



Cambridge  
Nonprofit  
Coalition



May 13th, 2020

Dear City Manager Louis DePasquale and Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui,

*“I cannot follow the CDC guidelines in congregate shelter, (if I could even get into one), nor out on the streets. I cannot take a shower, the soap is nearly always out of the few sanitation stations, and I’ve soiled myself three times waiting for a toilet. What am I supposed to do?”*

- An unhoused participant of the Cambridge Women’s Center

*“If they don’t want us to be on the streets, they should get us hotel rooms. If you let me know you’re gonna pay for a room for me, then I’ll be like sure, let’s go...I wanna be separated. Whatever type of virus this is, I don’t want to be a part of it.”*

- An unhoused parishioner of the Outdoor Church

We write to you as nonprofit and faith community leaders across **56 institutions** in support of the unhoused community of Cambridge. Specifically, we urge the City to act quickly to fully implement the vital concerns brought up by 1) a 119-signature petition from community members experiencing homelessness, and 2) ongoing conversations that both unhoused participants and staff of the Material Aid and Advocacy Program (MAAP) have had with the City. ***We are grateful for the City’s hard work to meet many of the homeless community’s needs at this time. However, there remain serious gaps in our collective response that we need to address together.*** Therefore, we not only strongly support MAAP’s advocacy, but we offer ourselves as partners and collaborators in the City response, and intend to do our part to support the unhoused community through and beyond this crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added incredibly difficult new challenges on top of old problems for the roughly 150 members of the unhoused community in Cambridge. In normal times, the coffee shops, public libraries, restaurants, and human service providers of Cambridge provided unhoused people access to limited hygiene facilities. However, with the closures of these facilities, it has become exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for unhoused Cantabridgians to meet their basic bodily needs in a safe and dignified manner. ***It has also prevented homeless residents from following CDC guidelines to prevent contraction or community spread of***

**COVID-19.** Furthermore, nearly all shelters in Cambridge have decreased the amount of participants they are taking in and are no longer taking any new guests. There were not enough beds to serve the homeless prior to this crisis, and now, despite the War Memorial opening, we are still facing a crisis as we lack the space for those most in need.

Therefore, we urge action in the following seven areas:

- 1. 20 bathrooms, 5 each in Central, Harvard, and Porter Squares, and Alewife.** We are grateful to the City for unlocking two more port-a-potties in Harvard Square, bringing the available bathroom count from two to four. However, four bathrooms for about 150 people is still not enough, particularly in order to meet CDC guidelines and prevent transmission of COVID-19.
- 2. 16 handwashing stations, 4 each in Central, Harvard, and Porter Squares, and Alewife.** We are grateful to the City's addition of two handwashing stations in Harvard Square, bringing the available handwashing station count from three to five. However, five handwashing stations is not enough for 150 people. The sanitation handwashing stations are also frequently out of soap and water, and we also urge you to refill them more regularly than once a week. The inadequate number of handwashing stations and bathrooms is likely accelerating the spread of COVID-19 in Cambridge, both among the homeless community and in the City as a whole.
- 3. 20 shower facilities.** Homeless Cantabridgians have expressed a severe lack of shower access, which is especially important during this public health crisis when high levels of hygiene must be practiced. We urge the City to make every effort to identify shower facilities and hope to collaborate with the City to serve this need, including volunteers and facilities from our communities of faith. We are willing to staff our shower facilities with trusted service providers, so long as the City can financially support the staff time. We also urge the City to contract a service to provide and launder towels for homeless community members.
- 4. Remove unnecessary barriers to accessing existing shelters.** Unhoused community members have spoken to the difficulty of getting into the War Memorial and other shelters, given overly stringent requirements like having to test negative before entering. Since testing has been infrequent, this functionally serves to keep many homeless community members from staying in these shelters due to no fault of their own. These obstacles should be removed.
- 5. Create a weekly, non-mandatory testing site at one of the existing food distribution centers in Cambridge.** In order to ensure that homeless community members can follow CDC guidelines during this pandemic, we urge the City to increase access to testing. While we are grateful for the opening of a new testing site in East Cambridge, the appointment requirement and location make it inaccessible for many unhoused residents. By contrast, the vast majority of the unhoused community visits a certain few trusted programs for daily meals, many of which are hosted by our faith institutions. Therefore,

the City should partner with a trusted meals program and provide weekly, on-site, non-mandatory COVID-19 testing to any homeless resident who wants it.

**6. Create a safe homeless encampment zone, contracted to trusted service providers.**

For many homeless residents shelter is not an option. Those homeless community members deserve a safe, physically distanced place to stay that is designated by the City, where they will not be moved along by police and instead supported by public health professionals and peers. Therefore, the City should create a safe homeless encampment zone, where homeless individuals have access to tents, bathrooms, sanitation, food, water, and medical support as necessary. There are a number of possible locations for such an encampment, such as Danehy Park, JFK Park, or Riverbend Park. A model can be found in the [‘Hillsborough Hope’](#) encampment in Tampa, Florida.

**7. Provide for 150 beds in hotels and dormitories for unhoused Cantabridgians.**

Cambridge homeless residents deserve a place to rest their head, take a shower, and physically distance during this unprecedented time, just as everyone does. Therefore, we urge the City to push to secure 150 beds in hotels and dormitories in and around Cambridge, so that every homeless community member has the choice to stay in a room if they wish. In a highly resourced community like ours with so many empty dormitory and hotel rooms, we should be making every effort as a city to ensure that the most vulnerable among us receive safe and dignified shelter.

We, the undersigned, stand in solidarity with these requests and concerns, drawn from our own deep relationships with members of the homeless community. We know that City leadership is under tremendous stress to respond to the thousands of needs arising every day in Cambridge. We stand with you as partners and collaborators, and offer our volunteers, facilities, and ears to the ground as we weather this storm together. We urge you to take immediate action for the safety and dignity of our unhoused neighbors, and for the public health of this city.

We look forward to learning of your plans to implement these facilities and capacities in a timely manner.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Elena Sokolow-Kaufman, Managing Director, **Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition**

Rev. Daniel Smith, Senior Minister, Rev. Kate Layzer, Street Outreach Minister, Jim Stewart, First Church Shelter, Alice Kidder, Missions and Social Justice Committee,

**First Church Cambridge**

Kathleen Patrón, Lead Organizer/Executive Director, Shayok Chakraborty, Associate Organizer,

**Greater Boston Interfaith Organization**

Cassie Hurd, Executive Director, **Material Aid and Advocacy Program**

Bishop Lawrence Ward, Senior Pastor, **Abundant Life Church**  
Maria LaPage, **Agassiz Baldwin Community**  
Gina Scaramella, **Boston Area Rape Crisis Center**  
Dan Yonah Marshall, **Brookline/Cambridge Community Center for the Arts**  
Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, President, **Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance**  
Sharon Zimmerman, **Cambridge Camping Association**  
Darrin Korte, **Cambridge Community Center**  
Rev. Larry Kim, Senior Pastor, **Cambridge Community Fellowship Church**  
Susan Fleischmann, **Cambridge Community Television**  
Robert Gittens, **Cambridge Family and Children's Service**  
Theodora Skeadas, **Cambridge Local First**  
Jan Latorre-Stiller, **Cambridge Neighbors**  
Meg Ramsdell, **Cambridge School Volunteers**  
Laurie Rothstein, **Cambridge Volunteer Clearinghouse**  
Jessye Kass, **Cambridge Women's Center**  
Rev. Warren Collins, Pastor, **Calvary Praise and Worship Center**  
Laura Jasinski, **Charles River Conservancy**  
Rev. Jonathan Eden, Associate Rector, Rev. Kathryn Ellredge, Interim Priest, **Christ Church  
Cambridge**  
Rev. Clayton Ward, Pastor, **Christian Mission Holiness Church**  
Jane Hirschi, **CitySprouts Inc**  
David Gibbs, **Community Action Agency of Somerville**  
Eryn Johnson, **Community Art Center**  
Gail Packer, **Community Dispute Settlement Center**  
Salvatore Bramante, **Dante Alighieri Society of Massachusetts**  
Michael Delia, **East End House**  
Ben Clark, **Enroot Inc.**  
Sasha Purpura, **Food For Free**  
Ian Harrington, Co-presiding Clerk, LJ Boswell, Resident Friend, **Friends Meeting at  
Cambridge**  
Steven Nutter, **Green Cambridge**  
Laurie Howell, Co-Director, Judy Siemen, Co-Director, **Harvard Square Churches Meals  
Program**  
Michael K. Dawson, **Innovators for Purpose**  
Carl Nagy-Koechlin, **Just-A-Start Corporation**  
Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Senior Pastor, **Kingdom Empowerment Center**  
Kimberly Massenburg, **Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House**  
Paulo Pinto, **Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers**  
Rev. Cody J. Sanders, Pastor, **Old Cambridge Baptist Church**  
Martha Sandler, **On The Rise**

The Ven. Patricia Zifcak, Senior Minister, Rev. Tom Hathaway, Minister, Wendy Tanahashi-Works, Board Member, **Outdoor Church of Cambridge**  
Bishop Brian Greene, Senior Pastor, Kia Martin, Executive Pastor, **Pentecostal Tabernacle, North and South Campuses**  
Robin Nadeau, **Per Scholas Greater Boston**  
Rev. Steve Watson, Senior Pastor, Rev. Lydia Shiu, Associate Pastor, **Reservoir Church**  
Ronnie Millar, **Rian Immigrant Center**  
Alice E. Kidder, **Solutions at Work, Inc.**  
Rev. Matthew Stewart, Priest-in-Charge, **St. James's Episcopal Church**  
Rev. Ellis Washington, Pastor, **St. Paul AME Church**  
Christopher Hope, **The Loop Lab**  
Sarah Gyorog, **Transition House**  
Kathryn Fenneman, **Tutoring Plus of Cambridge**  
Joan Squeri, **Union Partnership for a Whole Community**  
Rev. Kathleen O'Keefe Reed, Pastor, **University Lutheran**  
Mardie Hinkley, **Violeta Montessori School**  
Eva Martin Blythe, **YWCA Cambridge**