CITY OF CAMBRIDGE | Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship

Tuesday September 22, 2026

Hybrid Public Meeting Minutes

Present: Chairs Sarah Figge Hussain and Vanessa Ruget and Commissioners Karin Lin, Anne Odera, Raul Ripoll Vera, Guerlancia Laurent, Karim L. Razzaz, Dounia Jean Pierre Antoine, Dawn Lucovich, Alejandro M. Alvarez.
City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Immigrant Outreach & Referral Specialist Tagesech Wabeto, and Program Manager Ester Farah.
Members of the Public: Karina Castillo

1. **Call to Order**
    - Chair Figge Hussain called the meeting to order at 6:02pm.
2. **Public Comment**
    - Karina Castillo joined as a member of the public but did not make a comment.
3. **Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**
    - Chair Figge Hussain motioned to approve minutes. Commissioner Alejandro M. Alvarez seconded. All approved.
4. **Presentation**: Cambridge Demographics, Scott Walker and Roshni Wadhwani, CDD
    - Scott Walker, Senior Manager for Data Services in the Community Development Department, presented "A Close Look at Cambridge Demographics." The presentation reviewed population trends from 1950 through 2025 and examined Cambridge's age, sex, race. ethnicity, household and family composition, immigration, income, and poverty. Walker compared current data with 2005–2009 American Community Survey data to illustrate demographic changes over time. He also discussed potential changes to Census data collection and reporting, including a combined race-and-ethnicity question, a Middle Eastern or North African category, and possible changes to the 2030 Census.
    - Commissioner Alvarez asked about potential changes to Census questions regarding languages spoken at home and whether the City could preserve or supplement this information if federal data become less available. Walker responded that local governments, community organizations, and other entities may conduct their own data collection if federal data are reduced or altered. Commissioner Alvarez also asked whether the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected the data, particularly data from 2020, and noted that more recent one- or two-year estimates may better reflect rapidly changing conditions for some communities. Walker agreed that the time period covered by the data should be considered when interpreting findings and noted uncertainty regarding the release of more recent ACS data.
    - Walker then reviewed household and family characteristics, including family and nonfamily households, married and cohabiting couples. Commissioner Laurent

asked whether the data included Cambridge Housing Authority residents or only unsubsidized housing; Walker confirmed that Cambridge Housing Authority residents were included. Commissioner Laurent also asked whether Census materials are available in multiple languages and whether respondents understand and answer questions as intended. Walker noted that language access and interpretation of Census questions are important considerations when using Census data.

- The presentation also reviewed Cambridge's native-born and foreign-born populations, the geographic distribution of foreign-born residents, and the regions and countries of birth represented among Cambridge residents. Cambridge has an estimated 35,245 foreign-born residents, and the presentation included the 15 most common places of birth among foreign-born residents. Planning Data Analyst Roshni Wadhwani presented income and poverty data, including household-income distribution, family income by the race and ethnicity of the householder, and poverty by age, race and ethnicity, and Census tract.
- Chair Figge Hussain thanked the presenters, described the overview as very interesting, and encouraged Commissioners to review the presentation's footnotes.

5. **Pease join us in welcoming our new Co-Chairs, Sarah and Vanessa, and our new Commissioners: Guerlancia, Dounia, Alejandro, and Dawn!**
    - Chairs Figge Hussain and Ruget expressed enthusiasm for their roles as chairs and welcomed the newly appointed commissioners.
    - ED Almonte thanked Chair Figge Hussain and PM Farah for participation in vacancy interviews.
    - All commissioners then introduced themselves and shared how long they have served on the Commission.
6. **Staff Report**
    - Executive Director Report
        - ED Almonte provided new commissioners with a brief overview of the staff report process. She explained that staff reports typically included updates on City matters related to immigration in Cambridge, community outreach and events.
        - ED Almonte referenced the Commission's TPS letter and noted that it would be shared with the new commissioners. She reminded residents with a potential pathway to remain in the United States to contact the Commission's legal clinic, which is prioritizing TPS-related matters. She also reported that staff had met with De Novo to clarify the types of cases the organization provided full legal representation versus consultation. De Novo had provided guidance outlining the cases it could accept; cases with court appearances scheduled fewer than six weeks away were more difficult to take on, while matters with more than six

weeks before a court date were more likely to be considered for full representation.
    - Commissioner Alvarez asked whether information about case prioritization was publicly available. ED Almonte stated that it was not currently public, but that the Commission could determine whether to make that information available. Commissioner Razzaz noted that outreach for the legal clinic had been strong. Commissioner Figge Hussain suggested that the Commission's website could clarify the process for accessing the legal clinic.
    - ED Almonte also reported that she had contacted LUCE to request any new information concerning immigrant communities. Commissioner Razzaz noted that an ICE operation was reportedly taking place in New Bedford.
- Immigrant Outreach & Referral Specialist Report
    - Throughout the month, the Immigrant Outreach and Referral Specialist represented CIRC at several community meetings and events, and CIRC hosted resource tables at five community and school events, sharing immigration and community resources, including multilingual Resident Guides. CIRC assisted 12 individuals and organizations with information, referrals, and connections related to immigration, housing, employment, legal services, and other community needs. CIRC also continued distributing and posting resource flyers throughout Cambridge, particularly in housing developments, parks, libraries, local businesses, community spaces, and other areas where immigrant residents live, work, and gather. CIRC strengthened partnerships with local agencies and organizations, with approximately 40 agencies and organizations sharing resources and opportunities with CIRC this month, while CIRC shared resource information with more than 450 service providers to increase awareness of free programs, services, and community events. Outreach also continued through Cambridge Public Library ESOL classes and the CRLS International Office, where CIRC shared immigration and community resources and opportunities for immigrant students and families.
- Program Manager Report
    - PM Farah provided an overview of the movie screening, *The Stories That Stay With Us*. An event for "Meet Your Neighbor Month" with the Human Rights Commission and the Peace Commission. The event offered an interactive opportunity for community members to connect with their neighbors and reflect on what creates a sense of belonging in Cambridge.

A "Welcome Wall" invited attendees to respond to the question, "What does being a good neighbor mean to you?" Participants could also use conversation cards with prompts such as: What is one place in Cambridge that feels like home to you? What helps you feel welcomed when you enter a new space? What tradition, food, song, or activity do you think brings people together? What do you wish more people understood about finding community? What is a simple way to start a conversation with someone new? What is a moment when someone made your day better? What is one way we can look out for one another? and What makes a public space feel open and accessible to everyone?

7. **Old Business**
    - ShotSpotter – Civic Assembly
        - ED Almonte provided an overview of the Civic Assembly, the City's first initiative to gather resident input on surveillance technologies, including ShotSpotter and park cameras. Forty residents will be selected by lottery from a pool of volunteers, and their recommendations will be presented to the City Council in December. Chair Ruget and the husband of Immigrant Outreach & Referral Specialist Wabeto noted that they had signed up to participate if selected. Commissioner Alvarez asked how the City would help participants make informed decisions on a topic with which they may have limited familiarity.
    - New Resident Guide – Updated
        - ED Almonte noted that the updated guide is available on the website and printed version will be available in the office.
8. **New Business**
    - Establishing the Commission's goals for FY27
        - Chair Figge Hussain asked whether commissioners could share ideas and goals by email consistent with the Open Meeting Law. ED Almonte clarified the applicable limitations on email communications.
    - Holiday Dates - November 17th instead of November 24th, December 15th instead of December 22nd or alternative combined meeting.
        - PM Farah to send doodle poll.
9. **Adjournment**
    - Chair Figge Hussain motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:53pm. Commissioner Lucovich seconded the motion, and all commissioners voted in favor.