



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA • APRIL 21, 2020

Special Meeting

Sullivan Chamber

4:00 PM

Cambridge City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA 02139

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL TO DISCUSS COVID-19 UPDATES FROM THE CITY MANAGER AND HIS STAFF

Although there was not a City Council meeting on Monday in observance of Patriot's Day, Mayor Siddiqui called a Special City Council meeting for the following day to hear from City staff on the status of COVID-19 in Cambridge.

City Manager Louis A. DePasquale and Police Commissioner Branville Bard noted that the City's [emergency homeless shelter has opened](#), and it has had a smooth transition process so far. The homeless shelter will serve residents who rely on the Warming Center, and will be used to de-densify the Albany Street shelter. The City utilized a previous partnership with the Broad Institute and Pro EMS (a partnership created when the City [conducted COVID-19 testing in our nursing homes and assisted living facilities](#), which showed high rates of transmission in these facilities, and high rates of asymptomatic carriers), to test all residents moving to the emergency homeless shelter, which is located at the War Memorial Recreation Center. Those who tested positive for Coronavirus were quarantined before being transported to [hotel rooms for further self-isolation](#). Nancy Mahan, Senior Vice President of Services at Bay Cove Human Services, outlined how homeless residents are being tested for Coronavirus and moved to the War Memorial shelter, which she hopes to have completed today, April 22, 2020. She also explained how the City's homeless shelters are taking additional steps to safeguard the health of the residents they serve and their staff members, such as by acquiring personal protective equipment, setting up different meal times, place shower curtains or other dividers in between beds, and more. As we're seeing considerably lower rates of infection among Cambridge's homeless residents (with only 10% of homeless residents at the Albany Street shelter testing positive) compared to statistics from Boston (with [one-third of Boston homeless residents](#) testing positive) and across the country, I am so grateful for the dedication and hard work of our human services providers that has helped us protect our most vulnerable residents during these uncertain times.

Maura Pensak, the City Manager's Housing Liaison highlighted the work she, the Community Development Department, and the Multiservice Center have been doing to support tenants and affordable housing in Cambridge during this pandemic. The City's [COVID-19 Housing webpage](#) was created to share resources, answer frequently asked questions, and give contact information for residents with specific concerns, or who require individualized assistance. In addition to continuing to respond to non-COVID-19 related inquiries, they sent property owners and managers information on [the eviction moratorium](#) for distribution to tenants. A list of flexible requests, such as instituting flexible

rent due dates, allowing the use of security deposits to pay rent, waiving late fees and fees for online payment of rent, allowing for month to month extensions of leases, and more, was also sent to these landlords. Moving forward, they will begin looking at what long term impact Coronavirus will have on housing stability.

Assistant City Manager Ellen Semenoff noted that the City has raised more than \$3.5 million for the [Mayor's Disaster Relief Fund](#) due to the generosity of Cambridge residents and local businesses. Cambridge residents who have a documented loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic may be eligible to receive financial assistance through the Fund to help pay for rent, utilities, other household needs, or mortgage payments, if the home was purchased through the City's affordable homeownership programs. After launching the application on April 13th, 2020, [\\$88,308 was distributed to Cambridge residents and families in need that same week](#), and nearly \$200,000 total has currently been distributed in total. These applications are being moved through quickly thanks to the hard work of our talented City staff, who are providing support to applicants in nine different languages. [Click here to apply to receive financial assistance](#) through the Mayor's Disaster Relief Fund, or [click here to donate to the Fund](#).

Dr. Asaad Sayah, CEO of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Chief Public Health Officer Claude Jacob, and Dr. Lu Ann Bruno-Murtha, Medical Director and Chief of Infectious Diseases at the Cambridge Health Alliance, provided an update on public health in Cambridge. An overview of Coronavirus cases among Cambridge residents, [currently standing at 608 positive cases and 28 deaths](#), was given. Two-thirds of these cases are from general community members, while the last one-third comes from our nursing homes and assisted living facilities population. One-fourth of our positive cases come from residents who are eighty years old or more, demonstrating just how necessary it is for our senior population to take extra precautions during this pandemic. Although these numbers may seem staggering, our medical professionals are reporting '[glimmers of hope](#)' in what they are seeing in our hospitals, as their efforts to keep patients out of intensive care have often been successful, and more patients are being discharged. In some cases, the Cambridge Health Alliance has been providing oxygen to residents in need at home so they can recover at home. Additionally, Cambridge is one of twenty Massachusetts municipalities participating in a statewide [Community Tracing Collaborative](#) that will allow us to more effectively trace transmission of Coronavirus, helping us flatten the curve of infection. They also shared how our hospitals have been getting creative to combat shortages of personal protective equipment, by, for example, having staff wear recyclable protective suits that can be sanitized in between patients, drastically reducing the number of gowns used. The City Council was reassured that we have an ample number of ventilators, and that our hospitals will continue to provide state-of-the-art care to our residents. In addition, changes to [the City's case reporting](#) were announced. In addition to creating a map documenting COVID-19 cases by zip codes, the racial and ethnic data I requested is expected to be added sometime this week. Although the racial or ethnic background of *every* Cambridge resident with COVID-19 cannot be documented, as roughly one-fifth of residents who tested positive have incomplete patient profiles, I am hopeful that the data we do have will allow us to investigate any potential health disparities in our community, and ensure our Coronavirus response is equitable and works for everyone. Moving forward, the Public Health Department is working on issuing COVID-19 guidance for those observing Ramadan, and on creating mental health resources and programming.

City Manager DePasquale also provided several other key updates during our discussion. A Senior Outreach Team of 13 City staff members has been created to call residents over the age of 70 to check in on their health and ensure our seniors have the resources they need to stay safe. In addition, [through](#)

[the City's partnership with 18 local restaurants](#), roughly 7,800 meals have been provided to homeless residents in need, nearly 2,000 each week, and that this effort has infused around \$62,000 back into our local business community. During these challenging times for our small, local businesses, it is heartening to see that our City staff continue to develop creative and proactive ways to support our local economy, and ensure we return from this public health crisis with a recognizable Main Street. The City Manager also announced that the City [will circulate trucks around the City](#) broadcasting information on [the Stay at Home Advisory](#), [the importance of wearing masks or other face coverings](#) when outside of the home, and physical distancing. Lastly, the City Manager noted that the Inspectional Services Department is continuing to do their crucial work of ensuring physical distancing is being maintained at our essential businesses, and educating them on how to properly sanitize their stores. For smaller essential businesses, the City has distributed 2,000 masks so far for the use of employees in the stores. As someone who has been [advocating for the use of masks in our essential businesses](#) to protect our frontline employees, I am grateful for the steps the City has taken to ensure these crucial, essential workers have the resources they need to stay healthy and safe during this public health emergency.

[Click here to stay informed](#) on the status of COVID-19 in Cambridge.