



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING TO DISCUSS THE AVAILABILITY OF COOLING CENTERS IN THE CITY OF BOSTON DURING EXTREME HEAT EMERGENCIES

- WHEREAS,* In April 2022, the City of Boston released a comprehensive Heat Resilience Plan highlighting that average temperatures in Massachusetts have risen by approximately 3.5°F and that Boston has experienced more hot days in the past decade than in any previous half-century, underscoring an urgent need to prepare for increasingly frequent and severe heat events; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Extreme heat is a major public health concern that causes more fatalities nationally than any other weather event, emphasizing the need for coordinated strategies such as a citywide heat response plan to protect residents during high-temperature periods; *and*
- WHEREAS,* A heat wave is generally defined as a period of three or more consecutive days over 90°F, and climate projections indicate that Massachusetts will continue to see an increase in the number of high-heat days during the summer months; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Certain neighborhoods in Boston experience higher temperatures, enter high-heat conditions sooner, and remain in heat wave conditions longer than other areas, demonstrating a critical need for targeted cooling interventions; *and*
- WHEREAS,* The Heat Resilience Plan stresses that equitable heat resilience requires putting people at the center by expanding access to cooling resources and addressing systemic factors that contribute to disproportionate heat burdens; *and*
- WHEREAS,* The Plan recommends enhancing and expanding City-run cooling centers by developing dedicated programming, improving accessibility, and increasing the network of cooling spaces, particularly in neighborhoods with high heat vulnerability, to better protect residents during heat emergencies; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Guidance from the state Department of Public Health recommends that cooling centers be located in air-conditioned public facilities such as libraries, community centers, and senior centers, and that their operation be coordinated with boards of health, emergency management authorities, and community partners; *and*
- WHEREAS,* State guidance further emphasizes the importance of identifying vulnerable neighborhoods and populations, utilizing climate vulnerability mapping tools, and conducting broad multilingual outreach to ensure residents are aware of available cooling resources; *and*

- WHEREAS,* The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency advises residents to stay hydrated, seek air-conditioned public spaces such as libraries, community centers, and theaters when home cooling is unavailable, and consult local authorities for cooling center locations; *and*
- WHEREAS,* A 2023 study estimated that while roughly 77% of Boston residents live within a 15-minute walk of a community center or library designated as a cooling center, at least 19 additional centers would be required to serve 95% of residents and 45 additional centers would be needed to fully cover the city's population; *and*
- WHEREAS,* The City has taken important steps such as creating a multilingual Summer Cooling Guide and launching a Citywide Cooling Network communications strategy to expand public awareness of cooling resources and provide advance information before extreme heat events; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Public health authorities consistently identify older adults, young children, and individuals with chronic health conditions as among the most vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, making it essential that cooling centers be accessible to these high-risk groups; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Densely populated areas of the city with limited tree canopy and green space are particularly susceptible to extreme heat, exacerbating health risks for older adults, young children, socially isolated individuals, and outdoor workers; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Additional best practices for cooling centers include providing backup generators, programming and activities for guests, separate family spaces, accommodations for pets, access to power stations for device charging, and the availability of on-site health and social services; *NOW, THEREFORE BE IT*
- ORDERED:* That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss the availability of cooling centers in the city of Boston during extreme heat emergencies, and that representatives of city agencies, including the Boston Public Health Commission, Office of Emergency Management, Public Facilities Department, and Boston Centers for Youth and Families, as well as relevant stakeholders and interested members of the public, be invited to attend.

Filed on: April 28, 2025