

2017-12-07

Economy Working Group #4

Committee Attendees

Sarah Gallop, Josh Gerber, Theresa Hamacher, Gina Plata, Ruth Ryals, Daniel Shenfeld, Saul Tannenbaum, Ty Wilson.

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Gary Chan, Lisa Hemmerle, Pardis Saffari, Sue Walsh, Allyson Allen

Utile: Nupoor Monani

HR&A: Kyle Vangel

UMDI: Branner Stewart, Chris Jurek

Committee Members Absent

Chris Barr, Dave Holtz, Denise Jillson, Jay Kiely, Daniel Lander, Ivy Moylan, Mary Ting Hyatt, Ebi Poweigha, Ottavio Siani.

Two members of the public present.

Meeting overview

Kyle Vangel led a facilitated discussion to review and prioritize actions. Actions were sorted into four categories based on difficulty and estimated impact. The Working Group discussed the language of each action and confirmed where they should be placed on the prioritization matrix. This was followed by a discussion of indicators and the Working Group's recommendations for which should be included in the plan. The presentation is available [here](#).

Committee Discussion

Actions discussion:

- Overall, members commented that the actions read as a long laundry list and it was hard to identify the big ideas. They agreed on the need to prioritize and clearly point to the 4-5 big themes that cover the group's recommendations.

Easy Wins

- Action A: Members debated City staff's capacity to implement this action. They acknowledged that the City is taking the lead in advancing the regional discussion (e.g. through the GBREC or Mayors Mayors Coalition) and that the action was an easy win.
- Action H: Members agreed that the feasibility and funding required to realize this action needed further study by the universities and proposed that the City should help universities to identify gaps and commit resources.

Lower Impact / High Difficulty actions

- Action C: Some members identified this as one of the most important actions the City should pursue over the long term to maintain its position in the global economy.
- Action E: Members raised a concern about all data-driven actions being deprioritized in the matrix. They remarked that the data collection and monitoring has been a recurring theme in the working group's discussions. Business process improvement is a goal of the plan and the City should commit resources to these efforts and monitor them on an ongoing basis.

- City staff commented that Action I was tagged as having a lower impact because in the time taken to gather and assess data about employer's needs, the needs themselves may likely change. Considering the working groups strong preference to maintain data-driven actions they agreed to make this a Major Project.
- Action G: Members remarked that growing light industrial uses that provide low barrier to entry jobs is a flagship initiative of the plan and has been deeply explored in Alewife. They suggested consolidating actions relating to this in the Major Projects category.

Major Projects

- Action N: One member pointed out that the need for municipal broadband has already been studied and established by a City Manager appointed taskforce. The taskforce made a clear recommendation to conduct a feasibility study and identify a viable business model. Members agreed that the action should be amended to allude to this fact and rephrased to say, "Implement the City Manager's Broadband Task Force Recommendation by performing a focused feasibility study of a municipal broadband solution to provide competitive and affordable broadband to all Cambridge residents and businesses."
- Action U: One member commented that keeping small businesses in Cambridge is a major goal for the plan. They asked where this topic was being covered in the recommendations.
 - City staff clarified that having different tax rates for different commercial enterprises would be in violation of state law. The City is therefore studying the possibility of providing exemptions to small businesses.
- Action G (related to low-cost capital, and light industrial land trust): Members noted that both these actions are overlapping and more impactful if communicated together. They requested combining them.
- Action L: Some members commented that an action related to early education did not belong in the economy recommendations.
 - City staff noted that access to and cost of quality early education is one of the biggest barriers to economic productivity, and that this action speaks to the equity goal.
- Action G (related to light industrial zoning): Members asked why the action was phrased as "requiring" light industrial uses as opposed to simply "permitting" them.
 - The consultant team pointed out that simply "permitting" light uses will not create these uses. Light industrial is not the highest use in the city from a real estate value perspective, so if left to their own devices, the private market would always preference office or lab uses over industrial.
 - City staff clarified that this could be ensured by either incentivizing industrial developers or restricting other uses, and that the mechanism for implementing this action was yet to be determined.
- Action O: One member commented that rezoning would be the hardest part of implementing this action. Another asked if it was classified "difficult" because of implicit concerns about flooding and transportation issues in Alewife.
 - The consultant team confirmed that both these were considered while sorting Action O.
- One member noted that the city's demographic profile is rapidly changing widening the gap between its residents, knowledge base, and economic opportunity. They wondered if the city should allocate resources to studying the demographic profile in more detail and updating it regularly. Several others seconded this thought.
 - The consultant team recommended reorienting Action I to cover this and moving it to Easy Wins.

Fill ins

- Action S: Members recommended changing this to a recurring quarterly or monthly fee instead of an annual fee. Members supported prioritizing this action actively as it would penalize land / business owners who hold out for higher rents.
 - City staff responded that they were presently studying this through a Council Policy Order and looking at maintaining a registry. In the process, they want to ensure that small business owners are not getting unfairly penalized.
- Action B: Members noted that the cost and impact of this action would be determined by how the City chooses to pursue it. At the minimum, classifying it as an Easy Win will ensure that the City pursues a rebranding and visibility strategy.
 - The consultant team nuanced the action further noting that there are two separate questions, the City's recruiting and marketing efforts to attract large firms in core sectors, and separately, ways in which the City celebrates successes and visually identifies Cambridge as a leader in the innovation economy. The idea of recognizing Cambridge's successes in the community has percolated throughout the process.
 - The group agreed to amend the action make it more outward facing about recognizing the City's successes. The City communicated that the City's recruiting efforts to attract firms in core sectors is largely covered by Action A.

Indicators discussion:

- Commenting on indicator 4, one member noted that this is not a good indicator to measure economic mobility. Even as individuals become more prosperous and grow out of poverty, the relative share of people in poverty would not be likely to change. The recognized that measuring economic mobility comes with challenges of data but thought it worthwhile for the City to invest resources in developing and tracking metrics around this goal.
- Members noted that indicator 3 should be adjusted to measure the intended impact of workforce development programs.
 - City staff noted the difficulty in tracking long term impacts after people move out of the program. The consultant team also spoke of their experience trying to track data to measure economic opportunity partnering cities with non-profits, but these partnerships can be difficult to forge.
 - The working group strongly supported making this a part of the recommendations.
- Members asked to see more indicators relating to small business development and visibly establishing Cambridge as a leader in the innovation economy.
 - The consultant team indicated it will investigate the possibility of using the Census Bureau's Zip Code Business Patterns data for this purpose.
- Members asked to see indicator 1 broken up by business size or industry cluster.
- Members asked to see an indicator measuring growth in core sectors.
 - City staff responded that this data is tracked annually, and they would include it in the list of Envision Cambridge indicators.
- Overall, some members thought that the indicators as presented are unrelatable and do not inspire pride in the community. They would like to see some of them translated to ranking, e.g. "Be the first," or "Be the best."

There were no comments from the public.