



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA • MAY 28, 2020

Special Meeting

Sullivan Chamber

2:00 PM

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

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING TO RECEIVE UPDATES FROM THE CITY MANAGER REGARDING COVID-19

Although we did not hold our usual Monday City Council meeting this week in observance of Memorial Day earlier this week, Mayor Siddiqui called a special meeting so we could hear a COVID-19 update from City staff.

Reopening Update: As we continue to slowly reopen, the City has created [a dedicated webpage](#) with all the information you need to know on Cambridge's reopening. For any residents or local businesses with reopening questions, the City has also published an industry-specific contact list for inquiries, which can be found [here](#). City staff have been in contact with local businesses and the faith community on how they can begin to safely resume activities.

Farmers Market Update: The Community Development Department has released guidelines to help us ensure we can safely shop at farmers markets this season. [Click here](#) to read the guidelines. Currently, the Central Square Farmers Market is open every Monday from 12-6 pm, and the Charles River Farmers Market is open every Friday from 12-6 pm. Farmers markets are a great opportunity to shop local and support our farmers, and more farmers markets will begin opening throughout the City in June.

Police Update: Our Police Department is continuing to distribute face masks for residents' and small businesses' use, and because voluntary compliance with the City's [emergency order on face coverings](#) has been high, no fines or warnings have been issued to date. This past week, police intervention was required at [the temporary homeless shelter](#) located at the War Memorial Recreation Center for three incidents, but operations have been running smoothly there overall. 81 individuals are currently eligible to stay at the War Memorial Shelter, which has accommodated as many as 65 homeless residents a night. As the quarantine area, which typically housed residents awaiting COVID-19 test results, has seen little use, and as the State is stepping in to house these individuals as well, it is closing at the end of the month. The Field House, which houses residents who have tested negative, will continue operations. As there has been an increased number of incidents in the City's squares, there will be a higher police presence in those areas to dissuade crime and foster community trust.

Transportation Update: This past Sunday, [Memorial Drive and Fresh Pond Park closed to vehicular traffic](#) and opened for pedestrians and cyclists as part of a pilot program. The first day of the pilot was an amazing success, with everyone wearing masks and distancing, and no overcrowding. The pilot will

continue this Sunday, May 31st, and with the enormous success this has been so far, I am hopeful that the City will continue and expand the pilot to eventually close Memorial Drive every day. The extra space is critical for ensuring pedestrians and cyclists are able to safely physically distance when they're outside, and this is especially critical since Cambridge has notoriously narrow sidewalks.

After weeks of urging from myself and other members of the City Council, [a shared street pilot](#) was also announced. The pilot would create shared streets (open to pedestrians, cyclists, and local, essential traffic) on three key connector streets to begin creating a network of shared streets.

What's Coming Soon?

Shared Street pilot on three key connector streets to begin building a network:



Garden Street, Field Street, and Bay State Road corridor from Concord Avenue to New Street, connections to Cambridge Common, Harvard Square, Harvard Yard, Danehy Park, Fresh Pond, Alewife, Trader Joe's, Whole Foods

Harvard Street from Quincy Street to Portland Street, connections to Kendall Square, Harvard Square, Harvard Yard, Sennott Park, nearby City buildings, Washington Elms/Newtowne Court, 119 Windsor Street, Whole Foods

Magazine Street from Green Street to Memorial Drive, connections to Central Square, Magazine Beach, BU Bridge, Morse School fields, Trader Joe's

All of these streets were previously identified in the Cambridge Bicycle Plan as streets that should be prioritized as low-volume/low-speed routes.

As the image above shows, these three key streets have high connectivity levels, which would help residents safely travel to major destinations in Cambridge. Although the streets are not entirely connected, they're adjacent to other large areas like Harvard Yard and Cambridge Common, which would provide safe access to other parts of the network. The Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department has also been working closely with Somerville and Boston on this pilot, to ensure high connectivity of shared streets across municipal lines. Signage and markers will be placed on these streets informing residents about the pilot, and an educational campaign will be launched to promote community awareness and gather valuable feedback. This pilot is expected to begin in mid-June, and could expand to other streets if it is successful.

Next steps include the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department looking at expanding sidewalks into the street to give pedestrians more room in high-traffic areas, and extending businesses' space into the street to accommodate outdoor dining, entrance queues, additional pick-up areas, and more. The City will also be working with the MBTA to ensure efficient and reliable public transportation service. I

am incredibly excited that the City finally has a plan for shared streets. Whether it be for exercise, a commute to work, or running errands, ensuring all residents have the space they need to safely practice physically distance has to be a priority, especially in a dense urban environment like Cambridge. I am pleased that the City finally has a phase I plan for shared streets, and look forward to moving quickly into phase II with more street closures and the next steps discussed above. [Click here](#) to learn more about the shared streets pilot.

Construction Update: Earlier this month, the City Manager appointed a [Construction Advisory Group](#) to develop a safe reopening strategy. Earlier this week, the City released an [amended temporary emergency construction order](#), explaining how and when construction would resume in phases. Currently in Phase 1, developers are able to submit COVID-19 safety plans for the Department of Public Works and the Inspectional Service Department to review. Horizontal construction, city building projects, 100% affordable housing projects, larger buildings with existing permits could be able to resume construction as early as June 1, with other projects following in later phases. While no new building permits are being issued at this time, restaurants wanting to make COVID-19 related modifications are able to apply for permits. The City is committed to working with the construction sector as it begins to reopen, providing feedback on safety plans, and holding well-attended informational calls with industry members. The Construction Advisory Group will continue to meet weekly, and the temporary emergency construction order could be amended later.

Small Business Update: The City and [the Small Business Advisory Committee](#) are continuing to work and develop ways we can support our local small business community during their time of need. The License Commission has delayed 2nd half liquor licenses until September 30th, which will help roughly half of license holders, or around 135 businesses, saving them between \$900 and \$3,000, and the City is looking for other fees it can waive for small businesses. To ensure businesses are receiving important industry-specific reopening information, the City has been conducting education efforts with local businesses.

The Inspectional Services Department has sent food safety guidelines to restaurants and is helping them with any potential issues that arise. We also heard that, while the City Solicitor does not feel the City has the authority to enforce a commission fee cap on third-party food delivery services (which we asked the City Manager to do in [a policy order](#) last month), the City has teamed up with Newton and Boston to work on this and urge the Massachusetts Attorney General to institute such a cap. In the meantime, the Small Business Advisory Committee has created a “Pick It Up” marketing campaign, encouraging residents to place take-out orders directly with restaurants and to pick their order up when able, cutting out the middleman. Doing so could save a restaurant as much as 25% per order, which is critical in a time when so many small businesses are struggling, especially since restaurants operate on infamously low profit margins. The Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department has also been working with restaurants to install pick-up zones for restaurants with takeout service, and may expand this to include retail businesses in the future. To date, the City’s [partnership with local restaurants to provide meals to homeless shelters](#) has infused \$150,000 into the local business community, and this incredible program [will continue](#) throughout the rest of the fiscal year.

Public Health Update: Cambridge’s [COVID-19 case count](#) is up to 975 positive cases, and 90 devastating fatalities, $\frac{3}{4}$ of which coming from nursing homes or long-term care facilities. More than 100 residents have been hospitalized for COVID-19 during this pandemic, with 22 individuals currently being hospitalized. Overall, 22%, or 200 individuals, of those who tested positive have completely

recovered so far, and the Public Health Department is continuing to use neighborhood maps to monitor potential hotspots, and direct resources where they're needed most.

Thanks to the City's strong partnership with the Broad Institute and ProEMS, the City was able to create [a mobile testing site](#) in the Port neighborhood, which will wrap up later this week, and all residents in the Cambridge Housing Authority's (CHA) elderly buildings were offered testing as well. Members of the Fire Department were instrumental in getting CHA residents tested, and 70% of residents took part in the voluntary testing. These testing sites complement the Cambridge Health Alliance [COVID-19 testing site in East Cambridge](#), where any Cambridge resident over the age of eight can be tested for free regardless of immigration, insurance, or symptomatic status. The Public Health Department is following up with residents who get tested, and offer guidance to those who test positive.

In the future, the Public Health Department will continue to look at staffing and supplies, and will continue its work on contact tracing with [the Community Tracing Collaborative](#).