



City of Cambridge

POR 2026-186
FIRST IN COUNCIL
October 5, 2026

COUNCILLOR NOLAN
COUNCILLOR SOBRINHO-WHEELER
MAYOR SIDDIQUI
VICE MAYOR AZEEM

- WHEREAS: The City of Cambridge, through the Department of Public Works (DPW), has been working collaboratively with the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and the City of Somerville to develop a Draft Updated CSO Control Plan, as required by Water Quality Variances for the Charles River and Alewife Brook issued by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); and
- WHEREAS: The Health and Environment Committee of the Cambridge City Council met on September 9, 2025 to bring together representatives from the three watershed advocacy groups (Charles River Watershed Association, Mystic River Watershed Association, and Save the Alewife Brook) to discuss the City's work to reduce combined sewer overflows and the Draft CSO Control Plan, which led to policy order [POR 2025 #136](#) and a response from the City Manager, [CMA 2025 #309](#) and the creation of a CSO Control and Stormwater Management Advisory Committee; and
- WHEREAS: The [Draft CSO Control Plan](#), published in April 2026, is going through the public review process, which formally ends October 30, 2026, and the Cambridge City Council should use this opportunity to positively influence the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan and advocate for virtual elimination of Combined Sewer Overflows in the future; and
- WHEREAS: The Draft Updated CSO Control Plan outlines in detail a number of different CSO Control Alternatives (0 CSOs in 2050 TY, Limited CSOs in 2050 TY, 0 CSOs in 2050 5yr storm, 0 CSOs in 2050 25yr storm, and full sewer separation) and are based on a 2050 typical year calculation that accounts for increased number of intense rainfall events due to the impacts of climate change, but a 2050TY standard, while representing significant progress, would still have allowed CSOs in almost half years in the historical 10-year period from 2015 to 2024, and the City of Cambridge and the entire CSO Control Plan Partnership should work to ensure that CSOs are truly a rare occurrence in the year 2050; and
- WHEREAS: Combined Sewer Overflows discharge untreated or partially treated sewage, bacteria, pathogens, nutrients, and other pollutants into the Charles River, Alewife Brook, and connected waterways during wet-weather events, creating risks to public health, including to Environmental Justice populations; and

WHEREAS: The actions required by the various CSO Control Plan alternatives have total estimated costs between \$1.3B and \$4.74B, across the region, and so costs need to be considered equitably and the cost should be distributed as broadly as possible across the largest ratepayer and taxpayer base for the entire state and MWRA regional waterways system, and the City of Cambridge and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have more work to do to ensure that tax-supported funding is available for large infrastructure projects and to protect low-income residents from rising utility bills; and cost models and financial planning should continue to be expanded to include public health costs, environmental costs, and the costs of work after 2050 beyond the scope of the Draft Plan; and

WHEREAS: Committing to a regional plan that still allows for CSOs 25 years from now ensures that we will have more expensive work to do in the future, and the CSO Control Plan Partnership should spend more time investigating a range of hybrid solutions at higher levels of control than the 2050TY in order to continue to identify different solutions in different impact areas and continue to pursue efficiencies and alternatives to push for a near 25yr level of control, ensuring that CSOs in the year 2050 are truly a rare occurrence; and

WHEREAS: In addition to the action plans considered in the Draft CSO Control Plan, the City of Cambridge have done proactive and important work on sewer separation citywide over the past few decades and introduced novel stormwater and CSO retention tank systems like the project at [135 Sherman Street](#), that, while not a permanent solution or in lieu of larger sewer separation projects, are good and important projects that will significantly reduce CSOs in Cambridge in the short term and can be converted to an essential part of a long term vision for stormwater management locally, and that the 135 Sherman Street Multi-Use Facility has the potential to result in a 2050TY 2yr storm level of control at CAM401A, the most active CSO Outfall in Cambridge currently, significantly improving public health outcomes and stormwater mitigation for the entire region; and

WHEREAS: This region has a generational opportunity to improve the public health and safety of the region's waterways and its residents, and failing to take stronger action and ensuring a stronger level of CSO Control will ensure that the cost of improving our regional infrastructure and the public health and environmental costs for improving this system will fall to future generations at greater costs; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record urging the CSO Control Partnership to continue to work to refine the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan to investigate a range of hybrid solutions at higher levels of control, ensuring that Combined Sewer Overflows are a truly rare occurrence in the future, and push for virtual elimination of Combined Sewer Overflows through this Control Plan; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record urging the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to advocate for stronger levels of CSO Control, ensuring that the CSO Control Plan continues to work to investigate a variety of CSO Control Plan options at higher levels of control, ensuring that CSOs in the year 2050 are truly a rare occurrence; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to work with relevant City staff to advocate for a stronger level of CSO Control and virtual CSO elimination by 2050 in the CSO Control Plan and to advocate for broader funding across the state and entire MWRA region, and for additional federal funding; and be it further

ORDERED: That the Cambridge City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to the CSO Control Partnership, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, each member of the Cambridge delegation to the state legislature, Governor Healey, and Secretary Tepper of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs on behalf of the entire City Council.

In City Council October 5, 2026.

Adopted as Amended by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas 9; Nays 0; Absent 0.

Attest:- Paula M. Crane, Interim City Clerk

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paula M. Crane".

ATTEST:-

Paula M. Crane
Interim City Clerk