



Meeting Minutes

Monthly Commission Hybrid Meeting Tuesday, October 22, 2024, at 6:00 P.M.

Present: Chair Abhishek Raman, Commissioners Karin Lin, Felipe Lobo Koerich, Shubhan Nagendra, Vannessa Sarmiento, Karim Razzaz, Ana Mejia, Vanessa Ruget, and Debbie Klein

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Director of Operations Sarah Binney, Immigrant Services Liaison Tagesech Wabeto, Project Coordinator at the Office of the Housing Liaison Phoebe West

Members of the Public: Catiana Jean-Pierre, Sue Reinart, Yohanna Reid

Absent: Commissioner Tsamchoe Dolma, Language Access Manager Crystal Rosa

1. **Call to order**
 - Chair Raman called the meeting to order at 6:06pm.
2. **Public comment**
 - Sue Reinart introduced herself as a reporter for the Cambridge Day interested in Commission proceedings.
3. **Review and approval of August 2024 minutes**
 - Commissioner Lobo Koerich moved to approve the August 2024 minutes. Commissioner Razzaz seconded.
4. **Welcome and Introductions**
 - Commissioners welcomed new Commissioner Anne Odera to the Commission and shared why they joined.
5. **Staff Updates**
 - ED Almonte shared that she is gearing up for the next budget season, which kicks off in late December. She will be interested in hearing from Commissioners about any new ideas. ED Almonte also asked if Commissioners wish to reschedule the November meeting time since it is during the week of Thanksgiving.
 - ISL Wabeto – In October, ISL Wabeto attended 5 outreach engagement meetings attended 2 school events, helped 14 individuals access services via walk-ins, phone calls, and emails. She also posted flyers in immigrant residential areas, public parks, daycares, healthcare facilities, and faith-based organizations. She shared information about community events with the Community Engagement Team, the Bilingual Family Liaisons, the school liaisons, and other community organizations. She advertised programs such as Housing Drop-in hours, the fuel assistance program, the Breakthrough program, and universal Pre-K applications.
 - DOO Binney - The City of Cambridge is hosting an upcoming event called, "**An Advocate's Guide to Fair Housing Protections for Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors.**" The Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Initiative has teamed up with the Human Rights Commission, Women's Commission, and the De Novo Center

for Justice and Healing to bring this event aimed at empowering advocates working with DV survivors. The event will be on October 23 at 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at the Main Library Lecture Hall.

6. **Old Business** - Follow up from August EA shelter discussion

- PC West shared an update about the Registry of Deeds (ROD) temporary respite center. The ROD building has been serving the same function, providing overflow shelter for those unable to get into the family shelter system. This is a state shelter program, and the City is providing support and resources to the residents. Residents have not been limited to five day stays. Many residents are searching for housing using HomeBASE funds, but this process is slow. The Office of the Housing Liaison and the Human Rights Commission staff presented a training to ROD case workers about housing rights and discrimination in August. The Office of the Housing Liaison is using learnings from the ROD process to consider how to support all residents in Cambridge, including those in other shelter systems, those doubled up in apartments, and those living outside. In Spring of 2024, the state began a case management program for residents and day spaces were added where residents could access case management and use during the day.
- Chair Raman asked about the number of residents in the ROD building. PL West shared that they do not have an exact number, but the capacity of the building is 200 and they are slightly under capacity. Commissioner Odera asked about the reticketing process, and what type of support people get after leaving the respite centers. PL West shared that those living in shelter are offered support in travelling to support systems out of state. After they leave the shelter system they do not receive services. Chair Raman asked about HomeBASE use in Cambridge. PL West shared that a lot of families have been finding units using HomeBASE in other cities due to Cambridge's high cost of living and lack of multifamily housing. Commissioner Mejia asked about food access in the ROD building. PL West shared that food is brought in from a local restaurant with a state contract.
- If any Commissioners encounter any questions about the shelter system, homeless residents of Cambridge, or anyone looking for housing support, they should refer residents to the Office of the Housing Liaison.

7. **New Business**

- Danehy Park Day – Thanks to Commissioners Ruget and Razzaz for volunteering at Danehy Park Day in the rain! Commissioners can consider other opportunities to table at community events to get the word out about the Commission. Commissioner Ruget suggested tabling at the HONK festival in 2025.
- Co-chair election – There is now a vacancy for a co-chair for the Commission. Co-chairs facilitate Commission meetings and meet with Commission staff before meetings to determine the meeting agendas. Commissioners will reach out to Carolina via email if they want to self-nominate. The Commission will vote on a new co-chair in the November meeting.
- Volunteer Attorneys Needed – ED Almonte shared that additional volunteer attorneys are needed for the De Novo Monthly Immigration Legal Clinic. The clinic is fully virtual. Commissioners should send the information about how to volunteer to their networks.
- FY25 Planning – ED Almonte shared a list of ongoing Commission programs and events for FY25. These include the De Novo Immigration Legal Clinic, the workshops for Foreign Trained Workers with the African Bridge Network, the workshops in partnership with Pathways for Immigrant Workers, and the Cambridge Welcomes event. ED Almonte will

send a list with Commission events to Commissioners. Commissioners should brainstorm additional Commission events and programs they are interested in creating for FY25.

8. **Adjournment-** Commissioner Ruget moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:02. Commissioner Mejia seconded.