



City of Cambridge

POR 2026-34
FIRST IN COUNCIL
February 9, 2026

COUNCILLOR NOLAN
COUNCILLOR MCGOVERN
MAYOR SIDDIQUI

WHEREAS: Expanding and building on universal preschool programming has long been a goal of the Cambridge City Council, and over the last twenty years, the City administration, City Council, School Committee, and Cambridge Public Schools administration have worked to make the goal a reality for all 4-year olds in Cambridge and many 3-year olds; and

WHEREAS: The current iteration of CPP was the product of a broad coalition of educators, administrators, parents, and stakeholders, and built upon decades of CPS and DHSP programming, and was a longtime initiative of the City Council, noting the [November 28, 2016 Roundtable](#), the [December 2, 2019 Roundtable](#), and dozens of policy orders including [POR 2021 #44](#), along with an ad hoc joint School Committee and City Council [working group](#); and

WHEREAS: The current iteration of CPP was also borne out of countless [reports](#) and commissions as well as [delays](#) and [frustrations](#) with planning, and future planning needs to grapple with the lessons learned from years of effort; and the City Council received updates on implementation, including [at a roundtable on January 13, 2025](#); and

WHEREAS: On [November 10, 2025](#) the City Council and School Committee met with the City administration and School Department to discuss macroeconomic trends in Cambridge and preview budget and tax levy projections, and the key takeaways of that discussion and the Finance Committee meeting this term confirm that the City is experiencing a multi-year economic slowdown and the City needs to moderate budget growth to protect the City's financial stability and taxpayer impact; and

WHEREAS: Expanding CPP would be a substantial investment and would clearly impact long-term budget planning, and so in the years before implementation, the City should begin scoping programming and begin to place targets on future implementation, including evaluating different models for means-testing programming, which could allow for further expansion of offerings for Cambridge families within a further limited municipal budget; and

WHEREAS: The costs of childcare have an enormous impact on families in Cambridge, and high childcare costs also keep parents, especially women, out of the labor force and can result in economic disparities in women's labor market; and

WHEREAS: Access to high quality, affordable childcare is a proven path towards enhancing economic mobility and reducing stress on families, and has great potential to do the

same in Cambridge; and

WHEREAS: In 2022 New Mexico significantly [expanded child-care services](#) offering free childcare to all families earning up to 400% of the federal poverty level, and in the process has lifted at least 120,000 people out of poverty, making it one of the most significant investments in the social safety net in the country and an extremely successful poverty reduction investment, and New Mexico recently [expanded the effort](#), guaranteeing no-cost universal child care starting November 1, 2025, showing a strategic expansion of services over time; and

WHEREAS: By taking a long-term approach to planning for expansion of existing CPP programming, including discussing how means-testing programming might help fund expansion sooner, the community can plan for future expansion and strategize financial commitments in the years to come, and by investing in affordable childcare services, one of the largest expenses for families, and surest means of supporting economic mobility; now therefore be it

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to work with the City Council and relevant City departments on the process by which Cambridge can expand free early child care offerings, including models for means-tested programming, and exploration of non-City funding sources, from the state or foundations, towards the goal of universal, free, quality child care for every family; and be it further

ORDERED: That in implementing any means-tested component of expanded early childcare programming, the City Manager be and hereby is requested to ensure that families remain eligible for free early childcare by default, unless they voluntarily self-identify by checking a box on their application attesting that the cost of childcare would not constitute a financial hardship, in which case they shall be charged the applicable fee; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the Council with an initial report for Council discussion by April.

In City Council March 2, 2026.

Adopted as Amended by Affirmative

Vote of Eight Members:- One Councillor voted as Present

Attest:- Paula M. Crane, Interim City Clerk

A true copy;



ATTEST:-

Paula M. Crane
Interim City Clerk