



# GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, RULES & CLAIMS COMMITTEE AND HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, October 17, 2023

2:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee and the Health and Environment Committee will hold a joint public meeting on Tuesday, October 17, 2023 from 2:00p.m. – 4:00p.m. to discuss the relationship between the city and the Cambridge Health Alliance including a review of the operations and budget of the Public Health Department, the Cambridge Health Alliance annual contract with the City of Cambridge, legal options for structuring the public health board, and other ways to best serve

### Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2:26 PM

### Health and Environment Committee

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quinton Zondervan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, RULES AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Carlone

Councillor Nolan

Councillor Simmons

Councillor Toner

Vice Mayor Mallon, Chair

## **HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Councillor Azeem  
Councillor Carlone  
Councillor McGovern  
Councillor Zondervan  
Councillor Nolan, Chair

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Joint Government Operations, Rules and Claims, and Health and Environment Committees was held on Tuesday, October 17, 2023. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

**At the request of the Co-Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll of both Committees.**

### **Health and Environment Committee**

Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote  
Councillor Carlone – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor McGovern – Absent  
Councillor Zondervan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
**Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.**

### **Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee**

Councillor Carlone – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
Councillor Simmons – Present/Remote  
Councillor Toner – Absent\*  
Vice Mayor Mallon – Present/In Sullivan Chamber  
**Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.**

\*Councillor Toner was marked present and remote at 2:26p.m.

Co-Chair Nolan shared that the call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing to discuss the relationship between the City and the Cambridge Health Alliance including a review of the operations and budget of the Public Health Department, the Cambridge Health Alliance annual contract with the City of Cambridge, legal options for structuring the public health board, and other ways to best serve the community's public health needs. Councillor Nolan noted that City Manager Yi-An Huang, Megan Bayer, Acting City Solicitor, and Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Department of Human Services (DHSP) were present in the Chamber, as well as Derrick Neal, Chief Public Health Officer, and Deborah Odunze, Deputy Chief Public Health Officer from the Cambridge Department of Public Health, and Dr. Assaad Sayah, Chief Executive Officer for the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA). The Co-Chair introduced Cheryl Sbarro and Michael Hugo from the Massachusetts Association of Public Health, and shared they would be

providing a presentation for the Committee. After introductions, the Co-Chair offered opening remarks and read from a prepared statement, which reads as follows:

“This is an important topic, and we will likely not solve all our issues today. I expect this meeting is the first one to identify issues to be addressed in future venues - whether in council committee meetings, community meetings, or other meetings, or all of the above. As background, this meeting came from the discussions held during the Finance Committee meetings on the budget this spring, when the council discussed that the public health department budget was not under the city’s control directly, the way other departments are. Through our discussion of the Public Health Department and the Cambridge Health Alliance, the council and the city manager were put in a place where we were facing important staffing decisions that affected not only the public health of Cambridge, but also the wider organization of the Cambridge Health Alliance, which services communities outside Cambridge as well. The discussions we had were indicative of the larger conversations going on around the country in the healthcare industry. The healthcare industry is undergoing constant change and facing challenges. We understand that CHA has had to make difficult decisions on behalf of public health in Cambridge and on behalf of their larger organization and we are grateful for the care provided to our and other cities’ residents. Today we are at the point where we need to understand if the current structure is in the best interest of the public health in Cambridge. The current structure is now over 25 years old, and the healthcare landscape is drastically different now than it was then. Even our understanding of public health has drastically changed over the years. And, the CHA was essentially a public city hospital 25 years ago, and now is a regional health care SYSTEM serving many communities.

After discussions on this topic, the Vice Mayor and I thought it made sense to consider whether the current structure is serving us well. And it seemed that it made sense to consider possible options for updating the CHA contract, which hasn’t been reviewed by the city council in many years, perhaps ever.

In light of concerns raised about a conflict of interest to have the CEO of CHA be our city’s Public Health Commissioner, to staffing questions, when public health department staff aren’t city employees - so an email to all employees won’t reach them, and benefits vary. Would it make sense to consider a Dual Reporting Relationship where the Chief Public Health Officer would report to the City Manager as well as the CEO of the CHA or rethinking the role of the Public Health Commissioner and/or moving it under the purview of the city administration. Then there is the question of the various public and private boards that work throughout the public health department and the CHA - the Health Policy Board, (which exists in ordinance but not in reality) the Board of Trustees of CHA, and others. At the very least, we need to better understand where the lines of public and private operations exist, where the council and the city manager have control. We should eventually consider whether it makes sense to move the Cambridge Public Health Department under the City of Cambridge.

These are important questions and require thoughtful deliberation, which is why we are here today - to begin those discussions - and to better understand how best to provide for the public health of Cambridge.”

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Mallon, who offered additional opening remarks. The Vice Mayor thanked those in attendance and stated that she looks forward to a productive meeting. Co-Chair Mallon shared that this meeting is stemming from concerns that were raised in the budget hearing this May relative to staffing cuts that had to be made to the Cambridge Public Health Department due to larger staffing cuts being made to the Cambridge Health Alliance. The

Vice Mayor shared concerns about the services provided section in the contract, which has not been updated since 1997, and noted that it does not reflect the needs of the community and the Public Health Department. A copy of the contract was provided in advance of the meeting from the Law Department and included in the Agenda Packet. Co-Chair Mallon highlighted the fact that this meeting is the first step to move forward in updating the contract and having a better understanding of the needs of the City and its relationship with CHA and the Health Department.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Cheryl Sbarro and Michael Hugo who gave an overview of a presentation titled “Local Boards of Health in Massachusetts”, which was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered information on the establishment of local boards of health, legal authority and regulations, a review of the nuisance law and statutory creation of health departments in cities, and the role of Commissioner of Public Health in Cambridge. After their presentation, Cheryl Sbarro and Michael Hugo were available to respond to questions and concerns brought forward from Committee members.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Ellen Semonoff, who offered a review of the history of how the Cambridge Hospital became an independent authority and no longer a department within the City of Cambridge. She explained that there were many City Council hearings and more than one hearing before the State Legislature to get to what the legislation is today.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Dr. Assaad Sayah who shared that he is proud of the relationship between the Public Health Department and the City and the current model that is being used. Dr. Sayah noted that national trends are transitioning to a model that is like the one that is being used in the City and noted that the model that is being used was the most effective model during COVID. Dr. Sayah shared that he looks forward to strengthening the relationship of the Cambridge Health Alliance, the Public Health Department, and the City of Cambridge to continue to provide quality services to residents and citizens.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Dr. Sayah and Derrick Neal who offered a review of the FY23 and FY24 budget summary and shared how they are able to provide public health while also facing financial challenges as well as working with their budget during the COVID pandemic. It was noted that the clinical support from CHA directly impacts the quality care for Cambridge residents. Derrick Neal highlighted the importance of how they are one of the few accredited Health Departments in the State and that the Massachusetts Department of Public Health relies on the leadership Cambridge brings to the state.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zondervan who thanked everyone for their presentations, but shared he was still confused due to the complexity of the topic. Councillor Zondervan asked for more information on how the relationship between the three entities benefits the City of Cambridge. Derrick Neal was available to provide a detailed response and reviewed the current staff structure within the Public Health Department. Deborah Odunze offered comments and provided additional benefits that the City receives due to the relationship between the two. Dr. Sayah responded and shared the difference between Cambridge and other cities in which the CHA operates and what makes Cambridge different relative to the services that are received. Councillor Zondervan provided additional comments and concerns, noting the importance of making the model more understandable for people to know how it works.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Mallon who asked if there is a budget overview that provides more detailed information on where the funds are being spent. Dr. Sayah shared that there is an annual budget that is submitted to the City once a year, and would have no problem expanding the budget details to provide more information in that report. Co-Chair Mallon asked the team from the Massachusetts Association of Public Health Boards and the Acting City Solicitor if the CHA is fulfilling the Special Act provisions appropriately with the current structure in terms of the CHA Board of Directors. Councillor Nolan provided additional information relative to that question and read language from Ordinance Chapter 2.72. Megan Bayer was available to respond and provide a review of the Ordinance and Special Act. The Vice Mayor asked Derrick Neal if there were any type of employee surveys that are done to give staff the opportunity to share concerns. Derrick Neal noted that surveys and staff meetings are done on a regular basis, and that he encourages his staff to be open and honest to move forward productively. Deborah Odunze provided additional information and shared concerns and challenges that have been brought up by staff.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Carlone who had clarifying questions for Dr. Sayah related to the budget summary and where funds come from when the City is unable to provide it. Dr. Sayah noted that the difference in funding for the Public Health Department is supplemented by the CHA. Councillor Carlone asked if the early morning noise due to construction and other factors that are allowed by the State and the City would fall under the nuisance category and public health risk from the presentation made by the team from the Massachusetts Association of Public Health Boards. Cheryl Sbarro shared that it could potentially be considered a nuisance or a noisome trade that a Board of Health could put conditions on.

Co-Chair Nolan had a follow up question regarding the Health Policy Board and noted that the Law Department would be investigating it for future discussion. Megan Bayer was available to provide a response and reviewed some of the language that was in the Special Act and Ordinance and shared she would continue to examine the language. Councillor Nolan asked if Cambridge has such a great model with the Public Health Department, why aren't other cities in which the CHA provides services following that same model. Dr. Sayah responded and shared a history of how the CHA was established and how the structure in Cambridge was a result of the relationship between the Health Department and the Cambridge Hospital. Dr. Sayah shared they have never encouraged other communities to change their model, and no one has approached the hospital to change their structure. Councillor Nolan agreed with comments made by the Vice Mayor about having an expanded summary of the budget to have important information related to the funding available. Co-Chair Nolan had a follow up question relative to the TB Clinic that was shared is part of the contractual agreement between the City and CHA. Councillor Nolan asked if there was more information on what percentage of clients who come to the TB Clinic are actual residents of Cambridge. Deborah Odunze shared that it was not information they currently had in front of them but would be happy to pass along the percentage after further review. Councillor Nolan highlighted the importance of providing equity across funding to ensure that residents' needs are being met.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zondervan who offered comments on why he believes there is so much confusion between the City and the Health Department and noted that Cambridge is committed to spending funds on resources for public health. Councillor Zondervan

shared that it is worth having more conversations about the relationship and services provided to make sure everyone is receiving the best outcome.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized City Manager Huang who shared that he believes it has been a productive conversation but also that it is a very complicated discussion to have. The City Manager agreed that there is more room for transparency, especially with the budget process and annual reporting. City Manager Huang noted how it can get difficult and complex with the Cambridge Public Health Department falling both under the CHA and the City but shared the importance of continuing to build healthy relationships between the three.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Mallon who offered suggestions on how the City, CHA, and the Health Department could move forward. Co-Chair Mallon asked Dr. Sayah if he could explain how Cambridge receives preferential treatment and resources, like access to doctors and other services, because of their contractual relationship. Dr. Sayah shared he did not have an example of how Cambridge has preferential treatment but was able to review the services that are provided that come from the contractual relationship, which include school nurses and a TB clinic. The Vice Mayor shared that having a dual relationship could be complicated and she would like the Law Department to see if it is possible through the Special Act or Ordinance.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Carlone who thanked everyone who participated in the discussion. Councillor Carlone shared that he would like future conversations around public health to be how depression and loneliness are directly related to urban design, noting the importance of open space.

Co-Chair Nolan provided closing comments and noted all the questions that have been raised are important to continue discussing. Councillor Nolan shared that she looks forward to working with the City Manager and CHA to continue to move forward and ensuring that everyone understands how to best serve the community.

**With no further business, Co-Chair Nolan adjourned the meeting at 4:00p.m.**

**Clerk's Note:**

Deborah Odunze from The Cambridge Public Health Department responded to Co-Chair Nolan's follow up question by email on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, regarding what percentage of clients who are using the TB Clinic are actual residents of Cambridge. The response email is attached.

The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

[https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/596?view\\_id=1&redirect=true&h=2ffca50a2e47b474e9ab01734bfa2325](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/596?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=2ffca50a2e47b474e9ab01734bfa2325)

**A communication was received from Councillor Nolan, transmitting a presentation from the Massachusetts Association of Public Health Boards.**

**A communication was received from Dr. Assaad Sayah, Chief Executive Officer for the Cambridge Health Alliance, transmitting the Cambridge Public Health Department FY23 and FY24 budget summary.**

**A communication was received from Councillor Nolan, transmitting the City and Public Health Commission Health Services Agreements and Amendments.**

**A communication was received from Councillor Nolan, transmitting the Cambridge Health Alliance Statute, Chapter 147 Laws of 1996.**