



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA • SEPTEMBER 29, 2020

Special Meeting

Sullivan Chamber

12:00 PM

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

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

Human Service Programs Update: Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) preschools have been operating since August at a reduced 60% capacity. Many families have chosen to defer their slots until January. Community preschools have all reopened as well, and their staff are meeting regularly with City experts. The City has awarded nearly 40 preschool scholarships this year; it had originally hoped to offer 70, but capacity limitations and some families' apprehension have resulted in lower numbers. The Head Start program is offering virtual programming that helps support preschoolers learning from home. The Center for Families is also providing programming for children and parents alike.

The Fall on the Field program kicked off on September 21st to offer outdoor programming to scholars in grades JK-8th from 3-6pm each weekday on five public fields. Around 350 kids engage in athletic, artistic, or general enrichment activities each day as a part of this program. DHSP is also planning for other programming, including a distance learning mentorship program, and a limited Mayor's Youth Fall Employment Program to offer 150 low-income high school students jobs at community partner sites. Community partners offer critical services to our young residents at all ages, so I hope the City can continue supporting them with public health guidance and funding.

The Community Learning Center for adult learners is up and running, and the Council on Aging is offering classes and assistance for the upcoming open enrollment for Medicare. The Multiservice Center continues to offer housing stabilization support, and the Office of Workforce Development is operating Cambridge Works with in-person programming. Learn more about all of DHSP's fall offerings [here](#).

Homeless Shelter Update: In August, the City announced that the temporary emergency homeless shelter located at the War Memorial Recreation Center on CRLS campus [would be moving to Spaulding Hospital's vacant east wing](#). This shelter serves 50-60 homeless residents each night, and is expected to transition to the Spaulding site in mid to late November. Next week, the City will also open temporary mobile showers for homeless residents at the 41 Church Street parking lot, filling in a crucial gap for our most vulnerable residents.

Housing Support Update: The City recently announced it would be [extending the Housing Stabilization Program](#) to offer Cambridge families in need four months of financial assistance, increased from the original two months of support.

Small Business Update: Although Governor Baker recently loosened restaurant seating guidelines, the City issued a [temporary emergency order on restaurant operations](#) to require a more conservative approach, effective October 3rd. Seating at Cambridge restaurants is still limited to six people, not ten, and bar seating can only be offered after the site is inspected by the City's Inspectional Service Department. The [City's partnership with local restaurants](#) to provide homeless shelters with meals has been extended through the end of the year. This critical program helping fight food insecurity and uplift struggling small businesses has provided over 70,000 meals since March, 2,800 weekly, and has infused \$500,000 into our local restaurant community.

Nearly two weeks ago, the City announced it would be [extending the outdoor dining season](#) until sixty days past the end of Massachusetts' state of emergency. The License Commission approved 103 permits to expand outdoor dining space this year, so it's clear that outdoor dining has become a lifeline for countless restaurants. The [policy order](#) I filed last week with Mayor Siddiqui, Councillor Simmons, and Councillor Nolan asking the City to step up and provide restaurants with support with outdoor heat lamps, a free, expedited heat lamp permitting process, and clear public health guidelines, passed unanimously. We're already seeing interest in outdoor heat lamps increase, so this is a critical way we can support our small businesses as we adapt to the upcoming colder months.

The License Commission voted at their meeting last night to reduce license renewal fees by 40% for Fiscal Year 2021. Fees for private and public patios have also been reduced to \$25 and \$75 respectively, down from \$250 and \$750. To promote flexibility, alcohol license holders also now have the option of paying renewal fees in full, or putting 15% down and paying the rest at a designated future time.

Shared Streets Pilot Update: The Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department shared the sad news that they won't expand [the Shared Streets Pilot](#) as they previously intended. Instead, they plan on maintaining the current network as long as weather allows. Shared streets give residents the space they need to responsibly practice physical distancing, and this expansion was expected to extend the network of streets to areas left out under the current plan, like East Cambridge. As someone who has been a long-time advocate of safe, healthy streets and who has seen firsthand the beneficial impacts just this pilot has had in just a short amount of time, I'll continue advocating for the City to reimagine our roadways and public spaces to fit our new normal.

Schools Reopening Update: Ahead of the return to in-person learning for certain students on October 13th, testing will be offered to all in-person staff members during the week of October 5th, and twice weekly after that as part of the [Staff COVID-19 Testing Program](#). Testing will also be offered to staff and students as needed if they develop symptoms during the school day. These staff members have only been offered testing once before, in August, and as some educators continue to physically work at schools even as students remain remote, the City should have offered testing to them in this interim time. Moreso, there aren't any current plans to offer testing to students returning for in-person learning. While some evidence suggests young children may be less susceptible to COVID, educators and scholars' families alike deserve the peace of mind that comes with knowing their child regularly tests negative. Implementing a student testing program would also help us prepare for the eventual return of older students, who, evidence suggests, carry and transmit COVID at similar rates as adults. This is an opportunity to think creatively and consider pool testing, self-administered testing kits, and other non-traditional testing methods, so I'm disappointed to see CPSD won't be offering this testing to scholars, despite the support of the City Council, the School Committee, and countless CPSD families.

Of the three metrics CPSD is using to determine if it's safe to reopen, one measurement used is wastewater monitoring. However, data is collected from Deer Island, which serves numerous municipalities in the area. Cambridge should follow in Somerville's footsteps and develop a City-specific wastewater testing program, rather than the aggregate model being used currently.

Halloween Update: The City Manager and his team will be meeting next week to develop guidance on safely celebrating Halloween this year, pending guidance from the Commonwealth.

Testing Update: To date, over 112,000 COVID tests have been administered in Cambridge, [more than 11,000](#) of which from the City's free [mobile testing program](#). Over 50,000 residents have been tested at least once, but the Public Health Department is facing challenges with securing 'permanent' testing locations. Testing appointment slots have also been released at irregular times, sometimes a month in advance, and sometimes just days in advance. When testing slots for a month are all released at once, a lot of appointments booked far in advance end up being no-shows, so keeping it to a shorter time basis will help ensure slots are going to people who need it most. In my own experiences at the City's mobile testing sites, I've seen a lot of residents get tested without an appointment. The City hasn't advertised that its testing sites have walk-up capabilities, which presents a huge equity issue; only those who are well-connected know about this critical resource that provides some much-needed flexibility and urgent intervention, so I hope the City will be better about publicizing walk-up testing in the future.

Mask Update: Last week, the City issued [amendments to the temporary emergency order](#) requiring the use of face coverings. These amendments, which require a mask be worn at all times when outside or in public, will go into effect on Friday, October 2nd. Previously, residents were allowed to remove face coverings outside if physical distancing could be maintained. To expand access to masks, the [City recently donated \\$24,000](#) to the Cambridge Mask Alliance.

Flu Season Update: We're rapidly approaching flu season, and it's important, now more than ever, that you get vaccinated. The Public Health Department is working to develop vaccination programs for first responders, senior housing residents, and homeless shelter guests. Community flu clinics will also be offering vaccinations with outdoor, indoor, and drive-thru appointments. Dates and locations (including [Starlight Square](#)) will be announced later this week. [Visit this webpage](#) to stay updated as more information comes out.

Public Health Update: [Cambridge's case count](#) currently stands at 1,394 cases, nearly 1,000 of which have recovered. Just last week, we unfortunately hit a milestone of 100 [deaths from COVID](#), another devastating loss to our community that demonstrates we must remain vigilant. Our data also shows that COVID is having a disproportionately high impact on residents of color and certain neighborhoods. Moving forward, the Public Health Department is examining workplace driven transmission and clusters of youth cases.

Since March, the City has relied on our COVID-19 Expert Advisory Panel to inform policy decisions. Their expertise and insight has helped make Cambridge a safer place over the past several months. As they hold so much sway over City decisions, other Councillors and I advocated for their meeting agenda and minutes to be shared publicly to promote transparency and accountability. After months of asking for this, these materials are now available online [here](#).

Since their launch in July, [the Cambridge Community Corps](#) has served as an educational resource in City parks, tot lots, and public spaces. They've documented over 600 interactions, where they've

encouraged public health best practices and distributed PPE in Cambridge's hardest hit areas. Corps members will also be assisting with our upcoming flu vaccination campaign.