



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

FINANCE COMMITTEE DISCUSSION  
CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL  
APRIL 25, 2017



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# Context and Purpose

# Community Benefits Background Context

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- Between 2010-2013, mitigation funds for community benefits were pledged to the City through zoning amendments and agreements with developers
  - Approximately \$3.7 million currently in hand
  
- City Council interested in using these funds to partner with the nonprofit community in order to:
  - Expand services for Cambridge residents
  - Better meet residents' unmet needs

# Community Benefits

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- The City in consultation with the Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition developed an ordinance and a governance framework
  - The Community Benefits Ordinance was ordained in December 2015
  - The fund for distributing funds earmarked for Community Benefits was set up in fall 2015

# Community Benefits

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- Recommended approach & governance structure:
  - Establish a fund from which funds will be appropriated to support Community Benefit expenditures
  - Conduct a needs assessment to enable the City Council to set broad funding goals
  - Support the creation of a committee appointed by the City Manager to oversee the development of a funding plan based on the broad goals set by the City Council

# Needs Assessment Purpose

- The City's first step in developing a Community Benefits allocation plan was to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to provide an in-depth understanding of Cambridge's most pressing needs and service gaps.
- The City worked with the Cambridge Community Foundation and the Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition on this effort.
- Needs Assessment Advisory Committee created to help refine research plan strategy

# Needs Assessment Purpose

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- Help the City Council to make informed decisions about future funding priorities
- Inform the development of recommendations for the investment of mitigation funds tied to the City Council's funding priorities
- Model a replicable framework and approach
- Inform other planning efforts undertaken by the City, Cambridge Community Foundation, and others

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# Needs Assessment Process

# Cambridge Community Needs Framework



# RESEARCH APPROACH

## Phase 1: Comprehensive scan of available data

- Develop research framework
- Identify and gather all relevant data
- Interview key stakeholders
- Synthesize existing data

## Phase 2: Identify data gaps and conduct qualitative research

- Identify data gaps
- Refine qualitative methodology
- Conduct focus groups with residents
- Facilitate Needs Assessment Forum of service providers
- Synthesize qualitative data

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# Prioritizing Need

## Needs Prioritization Framework

### **Breadth** – How many are impacted?

1. Majority of population impacted
2. At risk subpopulation and/or neighborhoods impacted
3. Fewer subpopulations and/or neighborhoods impacted

### **Impact on Subpopulation**– Are there subpopulations for whom this is a significant challenge?

1. Subpopulations are impacted in a significant way by this need
2. Subpopulations are impacted to a more moderate degree
3. Few or no subpopulations impacted and/or the impact is minor

### **Urgency** – Is this issue becoming more pressing?

1. Worsening trends
2. Steady state or mixed trends
3. Improving trends

### **Top Tier Needs**

- Affordable Housing and Homelessness
- Financial Security
- Mental Health: Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse

### **Middle Tier Needs**

- Food
- Civic Engagement and Social Capital
- Education
- Employment

### **Lower Tier Needs**

- Safety
- Transportation
- Arts, Culture, and Recreation
- Health
- Built and Natural Environment

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# Key Findings

# Top Tier Needs

- Affordable Housing and Homelessness
- Financial Security
- Mental Health: Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse

# Affordable Housing and Homelessness

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- Many believe housing affordability is the most pressing issue facing Cambridge, impacting a significant number of low, moderate and middle income residents.
- Substantial demand for public housing and other affordable housing. High demand coupled with limited supply has created significant barriers for many low and moderate income households to access affordable housing.
- Low-income households face disincentives to earn above the eligibility line and move up to the middle-income group.

# Affordable Housing and Homelessness

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- ❑ Middle-income households in Cambridge unable to pay for market rate housing without compromising ability to address other basic needs.
- ❑ Vulnerable subpopulations include Black or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, seniors and the homeless.
- ❑ Many adult homeless individuals have a substance use disorder and/or suffer from a serious mental illness.
- ❑ Some concern about an increasingly visible homeless presence in Harvard and Central Squares.
- ❑ Perceptions of a continuous and steep increase in rents that is believed to be rising relatively more than income.

# Financial Security

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- Many Cambridge residents live in poverty within an overall environment of affluence.
- Poverty disproportionately affects children, particularly those living in a single-parent female headed household.
- Black/African American and Hispanic/ Latino individuals experience poverty at nearly double the rate of the overall population. Individuals born outside the United States more likely to be poor.
- The poverty line is an overly conservative way to define financial security. TDC heard that moderate- and middle-income people feel squeezed by the city's high cost of living.
- The number of middle income people in the city has grown smaller over time. TDC heard that some moderate income people are leaving the city.

# Mental Health: Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse

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- The Cambridge Public Health Department identified “Mental/Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse” as the number one health priority in a recent community health assessment; this was echoed in this needs assessment.
- Significant need for more affordable and accessible mental health services in the city; particular need for preventative or early intervention services for children, adults and families.
- Increasing concern about growing substance abuse in Cambridge, specifically with opioids

# Middle Tier Needs

- Food
- Civic Engagement and Social Capital
- Education
- Employment

# Food

- Food insecurity is a challenge for some low-income residents, particularly families headed by single adults, and families headed by a Black or Hispanic adult.
- Low-income residents face challenges in accessing food. Food pantries and grocery stores accepting SNAP benefits are not convenient to neighborhoods experiencing the highest levels of poverty.
- The rising rate of poverty and the increased cost of living in the city suggest that food insecurity will remain an urgent challenge for certain vulnerable subpopulations.

# Civic Engagement and Social Capital

- The City is seen as being supportive of civic engagement and building social capital.
- TDC heard that displacement and gentrification threaten to subvert those positive qualities for all residents.
- Some residents and providers felt that longstanding community bonds were fracturing under the weight of population churn driven by the increasing cost of living.
- Some populations face particular barriers to civic engagement and building social capital, including immigrants, seniors, people of color and low-income residents.

# Education

- While Cambridge residents overall express significant concern about education, Cambridge public school students score higher in basic performance metrics than the state as a whole.
- Significant disparities between students based on race, income and specific need-based groups such as English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities.
- Differential access to educational opportunities outside of the school system, including early childhood programs and out of school time programming, exacerbates the achievement gap.
- Over time, the city's overall dropout and graduation rates are showing improvement.

# Employment

- Cambridge's rate of unemployment is lower than the county and the state.
- Employment is not a guarantee of adequate income – Cambridge has a higher percent of underemployed workers than the county and state.
- Some Cambridge residents' skills appear mismatched to those needed by Cambridge's employers.
- Race, disability, and educational attainment appear to be factors that are correlated with unemployment; immigrants and older workers also face barriers in the workplace.

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# Next Steps

# Guiding Principles for Community Benefits Funding

## Frame Needs Thoughtfully

1. \*Fund programs or services that directly benefit Cambridge residents.
2. \*Emphasize funding priorities established by the City Council informed by the outcomes of the needs assessment.
3. Prioritize support for vulnerable and underserved populations.
4. \*Consider neighborhood(s) impacted by development projects.

## Build on Existing Assets and Programs

5. \*Consider other public resources allocated to a neighborhood in order to better understand unmet needs.
6. Promote awareness of and connection to existing programs and services.
7. Prioritize approaches that leverage other private and public resources.
8. Encourage an asset-based approach that recognizes and builds on the resilience of Cambridge residents and communities.

## Promote Holistic Approaches, Innovation and Collaboration

9. Recognize the inter-connectedness among community needs.
10. Emphasize holistic and creative ideas that promote prevention and coordination across systems and organizations.
11. Remain open to bold and innovative approaches to challenging issues.
12. Recognize that addressing community challenges takes time and provide the latitude for longer term interventions.
13. \*Prioritize funding for nonprofit applicants that promote collaboration, partnership and collective impact.
14. Encourage and incorporate program evaluation to identify which strategies work best.

## Simplify the Application Process

15. \*Establish a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative process.
16. \*Provide support and technical assistance to nonprofits in the application process to ensure equal opportunity and access.
17. \*Provide opportunities for renewable grants to returning nonprofit providers that have an excellent performance evaluation record and programmatic success.

# Community Benefits Advisory Committee

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- The role of the Community Benefits Advisory Committee is to solicit and evaluate applications from local nonprofit providers for services consistent with City Council funding priorities.
- The Committee will be responsible for establishing rules, regulations and guidelines to provide for the proper administration and implementation of community benefit funding.
- Anticipated start date late spring/early summer

# Community Benefits Advisory Committee Membership

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- 3 representatives of the local nonprofit community
- 4 Cambridge residents
- 3 City staff appointed by the City Manager
- 1 Cambridge Community Foundation representative
- 1 business/property developer representative
- 1 University representative

TOTAL: 13 members

# Appendices

Lower Tier Needs

Needs Assessment Advisory Committee

## Lower Tier Needs

- Safety
- Transportation
- Arts, Culture, and Recreation
- Health
- Built and Natural Environment

# Safety

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- Overall, crime in Cambridge is down.
- Cambridge experiences less crime than average when compared to cities with similar sized populations in the state.
- Some residents who participated in the focus groups were highly concerned about safety and violence.
- More vulnerable subpopulations include women, youth, people of color, immigrants, and the homeless.

# Transportation

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- Cambridge's transportation infrastructure generally works well.
- Seniors, the disabled, and youth face challenges.
- Increase in the percentage of people using bicycles and public transit as a means of traveling and commuting seems likely to continue.
- Many are concerned about safe interactions between bicycles and cars.

# Arts, Culture and Recreation

- City has a wealth of arts organizations and a wide range of recreation opportunities.
- Arts, culture and recreational opportunities can be particularly beneficial for certain subpopulations, including youth, seniors, and diverse populations. More could be done to make these accessible to these subpopulations.
- Artists and arts and recreation organizations are getting priced out by high real estate prices.

# Health

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- Cambridge is a relatively healthy city compared to the state.
- Low and middle income households as well as particular racial groups that face inequity are most at risk to experience adverse health outcomes and most challenged to address them.

# Built and Natural Environment

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- Cambridge's built and natural environment are valued assets in the community and do not currently represent significant needs for residents.
- Climate change will become a more pressing concern over time and will have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable subpopulations, including low income residents, seniors, the disabled and those who don't speak English.

# Needs Assessment Advisory Committee

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- **Chris Cotter**, Director of Housing Division, Community Development Department
- **Michael Delia**, Executive Director, East End House/ Nonprofit Coalition representative
- **Christine Elow**, Deputy Superintendent at Cambridge Police Department
- **Michelle Farnum**, Assistant Director of Children, Youth, and Family Services, Dept. of Human Service Programs
- **Kathryn Fenneman**, Executive Director, Tutoring Plus/ Nonprofit Coalition Representative
- **John Lindamood**, Director of Resident Services, Cambridge Housing Authority
- **Risa Mednick**, Executive Director, Transition House/ Nonprofit Coalition Representative
- **Mary Power**, Board Member, Cambridge Community Foundation
- **Geeta Pradhan**, President, Cambridge Community Foundation
- **Susanne Rasmussen**, Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning, Community Development Dept.
- **Susan Richards**, Cambridge Agenda for Children Out of School Time Coordinator, Dept. of Human Service Programs
- **José Wendel**, School Nutrition Coordinator at Cambridge Public Health Department

With support from:

- **Cliff Cook**, Planning Information Manager, Community Development Department
- **Elena Sokolow-Kaufman**, Coordinator, Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition
- **Ellen Kokinda**, Needs Assessment Project Manager, Community Development Department
- **Hedda Rublin**, TDC