



To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Chris Cotter, Chief of Housing

Date: May 18, 2026

Re: **Policy Order 2025-131 Social Housing**

Cambridge has confronted the growing housing crisis by committing significant funds to subsidizing affordable housing and through meaningful zoning reforms intended to unlock market rate housing and incentivize the production of affordable housing. These tools have successfully led to the development of permanently affordable housing by the Cambridge Housing Authority, non-profit developers, and by market rate developers subject to inclusionary zoning requirements. The scale of the housing crisis, however, has led communities like Cambridge to look at other tools, such as social housing.

The definition of social housing varies; though it is generally considered to be housing that has some public involvement, i.e. housing that is funded and/or owned by a public agency, permanently affordable, mixed-income, with an important degree of tenant governance. In September 2025, the City Council adopted Policy Order 2025 #131 asking the City Manager to work with relevant City departments to explore all steps towards advancing social housing in Cambridge. Subsequently, the Housing Committee held a [public hearing](#) on December 16, 2025, to hear from several stakeholders about how social housing could be an important and promising tool for Cambridge and about major operational and financial questions to consider in developing an approach to social housing in Cambridge. At that meeting it was suggested that a task force be convened to work through the questions and to develop recommendations as to how social housing could add to the City's efforts to create new housing.

Over the past few months, the City Manager and Mayor have been developing a road map for exploring social housing. The Mayor and City Manager are appointing a task force and CDD staff are procuring a consultant to provide support to the task force.

Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Social housing task force

The Cambridge Social Housing Task Force is a joint initiative of the Mayor and City Manager and will be charged with evaluating and presenting a social housing model in Cambridge. The task force will include members of the City Council and City staff along with representatives from the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust, the Cambridge Housing Authority, the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, MassHousing, the Joint Center for Housing Studies, the Alliance of Cambridge Tenants, the Cambridge Housing Justice Coalition, and non-profit affordable housing developers. State Representative Mike Connolly will also act as an advisor to the task force.

The task force will explore questions including financing and public ownership, tenant governance and affordability levels. The work of the task force is expected to focus on the following topics:

- Financing and capital strategy
 - Objectives include identifying the mix of funding sources required, assessing trade-offs among subsidy strategies and local funding options and amounts
- Tenant governance and democratic control
 - Objectives include exploring models for resident involvement and control and establishing criteria for effective resident governance and the training and resources necessary for successful implementation
- Public development barriers
 - Objectives include identifying regulatory, procedural, and operational burdens and necessary policy relief
- Public investment: initial and ongoing
 - Objectives include establishing the range of initial investment required, staffing and capacity needs, and evaluating trade-offs with competing uses of City funds
- Sponsorship and scaling strategy
 - Objectives include reviewing organizational sponsorship/ownership options and implications for scale and sustainability, and analyzing alignment with existing affordable housing strategies

CDD staff are currently working to procure a consultant that can provide analysis and support for the task force. The task force will produce a report with findings and recommendations for the above topics, as well as next steps for a social housing proposal and report back to the Housing Committee.