



CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

AUGUST 23, 2023

2:00 PM

SULLIVAN CHAMBER

~MINUTES~

MEETING

Wednesday, August 23, 2023

TIME

2:00 PM

PRESIDING OFFICER

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quinton Zondervan	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The City Council will meet to consider whether to approve an Order to take via a “friendly” eminent domain proceeding a parcel of land located at 41 Bellis Circle, Cambridge.

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
MEETING**

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2023

SULLIVAN CHAMBER

A Special meeting of the Cambridge City Council was held on Wednesday, August 23, 2023 to consider whether to approve an Order to take via a “friendly” eminent domain proceeding a parcel of land located at 41 Bellis Circle, Cambridge. The meeting was called to order at 2:02 p.m. by the Honorable Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this public meeting was hybrid allowing participation in person and via Zoom.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui called the meeting to order and asked the Clerk to call the roll. Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Present/Remote

Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Present/In Person

Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Present/Remote

Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Present/In Person

Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent

Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Present/Remote

Councillor Paul Toner – Present/In Person

Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Present/Remote

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Present/In Person

Present-9, Absent-0. Quorum established.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized individuals for public comment. The following individuals participated in the public comment portion of the meeting, each allowed up to 2 minutes to speak:

Marina Von Bothmer, 147 Sherman Street, Cambridge, MA, urged the Council to be transparent about what type of property would potentially be developed.

Deb Olken, 39F Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared their concerns and noted the current problems within the neighborhood and urged the Council to proceed with transparency.

Peter Boshco, 44 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about the City purchasing 41 Bellis Circle and asked the City to be respectful to neighbors and abutters to the property and enhance the Bellis Circle area.

Michael Siegell, 33 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, offered concerns about the unknowns of the type of development that may happen with the purchase of 41 Bellis Circle and urged the Council to vote no.

Lakshmi Mudunuri, 33 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared that neighbors of Bellis Circle would like to be involved with the planning of the development of the property.

William Giraldi, 39A Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about a large development being built on the property with an already congested traffic area.

James Zall, 203 Pemberton Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in favor of the City purchasing 41 Bellis Circle if it is being used towards affordable housing.

Sharon Hsu, 44 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, spoke against the City purchasing 41 Bellis Circle, noting that it will create more problems and offered suggestions on how to address the housing shortage.

Judy Hunt, 40 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about transparency with the City and lack of clarity as well as traffic patterns in the area.

Federico Muchnik, 82 Richdale Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke against the City purchasing 41 Bellis Circle until there is revision to the Affordable Housing Overlay.

David Vise, 19 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that supported why they are against the purchase of 41 Bellis Circle.

Maureen Whitehouse, 39D Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared they were opposed to the purchase of 41 Bellis Circle due to the lack transparency with other issues within the community.

Lisa Jayne Gordon, 31 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared that they were opposed to the purchase of 41 Bellis Circle.

Julien Gordon, 31 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, urged the Council to consider other options and shared they were opposed to the purchase of 41 Bellis Circle.

Jonathan Haber, 11 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared they would be in favor of the property being more than just a parking lot and asked that the City be transparent with the neighbors throughout the process.

James Williamson, Churchill Avenue, Cambridge, MA, shared concerns about city government and asked for more transparency regarding the plans if the property is purchased.

Eugene Harris, 15 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, stated that they are in favor of more affordable housing in Cambridge but does not believe 41 Bellis Circle is a good location for housing and shared concerns about the current traffic patterns in the area.

Roberta Turri Vise, 19 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, asked that the process of purchasing the property is fair and transparent with the community.

Levi Tofia, 30 Bellis Circle, Cambridge, MA, shared that they support the City buying the property and noted that there has been a communication issue and asked that the City be transparent and suggested the possibility of having a Commuter Rail stop in that area.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments as a Title Examiner and urged the City to look at laws related to railroads and land owned by railroad companies, specifically Chapter 40 Section 54A.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Toner who made a motion to close Public Comment at approximately 2:43 p.m.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Yes

Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Yes

Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Yes

Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Yes

Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent

Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent

Councillor Paul Toner – Yes

Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Yes

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Yes

Yes-7. Absent-2. Motion Passed.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Owen O’Riordan, Deputy City Manager, who stated that the City Manager is recommending that the City purchase 41 Bellis Circle via a “friendly” eminent domain proceeding, CMA 2023 #220, which was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the agenda packet. He stated that the City became aware of the property later this year and began a conversation with the existing owner with a proposal to purchase the property for municipal operations. He said that there has been discussion about what the nature of the property will ultimately become. He noted the significant needs in the City in terms of affordable housing but there is also an existing need for Public Works operations. He noted that there will be discussions with the community regarding options for the space and then come back to the City Council with what the community has indicated. He noted that regardless of whether the City ultimately ends up using this property for affordable housing or DPW purposes, the City believes that it can accommodate the storm water and sewer system controls in this space. City Manager Huang added that the process after purchase would be to include all voices and have more specific conversations. He said that he is committed to having conversations before major decisions are made.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who stated that address of the location being listed as a Sherman Street address would make a lot of sense. He stated that the City should look at the fact that this parcel is located next to a railway and research any potential issues that this may bring about. He asked about the rapid timeframe of the negotiations. Mr. O’Riordan explained that the seller wanted to ensure that the transaction was executed by the end of August so that is the reason for the Special City Council meeting. Gayle Willett, Director of Assessing, added that the non-market sale was never exposed to the market in 2023. She said that in her

opinion, the cost of the parcel currently is not a market price. Councillor McGovern stated his support for the purchase.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Toner who concurred with the comments by Councillor McGovern. He stated that he feels that the City should purchase the property so that the City can be in control of the process and ensure that residents play a role in helping the City determine what that property will be used for. He said that one of the prime directives by the City Council to the City administration is to buy any piece of property at what is a fair, reasonable market price. He said that if a private developer gets hold of the property, it may not be affordable housing or DPW operations but a large, residential property. He noted that the City will be far more receptive in listening to the residents.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Azeem who echoed the comments of his colleagues. He added that this is not the first location that he would look at for affordable housing. He stated that there is also a shortage of space for DPW operations. He asked Mr. O’Riordan to talk about the severe shortage and the properties that the City is losing. Mr. O’Riordan stated that at present, the DPW has a permanent facility at 147 Hampshire Street which is 2.8 acres in size. It is in poor shape and needs a lot of upgrades. He explained that over the last 5-6 years, they have shifted a lot of their operations to spaces that the City has leased on Mooney Street, which is a short-term lease which will expire May of 2024. The hope is that a portion of that lot will continue to be used for DPW but that remains to be seen. There are other satellite spaces throughout the City which will disappear within the next two years. Kathy Watkins, Commissioner, Department of Public Works, added that DPW has over 270 employees, 9 divisions with over 150 pieces of equipment. She said having long term homes is important so that the City can build the infrastructure to support the various departments.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zondervan who echoed the comments made by his colleagues. He stated that he supports this purchase. He said that the City does not have the luxury to debate how to use the space until it is purchased. He said that the biggest loser in this situation is the Montessori School who did not think to contact the City in January to see if it would be interested in purchasing the property.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Carlone who stated that entry on Sherman Street makes sense. He said that this is achievable. He said that he is optimistic, and he is in favor of purchase of this property.

Mayor Siddiqui spoke about the timeline and asked how long the sale will take after this vote. Mr. O’Riordan replied that the expectation is that the transaction will be completed by the end of August 2023. In terms of community process, the City may want to have an architect work with the City because it will take time to pull the pieces together. He expects that the process may not begin until the new year. Mayor Siddiqui stated that communication is vital to the City Council and the neighborhood.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to approve the Transfer Appropriation Order to Pro Tanto in the amount of \$3,676,500.00.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll:

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Yes
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Yes
Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Yes
Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Yes
Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent
Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent
Councillor Paul Toner – Yes
Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Yes
Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Yes

Yes-7. Absent-2. Motion Passed.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to approve the Order of Taking.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll:

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Yes
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Yes
Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Yes
Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Yes
Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent
Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent
Councillor Paul Toner – Yes
Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Yes
Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Yes

Yes-7. Absent-2. Motion Passed.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to approve the Transfer Appropriation Order in the amount of \$4,648,500.00.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll:

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Yes
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Yes
Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Yes
Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Yes
Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent
Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent
Councillor Paul Toner – Yes
Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Yes
Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Yes

Yes-7. Absent-2. Motion Passed.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to Suspend the Rules to allow Reconsideration.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll:

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Yes
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Yes

Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Yes
Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Yes
Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent
Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent
Councillor Paul Toner – Yes
Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Yes
Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Yes
Yes-7. Absent-2. Motion Passed.

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to Reconsider the votes taken at the meeting.

Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll:

Councillor Burhan Azeem – No
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – No
Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – No
Councillor Marc C. McGovern – No
Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent
Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent
Councillor Paul Toner – No
Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – No
Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – No
Yes-0. No-7 Absent-2. Motion Failed.

ADJOURN

The Chair, Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to adjourn.

Deputy City Clerk LeBlanc Crane called the roll.

Councillor Burhan Azeem – Yes
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone – Yes
Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon – Yes
Councillor Marc C. McGovern – Yes
Councillor Patricia Nolan – Absent
Councillor E. Denise Simmons – Absent
Councillor Paul Toner – Yes
Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan – Yes
Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui – Yes
Yes-7, Absent-2. Motion Passed.

The Cambridge City Council adjourned at 3:17 p.m.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Four (4) Communications received by the City Clerk's Office

A++ A
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Good afternoon

My name is Deb Olken. I live at 39 Bellis Circle.

41 Bellis is located in front of & alongside my ^{home} residence. The parcel's zoning was changed from C1-A to Residential C in 2011 after a petition by neighborhood residents.

Our

The neighborhood is residential with some commercial, educational and industrial uses. A commuter rail line passes thru several times daily. We are considered a quiet zone so train horns are rarely heard.

In 2018, all trains suddenly began using their horn as they approached the Sherman Street crossing. The City had not filed the necessary paperwork. A neighborhood meeting was held & the City presented a 3-phase plan to regain our Quiet Zone status. Five years later, the horns have stopped but we are still waiting for the ^{solutions} 3rd phase of the solution to begin.

During the City Council's current term, you've made several changes which greatly impact ^{of} the neighborhood.

The decreased number of automobile lanes on Mass Ave causes massive traffic jams that run from the Arlington border, down Mass Ave, onto Cedar St, along Rindge and onto Sherman St. Just getting off of Bellis Circle to merge into the gridlocked traffic can take several minutes.

New multi-unit developments are no longer required to provide resident parking.

The AHO Overlay overrides height limits that had been set by zoning.

^{potential}
The use of 41 Bellis after its acquisition ^{has been} is not clearly defined. ~~The City~~
~~Manager says~~ it might be ~~for~~ municipal operations & infrastructure or it
could be affordable housing. ^{of something else}

The possibility of a 9-story building on this land is the worse possible outcome for an already over-burdened residential neighborhood.

I ask that the City Council honor their past commitments and proceed with transparency. Going forward, please communicate with and involve the neighborhood earlier in the process rather than later.

Thank you.

Good afternoon, My name is Judy Hunt. I have lived at 40 Bellis Circle for the past 31 years. My home is directly across from the parking lot that is being discussed today.

The notice of the Special City Council Meeting took many of us by surprise. Most concerning is the lack of specificity as to the city's actual intentions concerning the use of this property. How are we to understand the impact this decision may have on our lives when there is such a lack of clarity. Did the city conduct impact studies for example and if so, could those findings be shared with us?

Whatever the outcome, 41 Bellis Circle should be given a Sherman Street address. It would be devastating for our small street to have traffic from this parking lot entering and exiting on to Bellis Circle rather than Sherman Street. Sherman Street is a far more appropriate address for this parcel.

I have communicated multiple times with the city council and the department of parking and transportation. I shared my deep concerns about Sherman Street. I received very sparse response from the City. I urge you to take to heart the pre-existing conditions of Sherman Street that will impact the use of the parking lot.

Sherman St has become increasingly more dangerous. the current traffic situation is hazardous. With the new traffic and bike patterns on Mass Ave, Sherman has become the logical cut through to avoid a lot of Mass Ave and get to Cedar Street faster. There are two extremes, gridlock due to heavy congestion or cars speeding from Rindge to Walden. Sherman has become either a raceway or bumper to bumper traffic. I urge you to designate Sherman Street a Safety Zone with a 20 mph speed limit. It is only a matter of time before there is a catastrophic event.

Take into account the existing density in this section of Cambridge as well as our very serious climate crisis. Nationally, Cambridge should be in the forefront of community innovation in regards to climate change. This property is south facing and therefore ideal for a solar farm that could provide low cost electricity for example. Additionally, opening more green space in order to promote storm mitigation, community gardening, pathways to connect neighborhoods, and other environmentally focussed endeavors would benefit the entire city. Bellis Circle is not a collection of strangers. When issues pertaining to the welfare of our community arise, we join together on behalf of the best interests of the neighborhood.

David Vise
19 Bellis

Thank you for listening to our concerns.

I have been a resident for 28 years at 19 Bellis and was born in Cambridge.

Our community is Zoned Residence B, the same as many of the quiet neighborhoods in North Cambridge, Huron Village and Strawberry Hill.

Yet we are surrounded by public, institutional, and transit uses.

The Montessori School, ~~250 FAR~~ splits and is adjacent to about one quarter of the lots.

THE Rail line is on one side with a dangerous grade crossing, ~~where most train accidents can occur~~

Narrow Sherman St is on one side with high in city and commuter traffic.

The park, which we all enjoy, is now heavily used, which is great, but often adds to the noise factor.

The salt shed and DPW staging area also contributes to heavy truck traffic.

Lots of traffic turns in and out of the Danehy and ball field parking area.

The sidewalk on the Northeast side of Sherman St is narrow and has no pedestrian protection.

With Cambridge adding about 10,000 residents over the last 10 years, the impacts have grown in magnitude.

To respond to the potential uses:

Affordable housing;

The Sherman and Rindge corridor already has dense affordable housing.

Walden Square has many units planned.

New Street, which probably has the least community impact, is also planned.

With the affordable housing overlay, it's likely that double the density and height could be built compared to private development.

Also, parking would not be a requirement, so Bellis Circle and the surrounding community will fill up with cars.

OVER TO PAGE 2

Thank you for letting me share my thoughts with you.

This parcel of land has been vacant and available to be taken by the city since 1995 . The fact that the city is pursuing this land today suggests to me that converting this piece of land for city use faces many difficult challenges.

My understanding is that The City is proposing to build a new road just for this parcel of the land. The best and logical use of this land is for housing, NOT the other use proposed. Hence the neighborhood residents believe that the city wants to develop this land for affordable housing. I am sure the city Manager is aware that Our neighborhood has the highest concentration and density of affordable housing and the largest units than any other neighborhood of Cambridge. The city should consider developing affordable housing in other neighborhoods.

Please allow me to share my thoughts on solutions to the housing shortage in Cambridge.

Cambridge has a large population of young people, aged 18 to 35. They are undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and young professionals. They stay in this area for 4 to 12 years. They rent the majority of the city's affordable market rate housing supplies.

I see MIT doing a fantastic job meeting their housing needs. They have built and continue to build lots of housing units for its graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Building housing for this group of residences like MIT can solve a lot of our housing challenges. The city of Cambridge might consider teaming up with neighboring cities like Arlington, Belmont, Watertown, Somerville to build high rises of 8 stories or higher for this group of young people, especially along the borders of these cities.

In summary, I believe the City should not take this parcel of land at all, Leave it for private developers to build housing units. The City might want to consider a different approach to tackle the housing crisis.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sent from my iPhone

Sharon Hsu
44 Bellis Cir
Cambridge MA 02140
8/23/2023.