Plan and noted that the City is in the process of hiring an Emergency Management Director to oversee and plan for these types of scenarios with an emergency response team. Julie Wormser provided additional comments and highlighted how important it is to get into the communities to be proactive versus reactive.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Azeem who had clarifying questions regarding the Amelia Earhart Dam and flooding in Alewife. Kathy Watkins provided a response relative to flooding and preventative flood design and explained that the goal is to work on these challenges to try and get ahead of that 1% chance of a flood event. Kathy Watkins also pointed out that when development is coming in, they are considering both coastal and precipitation flooding both with new and current infrastructures, noting that it is important that people are meeting the needs that are necessary through resilience zoning. Iram Farooq provided a response as well that supported comments made by Kathy Watkins, noting that is important to focus on infrastructure and the regional picture that works with in collaboration with local policies that are in place. In addition, Kathy Watkins provided more information relative to the Amelia Earhart Dam and flooding related to Alewife moving forward. Julie Wormser responded as well and shared that it would be important not to decrease the work that is being done to Alewife because it is a flood prone area. Kathy Watkins noted the importance of balancing many different challenges to reach an important goal.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan asked how the modeling of the expectation for more extreme weather factor into plans. Kathy Watkins responded and explained that the zoning is tied to the Flood Viewer, which is updated every 1-2 years, which is a public version of the City's modeling, and provided examples of updates, such as climate projections and infrastructure. Commissioner Watkins noted that the next update will include information on the latest projections for precipitation that were done by the state and the goal is to try and keep up to date with the best available information. Deputy City Manager O'Riordan provided additional information and noted the importance of looking at the possibility of a duration of events that could occur and a system that is designed to handle the extent of damage that may happen, noting that there is a great deal of uncertainty of what Cambridge and neighboring communities may face in the future.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan asked what we be helpful from the Council in terms of next steps. Deputy City Manager O'Riordan shared that continued advocacy at the state and federal level is very important and highlighted that the work being done collaboratively with other agencies, and pointing out it will also be extremely expensive when the time comes to implement certain solutions. Julie Wood shared it would be important to have a conversation at the community and state level to discuss whether Massachusetts is prepared for these future climate change risks. Julie Wormser shared that she would love to see Cambridge become the center of climate tech and be more enthusiastic in all the work, the solutions, and the modeling that has been done to help encourage other communities to follow.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered closing remarks and thanked everyone for the conversation and efforts towards flood resilience and climate change.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who 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 – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Absent

Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:26p.m.

Attachment A – Opening remarks from Chair Nolan. Not verbatim.

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/712?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Kathy Watkins, Commissioner for the Department of Public Works, transmitting a presentation relative to regional coastal flood resilience interventions.

Councillor Nolan Intro

We are here today to have a conversation about climate resiliency, specifically about Regional Coastal Flood Resilience.

As a part of that discussion, we have invited some regional partners to the table, who I will have introduce themselves in just a moment and I have let members of our state delegation know about this meeting to ensure all our regional partners are apprised of ongoing work - and I commend our Department of Public Works for their ongoing regional collaboration, which is never as straightforward as we hope, but this seems to be one instance where our partners have done a great job at working towards the same goals - climate resiliency and investment in regional infrastructure. For those of you watching from other, neighboring communities, I hope you will take some time to dig through the slides, as they include a lot of important information about regional coordination and mitigation projects that are extremely relevant, not only to Cambridge, but to a much larger community of municipalities.

This topic is of the utmost importance given growing climate resiliency concerns around the climate crisis. This meeting will include a presentation by the Cambridge Department of Public Works and go into depth on regional coordination with state organizations and surrounding communities as well. Representatives from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Mystic River Watershed Association, and Charles River Watershed Association are here as well to help speak to some of the ongoing regional coordination.

Without further ado, let's go around the table and introduce everyone before I hand it over to DPW Commissioner Kathy Watkins and her team.