

Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2026

Present: Caroline Palavacino-Maggio, Sweta Joshi, Jean Connor, Robin McCree, Vicki Mahfoud

Virtual: None

Staff: Diana Milkey, Shameka Gregory

Absent: Mara Murray-Horwitz, Pauline Wells, Caitlin Dube, Natalie Le

Public: Morgan Snyder

I. **Call to order**

- a. ED Gregory called this meeting to order at 6:48 PM.

II. **Review and approval of agenda**

- a. "New Business" has been added as agenda item number 8.

III. **Review and approval of January 2026 minutes**

- a. Jean Connor makes a motion to accept the minutes.
- b. Seconded
- c. Passed

Note: February meeting cancelled as we didn't have quorum

IV. **50th Anniversary Planning**

- a. ED Gregory met with former ED Nancy Ryan who suggests hosting an event honoring and celebrating all of the previous staff and Commissioners who were part of the Commission.
- b. Jean Connor states that she would love to see an event that honors the women that have headed the Commission throughout the years.
- c. SG suggests options to celebrate the 50th
 - i. SG suggests a "Tea" Event to hear stories from local Cantabrigians similar to a library "Check out a person" event
 1. JC suggests this event taking the place of a Women and Words event. The Commission agrees
 - ii. SG suggests something to chronicle reproductive health and justice through the years.
 1. JC agrees and says that the mapping of Inman Square through Mapping Feminist Cambridge would be a good resource for this.

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- iii. SG suggests another event revolving around voting and suffrage for women. She ties this to an earlier suggestion meaning to talk about the incoming SAVE act from the Federal government.
- d. SG opens the floor to comments or questions
 - i. Commissioner Sweta Joshi suggests something to bring in younger women and girls into a historical event.
 - 1. JC suggests teaming up with the YWCA.
 - 2. SJ suggests some kind of an essay contest in Cambridge Public Schools regarding women heroes or the 19th amendment.
 - ii. Commissioner Vicky Mahfoud suggests something to bridge the older generation and newer generation in something that celebrates women of all ages.
 - iii. Commissioner Caroline Palvacino-Maggio mentions that her daughter is interested in speaking up at City Council over issues that affect women.
 - 1. SG agrees and says that some kind of girls' oration effort would be great.
 - iv. JC asks a visiting member of the public her opinion, and she notes that something to show young girls the possibility of being on a Commission or how to get involved with local government would be a great idea.
 - v. SG planning to work with MSW Macro Intern or student from HKS to do a deep dive into work and impact of the Commission over the last 50 years as well as stakeholder interviews to determine where we go from here.

V. **Event Updates**

a. **Girls in Sports Night**

- i. SG reads out her stats from CGISN
 - 1. 193 girls K-12
 - 2. 33 boxes of pizza
 - 3. More than 39 volunteers, including high school athletes
 - 4. 15 activities and sports available
- ii. Commissioner Robin McCree asks if any further demographic information was taken.
 - 1. SG says she was not able to during this event, but plans to build demographic information into future event registrations so we can track these things.
 - 2. RM asks what the general population statistics in Cambridge are to compare. JC notes that 51% of the population of Cambridge are women and 8% of the population of Cambridge are Black. She requests that staff assistant Diana Milkey fact check this information before publishing the minutes.
 - 3. From 2023 data, there are 59,042 women in Cambridge

18 to 24 years	12578	52574	24%
25 to 34 years	14913	52574	28%
35 to 44 years	7688	52574	15%
45 to 54 years	4659	52574	9%
55 to 64 years	4503	52574	9%
65 to 74 years	4904	52574	9%

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75 years and over	3329	52574	6%
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4.

Asian Alone	10872	52574	21%
Black or African American Alone	5164	52574	10%
Some Other Race Alone	1445	52574	3%
Two or More Races	4422	52574	8%
White Alone	30671	52574	58%

5.

b. Book Club focused on Combahee River Collective

- i. April 28th – Public reading of the Combahee River Collective
- ii. Alternating between Tuesdays and Saturdays starting April 28th – meetings for the book club
- iii. RC asks who the Combahee River Collective is.
 1. SG says that it was a group of black feminists active around the 1970s who’s primary argument was that both the white feminist movement and the Civil Rights Movement were not addressing the needs of Black women. They specifically began intersectional feminism before “intersectionality” was coined as a term. Many of their members were active in Cambridge.

c. WEN March 24th 9-11 at the CPL

- i. 28 people have already RSVP’d
- ii. Format is staying the same, but also disseminating a survey to learn more about the demographics and what people’s needs and wants for the events are.

d. Gamechangers

- i. Gamechangers will run this summer for one week during the week of June 30th. Commissioner Dube will organize and facilitate the camp alongside partners at the YWCA and Women’s Commission for logistical support.

e. Jill of All Trades: Traditions and Transgressions Screening at CPL

- i. Friday, March 27, 12:00-1:30PM**
- ii. Organized by SG for Women’s History Month with film maker
- iii. Will include a talkback with the film maker remotely
- iv. SJ asks if this is part of the 50th event. SG confirms it is not.
- v. VM requests emails covering these events.

f. Women and Words March event in collaboration with the Senior Center

- i. Wednesday, April 29th, Rustin Room 344 Broadway**
- ii. Thursday, June 4th, Lewis Room Central Sq. Library**
- iii. Potential Topics**
 1. Redoing/Continuing the discussion on menopause. SG will reach out to Commissioner Murray-Horowitz to see if she has connected with her contact that facilitated the last event.

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2. Former Commissioner Kristine Pereira-View had volunteered to coordinate one of these events. SG will reach out to ask if she is still interested in connecting Commission with her contact.
3. JC suggests reaching out to Ophelia Dahl, a resident in Cambridge who was responsible for bringing certain healthcare efforts to Haiti. She mentions possibly reaching out, but not being so sure about her availability. CPM agrees, noting that someone with experience in healthcare abroad may have unique insights on menstruation in other cultures.

VI. Sex Trafficking Stakeholders

- a. SG reached out to the list of people on the stakeholders list and met with people from the group
 - i. She noted that many said that there were no concrete plans, but are still interested in working together in impactful ways.
- b. CPM suggests reaching out to Pauline Wells in order to coordinate with the police department to ask about things that they may or may not witness on the ground regardless of ability to prosecute.
- c. SJ mentions an upcoming Sex Work event done by the DGBVPI and comments on the difference between legal sex work and trafficking.
 - i. SG clarifies that sex work is illegal in MA and that trafficking specifically involves people who are being forced to engage in sex work against their will where as sex workers are exercising their agency and often making the best decision available to them.
- d. JC asks if the City has any sort of billboards or advertisements that could help educate or identify signs of sex trafficking as they do in the airport. SG says they don't, but having these discussions are important to bring up so progress can be made in this direction.
- e. SJ asks what the CCSW can do about spreading awareness.
 - i. JC says they can ask City Council to create a program for young people to create awareness.
 - ii. SG agrees and says that this type of awareness building involves a lot of learning and education. It's important to move forward informed.
 - iii. VM suggests some kind of mental health support for the community, especially for vulnerable populations like immigrants, highlighting Iranians especially. The Commission agrees with this idea enthusiastically. SG asks if she can bring this to the Peace Commission. VM agrees. Staff DM also suggests the "Welcome Event" held with the HRC.

VII. Applications for the Women's Commission Open Positions

- a. SG printed out a list of names of applicants for the commission, noting that there's a number of applications already. SG will reach out to each current Commissioner individually to explore their thoughts on remaining part of the Commission. This will help determine how many new Commissioners are invited to join.

VIII. Mediation Meeting with CM and Chief Brown & scheduling options

- a. SG cites Open Meeting Law and says that five or more commissioners gathered together are under a public meeting. She notes that the City Manager will not meet in the format of a Talking Circle in a public meeting and has offered to meet with four Commissioners instead of the full group.

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- b. SG notes that Chandra, the party asked to mediate, is not going to go forward with joining the Commission for this meeting. Chandra noted that she would not be able to “meet the needs” identified by participants.
 - i. Hello Shameka, my intention was to share this information with you in person but it seems that we will not have the opportunity to have this meeting in person. After completing 7 interviews and reflecting on the principles that guide my practice, I have come to a conclusion. It is not possible for me to hold a Talking Circle honoring the values of honest, humility, trust, group care, and accountability that would meet the needs identified by the participants. It is admirable that you have tried to manage the recent events in a restorative way. I have attached by W-9 and invoice for the services that I have provided. Keeping in mind that I am not able to disclose any of the content of my interviews, if you have any questions, please let me know. Initially I had planned to come to the next WC meeting but with the confidentiality in place, it would be frustrating for them to have me there yet unable to answer any questions beyond what I have written in this email. Thank you very much. Sincerely, Chandra Banks.
 - c. JC suggests two individual meetings with the CM in groups of three. SG says she is willing to ask, but need to make sure this is the way the Commission would like to move forward.
 - d. VM objects to the fact that the mediator did not reach out to the commissioners to share that she is stepping back. Felt like she gathered information to, “hand over”. SG assures the commissioners that the information shared with the mediator is completely confidential and is only known by the mediator.
 - e. JC has requested the mediator’s response be added to the minutes. It is included above.
- IX. **Bylaws & Ordinance Review Subcommittee Updates**-Unable to discuss due to time constraints.
- X. **New Business**
- a. **SAVE ACT America** - Unable to discuss due to time constraints.
 - b. **Building Connections: Effective Tools in Community Conversations by Human Rights Commissions**
 - i. VM discusses the group she was a part of in finding effective communication and how actions, values, and experiences affect how people listen and discuss personal experiences.
 - ii. JC mentions that boundaries in conversation were important in this discussion and that saying that one is able to “pass” on being a part of the conversation is effective in laying out what is said and felt.
 - iii. SJ talked about a workshop that she attended where she did a similar exercise on how to make an effective dialogue happen, including how to ask effective questions in an effort to understand as opposed to persuade. She also mentions that hearing stories from other commissions across multiple City governments felt important and worthwhile, that the multitude of voices created interesting opportunities to view the same situation from different perspectives.

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- iv. JC says that she had some of the handouts from the Essential Partners company running the workshop, and that she'd give them to staff to distribute with the minutes from this meeting.

XI. **Announcements**

XII. **Adjournment**

- a. Executive Director Shameka Gregory adjourned the meeting at 7:52 PM.

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