



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA • JULY 15, 2020

Special Meeting

Sullivan Chamber

2:00 PM

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

THE CITY COUNCIL WILL MEET IN A SPECIAL SESSION TO RECEIVE A COVID-19 UPDATE FROM THE MANAGER AND HIS STAFF.

Small Business/Non-Profits Update: The City has distributed [\\$3.6 million in grants and loans into the small business community](#) as one of our key efforts to support our struggling local business community. As the Chair of the Economic Development and University Relations Committee, and as someone who spearheaded this effort with Mayor Siddiqui, I understand just how high this need is, and how critical this relief is. **More than 440 grants and loans have been awarded through this Small Business Recovery Program, 65% of which to women, minority, or women and minority owned businesses.** This is, however, just one part of all the recovery efforts needed to ensure we return from this public health crisis with a recognizable Main Street, and that community loss is mitigated. Currently, the City is conducting a small business survey to gather further insight as we plan for the future, and I look forward to continuing to be an advocate for our local small businesses.

Meanwhile, our local nonprofits are in an especially difficult situation, experiencing decreased revenue and funding streams, while need for their services only grows. To support these critical organizations that give so much to our community, Mayor Siddiqui and I worked to establish [COVID-19 Emergency and Recovery Grants](#) for Cambridge nonprofits. By supporting their work, we're ensuring they can continue reimagining their models and delivering their services to vulnerable residents. The applications closed last week, and City staff is currently reviewing the 130 applications received before the Community Benefits Advisory Committee does a more in-depth assessment at their July 20th meeting.

Reopening Update: The City is continuing to reopen municipal buildings. Certain City staff now report to their offices five days a week, and appointments for in-person services can now be made four days a week. Additionally, the City announced that [the temporary emergency order prohibiting the use of reusable bags](#) at retail stores remains in effect. This is one issue that will be discussed as part of this week's Cambridge COVID Expert Advisory Panel, and I hope Cambridge can join every other municipality in Massachusetts in removing this order, and we can again use reusable bags at stores.

Human Service Programs Update: Over the course of this pandemic, the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) has been adapting existing services and creating new programs to meet the high need in our community. Since DHSP took over the school meal distribution sites on June 22nd to run the summer food program at eight sites, they have served roughly 1,000 meals each day. They've also been conducting summer food markets in public housing buildings where need is high. Food insecurity is an issue very close

to my heart, and having partnered with Food For Free to help plan and run the school meal distribution sites, I have seen firsthand just how needed these efforts are.

The Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program is underway, with more than 750 young residents employed in mostly virtual programs at over 60 sites. While these would typically be physical work sites, the program has been modified to suit COVID-19 needs, with liaisons working with participants and their employers to ensure materials are received, and that the experience is rewarding for everyone involved. Not every applicant could be accommodated, so DHSP prioritized low-income applicants. Some of these low-income applicants were identified through their enrollment in the free and reduced lunch programs, while others were identified by DHSP through other indicators. I am incredibly grateful for the work DHSP has done with getting creative about identifying low-income students who don't receive free or reduced lunch, but I hope we can be more proactive in signing up qualifying students. Just last month, students who receive free and reduced priced lunch received a crucial pandemic EBT credit that a lot of eligible students didn't get to access, so this is something we need to encourage on a wider scale.

Next Monday, July 20th, [DHSP's free Summer Online/Offline Programming](#) will begin serving young residents in kindergarten through eighth grade. In groups of 10-12, these kids will be engaging in STEAM activities, reading, theater programs, and more virtually. They'll also be meeting three times a week in-person for outdoor activities like scavenger hunts and obstacle courses, while adhering to public health guidelines.

Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Update: In the nearly three weeks since the [Shared Streets Pilot](#) began, 1,000 comments have been received from the [online feedback form](#). From the various reviews, the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) is incorporating community feedback and working to tweak the Shared Streets Pilot to better serve our needs by, for example, putting up additional signs noting the 10 mph speed limit. An informational postcard has been sent to every Cambridge household, and there will be flyer in the Port as well. The June 25th [Shared Streets Webinar](#), which drew over 100 participants, is available online, and another community webinar is scheduled for August 8th. Moving forward, TPT will be examining all the feedback received next week and look at next steps. East Cambridge has been especially vocal about wanting this pilot to be implemented in their neighborhood, so I'm hopeful we can continue expanding to create a connected network of safe streets throughout Cambridge and the broader region.

To support small businesses, TPT has [increased the amount of outdoor dining space](#) available for local restaurants in Harvard, Inman, and Central Squares by reallocating sidewalk and parking space. This effort has been well-received by our local businesses and residents alike, and [more than 50 restaurants have applied](#) to use public space for outdoor use. As the City continues to tweak our programs, the City should consider supplying [jersey barriers](#) to restaurants expanding their outdoor dining space. Although businesses aren't currently required to use them in an effort to keep costs low, especially since restaurants have notoriously low profit margins, these barriers are instrumental in safeguarding diners, cyclists, and drivers alike as we expand into roadways.

[Retail businesses can also apply](#) to have the parking spaces in front of their locations into 15 minute pick-up zones. There are currently 20 pick-up zones throughout the City, which free up space for anyone supporting their favorite local business by shopping small and picking up an online order. Moving forward, TPT will be working with the MBTA and the Community Development Department to support transit efforts as more employees return to work throughout Cambridge, and with the community to continue reimagining our roadways.

War Memorial Update: At [the War Memorial Emergency Shelter](#), around 60 homeless residents are served each night. Since its opening, 9,000 meals have been served, with day programming and health services offered by [Bay Cove Human Services](#) and [Healthcare for the Homeless](#), respectively. Given that the War Memorial Recreation Center is a part of the CRLS campus, the City Manager and his team are looking into alternative sites for the fall, and an update will be provided to the City Council in the coming weeks.

Testing Update: The Cambridge Health Alliance decommissioned their COVID-19 testing tent in East Cambridge last month as interest was declining, and the City instead switched to [a mobile testing model](#). Since their implementation demand for testing has spiked, so the City has added additional testing appointments ([which can be booked here](#)) at the Pisani Center on Saturdays July 18th, July 25th, and August 1st from 11am-7pm. After hearing from so many residents unable to get an appointment, I appreciate the additional testing slots, and hope the City can continue to invest in testing efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of our residents.

COVID-19 testing turnaround time has also decreased, going from a 5-7 day turnaround at its highest, to a current rate of 36-48 hours. Overall, 21,000 COVID-19 tests have been administered in Cambridge, with a total positivity rate of under 1%. Comparatively, Boston stands at 2%, while Chelsea has a 7% positivity rate. Of the 648 tests that have been administered so far at the mobile testing sites, there has not been a single positive result, showcasing the dedicated work the Public Health Department and other City offices have done to keep residents safe.

Public Health Update: The current [Cambridge COVID-19 case count](#) stands at 1,125 cases, with $\frac{3}{4}$ of cases recovered, and seven individuals currently hospitalized. At 97 deaths, the fatality rate serves to remind of us the enormous community loss we've experienced over the past few months. Due to our stringent public health guidelines and vigilance, we thankfully haven't had a COVID-19 related death in four weeks. The Public Health Department is continuing to work with the State's [Community Tracing Collaborative](#) to further mitigate spread. Moving forward, the Public Health Department will continue with its broad education, communication, and outreach efforts, especially through a planned Cambridge Community Corp of trained volunteers, while also providing [ongoing summer heat guidance](#) and school reopening support.