



HUMAN SERVICES & VETERANS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, July 16, 2024

12:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Human Services and Veterans Committee will hold a public hearing to receive an update from the City's Opioid Task Force and local providers regarding the opioid crisis in Cambridge and current and future interventions.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input 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 Human Service and Veterans Committee was held on Tuesday, July 16, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 12:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Siddiqui. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, 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, Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

- Vice Mayor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Wilson – Present/Remote
- Councillor Nolan – Present/Remote
- Councillor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote

Present – 5. Quorum established.

The Co-Chair, Vice Mayor McGovern offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to receive an update from the City’s Opioid Task Force and local providers regarding the opioid crisis in Cambridge and current and future interventions. Present at the meeting from the City was City Manager, Yi-An Huang, Assistant City Manager for the Department of Human Services (DHSP), Ellen Semonoff, Police Commissioner, Chistine Elow, Fire Captain, Jeremy Walsh, Homeless Services Continuum Planner, Elizabeth Mengers, and Nic Miragliudo, Strategy Manager. Dr. Assaad Sayah was present from the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA). Mary Kowalczyk and Danielle McPeak were present from the Cambridge Public Health Department. Robert Goldstein, Deirdre Calvert, and Abby Kim were present from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). Mark Eisenberg, from Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), and Chris Fischer from Mount Auburn Hospital were also present.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Co-Chair Wilson who offered opening remarks and shared she appreciates and looks forward to the conversation around the opioid crisis and recognizing the work that needs to be done regionally for the City to move in an effective and helpful direction.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized City Manager Huang and his team who gave a presentation titled “Human Services and Veterans Subcommittee, Addressing Overdoses in Cambridge”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of history and current programing, opioid abatement funds, and paths forward on Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs).

Co-Chair McGovern opened Public Comment.

Jim Stuart, 11 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA, First Church Shelter, spoke in strong support of OPCs.

Alexandra Collins, 52 Mirimichi Street, spoke in strong support of OPCs and offered suggestions on how to move forward.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Siddiqui who thanked the Vice Mayor for being a leader on this topic and all the work and advocacy he provides. Councillor Siddiqui asked what work has been done around a language justice component for those individuals in the community who are being engaged to speak about their experiences. Mary Kowalczyk responded by sharing with the Committee the demographic data is collected on people who overdose in Cambridge. They shared that that information is available, but was not included in the presentation. Danielle McPeak provided additional information regarding the demographic of people they met with and their experiences. Councillor Siddiqui asked if more information could be provided on the Harvard College Overdose Prevention Education Students (HCOPE). Danielle McPeak shared that HCOPEs goals are to receive more information on the impact of substance overdose, specifically in Harvard Square, and how they can better influencers in the community. Danielle McPeak shared that the group has done a lot of advocacies in the Harvard Square area. In addition, Danielle McPeak provided information on the PILOT with the MBTA and Narcan availability. City Manager Huang shared his excitement for the PILOT program as well and noted that the MBTA is continuing to look at Central Square as a possible location.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Cassie Hurd, Executive Director, Material Aid and Advocacy Program (MAAP), who provided comments regarding the opioid crisis and shared support for OPCs. Cassie Hurd encouraged those in leadership roles to help with advocating at the State House to help create legislation. Cassie Hurd also provided information on the data and feedback at a recent meeting and shared the importance of understanding how those using drugs are caring and responding to each other during this epidemic, noting what crucial components and acts need to be recognized to save lives. In addition to her comments, Cassie Hurd shared statements from people affected by the opioid crisis.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Sobrino-Wheeler who shared his support for moving forward. Councillor Sobrino-Wheeler asked if there was more information that could be shared relating to support and questions that may arise coming from a federal level. Deirdre Calvert responded by sharing they do not believe there is anything at the federal legislation level that is currently working with OPCs and noted the importance of state legislation passing as soon as possible. Deirdre Calvert also pointed out the positive effects occurring in neighborhoods within the feasibility study that took place in New York. Deirdre Calvert stressed that state protection is the strongest possible funding to ensure that the state is protected if municipalities were to move forward with OPC sites.

Co-Chair McGovern reopened Public Comment.

Dinah Applewhite offered strong support for OPCs and shared their experiences as a doctor working with those in the opioid crisis.

Co-Chair McGovern recognized Councillor Nolan who stressed the importance of ensuring that prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery are all services that are working together to help advocate for those who are in need. Councillor Nolan shared that making sure these goals are properly funded is an important factor for them to work together to succeed as well as using evidence-based services to make sure the city is being effective in reaching goals. Chris Fischer responded and pointed out that there has been discussion within the Opioid Task Force team on not just opioid death reduction and opioid prevention, but also treatment of substance use disorders of all types. Chris Fischer stressed that the range of treatment, both in-patient and out-patient, needs to expand and provided examples of programs that can help with assisting both. Dr. Assad Sayah provided additional comments, noting that the goal is to look at all strategies to counter the drug epidemic by providing services, intervention, education, resources, and access to treatment. Councillor Nolan shared she looks forward to continuing the conversation.

Co-Chair McGovern offered comments regarding interactions with the Cambridge Police and shared how the newly developed Community Safety Department is helping to reimagine public safety as they continue to train and be prepared to assist and provide outreach in collaboration with the Police Department and DHSP. The Vice Mayor thanked those on the Opioid Task Force for their hard work and shared how it would be significant to have those with lived experiences to possibly be a part of the team and stressed the importance of have a vision zero goal relative to the opioid crisis. Vice Mayor McGovern shared that it is important to provide education prevention and prevention mechanisms to young members of the community, not just those in universities. Mary Kowalczyk shared that fentanyl test strips are provided at Narcan distribution events and always available to those who need them and shared that school nurses are all trained in the use of Narcan. Mary Kowalczyk shared support for providing more education in the schools, but that would be more up to the school district. Deirdre Calvert shared that there is also nightlife prevention education that reaches out to members of the community at entertainment events, bars, festivals, and concerts to provide education. Deirdre Calvert and Danielle McPeak shared additional information on the impact of alcohol in the community and there have been conversations with peer recovery coaches and Pro-EMS on alcoholism. Vice Mayor McGovern asked for more information on the availability of treatment beds. Deirdre Calvert and Abby Kim responded by sharing the many challenges that are faced in a complicated situation when trying to locate available treatment centers and provided examples of how the State is trying to enhance its services.

Co-Chair McGovern offered closing remarks regarding OPCs and provided feedback and comments on how the City can move forward with bringing OPCs to Cambridge. The Vice Mayor noted the importance of having the conversation now, so when legislation does pass, Cambridge will be ready to provide services with OPCs. In addition, the Vice Mayor stressed the importance of providing education to the public on the opioid crisis and the positive effects of OPCs. Co-Chair McGovern thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting. City Manager Huang thanked the Co-Chairs for holding this meeting and taking charge of moving forward to help find solutions, as well as advocating for those with substance abuse disorders.

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

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Vice Mayor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Absent

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

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:00p.m.

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/788?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Nic Miragliuolo (he/him/his) | Strategy Manager for the City Manager's office, transmitting a presentation regarding Addressing Overdoses in Cambridge.