

2017-07-17

Economy Working Group #3

Committee Attendees

Chris Barr, Sarah Gallop, Josh Gerber, Theresa Hamacher, Denise Jilson, Daniel Lander, Gina Plata, Ruth Ryals, Daniel Shenfeld, Ottavio Siani, Saul Tannenbaum, Ty Wilson.

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Gary Chan, Lisa Hemmerle, Christina DiLisio, Pardis Saffari, Sue Walsh, Susan Mintz

Utile: Tim Love, Nupoor Monani, John McCartin

HR&A: Kyle Vangel, Sara Brown

UMDI: Branner Stewart, Chris Jurek

Committee Members Absent

Dave Holtz, Jay Kiely, Ivy Moylan, Mary Ting Hyatt, Ebi Poweigha

One member of the public present.

Meeting overview

Branner Stewart presented ongoing research of best practices in workforce development. Thereafter, Sara Brown led a facilitated discussion to confirm the list of strategies and actions generated through the WG process and fill any gaps. Kyle Vangel followed with a presentation of what makes a successful indicator and presented ideas for what Cambridge could track to measure progress along economy goals. The presentation is available [here](#).

Committee Discussion

Workforce development discussion

- One member asked the consultants to elaborate on why these are considered “best practices.”
 - Consultant team clarified that this research was still in progress. In the upcoming phase, the team would identify ideas that are best suited for Cambridge to realize its goal of creating high paying livable wages for all residents.
- Members asked for more information on the BostonPIC Summer Internship program, specifically the outreach strategies they use to connect with the 3,000 teens served through its summer jobs programs.
- Members further asked if all the agencies involved in the best practices presented were government or non-profit institutions. They would like the team to clearly flag programs by for-profit organizations.
- Members asked about the relative impacts of these programs at specific levels of training, wondering if high-school or post-college internships are more impactful.
 - City staff answered that most research shows early work experiences are better to ensure people stay in the labor market over the long run.
- One member suggested looking at the Boston Foundation’s work for a greater insight into best practices. Another member pointed out the Cambridge Community Foundation’s efforts to study workforce development opportunities through the [Boomtown/Hometown report](#). They strongly felt that businesses associations could play a greater role in serving as a conduit for workforce development.

- To this, a member responded that the Harvard Square Business Association has been in a decade-long partnership with the Community Charter School of Cambridge to provide 12-week internships to students. They have recently partnered with the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School too, and would like to expand this further. Members supported this idea, noting that if internships are offered for school credit it would become easier for small businesses to participate in these efforts as well.

Strategies / indicators discussion

Strategy 1:

Support the growth of core sectors that drive Cambridge's and the region's prosperity.

- Members commented that this section was missing the mention of universities as key forces in driving Cambridge's economic position. They recommended that the City be clear about enhancing partnerships with the universities as one of the actions through tech transfer, academic mentorships for startups, and other such initiatives.

Strategy 2:

Expand hiring of Cambridge residents by Cambridge businesses, with a focus on opening up new pathways of opportunity for underserved residents.

- Members noticed that actions here did not address the surest pathway to higher earnings which they identified as educational attainment.
 - The consultant team pointed to strategy 5 which covers the holistic infrastructure to support families in need.
 - Action C - City staff clarified that this action is "earn and learn" and would include opportunities for adult learners and underserved residents to earn money while they build their skills and education, which may require flexibility on the part of employers for incumbent workers along with opportunities for residents to participate in internships to earn money while they build skills.
- Action D – City staff remarked that there is not much evidence that recognizing employers who provide a living wage publicly leads to an increase in this practice. Members agreed that this action could be folded into the strategies to strengthen overall outreach.
- Some also worried that this strategy would burden City staff who have limited capacity and suggested the Chamber of Commerce could take the lead on conducting such outreach through their website.
- Some members wanted to see stronger actions that would lead employers to pay a living wage, like creating tax incentives. This did not get much consensus from the group - many members worried that such an action would create an additional level of red-tape and may disincentivize small businesses from hiring low skilled workers.

Strategy 3:

Build a comprehensive, integrated workforce development approach that targets specific key sectors and intentionally creates career pathways for Cambridge residents.

- Members thought it was difficult to prioritize the actions in the absence of targets that would determine their scale and impact. As a general principle, they would like the City to invest in scaling the "most effective" programs.

- Members felt that action should expand to ensure that participants in the City's adult education programs who are looking for work should have a place in the workforce.
- Action E - Members advocated for the creation of a centrally coordinated communication channel for businesses developed with a focus on user experience. City staff agreed that streamlining communication with businesses should be added as a new action.
- Members asked City staff to provide a fuller picture of whom the City serves through their workforce development programs, and a summary of the unmet need. City staff responded that there are about 900 members enrolled in adult basic education programs citywide.

Strategy 4:

Establish the City as a leader in attracting and retaining firms, including those in emerging industry clusters.

- City staff commented that there are many efforts in place to achieve this but it is not publicized enough. Members agreed and suggested this be incorporated in strategy 1.
 - Generally, members felt that the City doesn't take enough credit for being the center of the innovation economy and should focus on communication and public relations to highlight City efforts that keep businesses coming and growing in Cambridge. They encouraged the City to announce through outreach that "Cambridge is open for business" and establish itself as an "economic powerhouse with vibrant quality of life."
- Members suggested adding a near-term timeframe of 6-18 months for actions that are immediately implementable. They identified actions D, E, F, J, M, P, X as such. They also asked to clarify whether the timeframe reflected when the action was undertaken, i.e. initiated, or achieved, i.e. when the target is expected to be met. In relation to long-term strategies members noted that these should be carried forward to next year's capital budget to ensure that they are implemented.
- Action O – members asked to remove the verb "consider" noting that these actions would have to be implemented to ensure meet the development goals of Alewife.
- Members identified that actions P, M, N are already in place and that businesses should be made aware of them more strongly through outreach.
- A member suggested adding free broadband service to support Cambridge's economy and home-based businesses.
- Members identified many overlaps in the actions within strategies S1 and S6. They suggested combining both, and removing actions like M which the City should be doing on an ongoing basis.

Strategy 5:

Make investments in social and economic inclusion that support Cambridge's desirability as a place to live and work and its long-term economic competitiveness.

- Members asked to change the timeframe of action S to "short-term" and change action R to "modified"

Strategy 6:

Provide necessary multi-modal transportation, public infrastructure, and built environment improvements where job density and growth is desired.

- Members proposed changing the time frame to short term and coordinating this action with the Mobility Working Group.

Strategy 7:

Maximize effective use of public and private real estate to mitigate real estate pressures and support small business growth and community purposes.

- Some members felt against using TIFs to achieve this strategy.
 - The planning team clarified that TIFs and BIDs have not been extensively used in the City to date, and that City Manager's office also did not favor TIFs. They deferred to recommendations of the Retail Strategy Plan for actions relate to public improvements.
 - City staff suggested considering Community Benefits Districts as an alternative mechanism to BIDs.

Strategy 8, 9, 10:

(Included from the Retail Strategy Plan.)

- *Encourage the provision of affordable commercial space.*
- *Enhance the experience within Cambridge's diverse commercial districts through necessary public realm improvements and the promotion of local events and activities.*
- *Help small business owners prepare for a changing competitive environment.*

- Members suggested lowering the commercial tax rate for businesses that provide affordable commercial space.
 - City staff pointed out that lowering tax rate for small businesses is illegal per state legislature. This strategy could be achieved through exemptions and credits which the City is currently exploring. Zoning has been used to provide requirements for set aside innovation space, and doing this for retail may be another option. The City is also currently looking at lowering fees collected by city for small businesses.
- Members strongly suggested moving towards improvements Central Square, rather than "considering" this as part of action AD.
- To this point, another member suggested looking outside the squares, comprehensively at all the retail locations in the city.
- City staff elaborated that the focus of action AF in the Retail Strategy Plan was on enabling omni-channel experience to enable in-store pickups for consumers who order online.
 - Members suggested that City staff hire experts who can help craft specific actions within this effort. Some also suggested using external grant funding or CDBGs for such a study. The City is currently looking at this in greater detail.

Indicators and targets discussion

- Members asked the planning team to look into how unionization affects job and wage growth. They suggested measuring indicators C and D (wage growth among low-wage earners and disparities in median income) by age and gender to better align with the strategies discussed.
- Members supported indicator E and suggested making a stronger connection between this and the strategies. Some suggested including a MBE/WBE requirement in all City contracts.
- Members noted an imbalance among the focus of the indicators and suggested adding those related to the business and fiscal health of the city to support the social and equity-focused indicators.
 - The planning team agreed and suggested production of commercial space/space for employment per year, or growth of commercial tax revenue as examples.
 - Members supported the idea of adding more business-focused indicators and suggested that local businesses be counted separately as an indicator of community stability.

- Members asked if the City has a tracking system in place for the number of businesses or employees.
 - The consultant team answered that the City produces a list of the largest businesses. Data about businesses beyond this is available by zip code.
- Members suggested adding targets and indicators to the strategies matrix to ensure that the scale of action is directly tied to the needs of the city.
 - The consultant team supported having specificity among targets saying that the system of governance in Cambridge makes it more politically feasible to do so. Adding targets like “two new companies with ten people or more every year” also harkens back to the City’s goal of communication and outreach.
 - On the point of governance systems, City staff chimed in to say that the upcoming best practices research should focus on City Manager run administrations to draw better parallels with Cambridge.