About A Better Cambridge: A Better Cambridge (ABC) is an all-volunteer group committed to

creating a more affordable, diverse, sustainable, and vibrant Cambridge. We believe more

housing, more affordable housing, and stronger tenant protections are critical to creating a city

that lives up to our values. Read our full values statement here.

Our Process:

● Please keep all answers under 2000 characters unless otherwise specified.

● We will publish all responses to every question (except contact person info) on our

website.

● Candidates who fill out this questionnaire will be invited to the ABC Candidate Forum,

which we will hold on Tuesday, September 12th at 6pm. Candidates wishing to

participate in the forum must complete this questionnaire by midnight Monday,

August 21st.

● Questionnaire responses must be submitted using this Google form.

● If the ABC Steering Committee seeks clarification on a candidate’s questionnaire

responses, we may ask for a short interview.

● As soon as possible after the ABC Candidate Forum, we will make final endorsement

determinations by looking at questionnaire responses in addition to backgrounds, voting

records (if applicable), advocacy records, platforms, and public statements.

● In 2023, in order to preserve the independence of our IEPAC, ABC will again not be

coordinating election strategy or messaging with any City Council candidate or

committee. Endorsements will not be negotiated. For more information, you may read

the ABC IEPAC Firewall Policy.

● For any further questions about this questionnaire or ABC’s process, please contact Dan

Phillips at danlphillips234@gmail.com

Identifying Information:

● Candidate Name

● Contact Person Name

● Contact Person Email

● Contact Person Phone #

● Would you accept an ABC endorsement? [Yes/No]

Introduction

● Would you like to give a brief introductory statement we can use for our “meet the

candidates” flier?

● What is your personal experience of housing in Cambridge and how has that

affected your decision to run for city council? Do you rent or own? Have you ever

lived in public or subsidized housing?

● From 1980 to 2020 (pre-pandemic), Cambridge on net added ~45,000 jobs but built only

~12,600 homes. As a result, rents and home prices have skyrocketed, making

Cambridge less affordable and more exclusive with each passing year. Cambridge

Housing Authority waitlists have more than 22,500 households on them, and Cambridge

residents consistently select housing affordability as their #1 concern in citywide surveys.

As City Councillor, what would be your top priorities to address our housing

crisis?

Housing Abundance

● ABC believes that Cambridge’s current housing crisis is in part the product of a historical

effort to weaponize the zoning code to segregate the city by class and race. On about a

third of the residential land in Cambridge, building new apartment buildings is prohibited

outright by zoning. And even where they are legal in theory, dimensional standards (e.g.,

height limits, maximum floor-area ratios) and setback requirements have made it

impossible in practice to build new triple-deckers, fourplexes, and townhouses like the

ones that historically made Cambridge affordable to the middle class. In fact, a majority

of Cambridge’s existing housing stock would be illegal if rebuilt today. Furthermore,

Cambridge zoning generally prohibits four or more people who aren’t immediate family

members from sharing a home, discriminating against extended, foster, and LGBTQIA+

families (although this rule is not currently enforced by the city). When these rules were

created in the 20th century, they locked in a racist, classist status quo.

These exclusionary zoning rules promote suburban sprawl, deepen patterns of

segregation, and undermine housing affordability. As Councillor, will you champion

efforts to end exclusionary zoning in Cambridge by reforming the zoning code to

allow, at minimum, four-story multi-family housing by right in all Cambridge

neighborhoods? [Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Please explain.

● There is widespread evidence that the U.S. needs a substantial amount of new housing

and that new housing lowers nearby rents. Furthermore, new housing lowers rents even

for residents that can’t afford the new housing themselves by soaking up demand from

higher-income households. In conjunction with direct support for affordable housing

and inclusionary zoning requirements, do you believe that new market-rate

housing development is a key pillar in making Cambridge an affordable city?

[Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Please explain.

● ABC believes prioritizing transit-oriented development is key in addressing the twin

housing and climate crises. The CDD has estimated that Cambridge’s zoning code is

already in compliance with Massachusetts’ MBTA Communities Act, which requires a

minimum amount of zoned, by-right multi-family housing near transit stations. Do you

believe Cambridge should go further to promote transit-oriented housing

development, such as allowing greater height and density within walking distance

of MBTA stations? [Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Please explain.

● The Alewife Zoning Working Group has proposed an Alewife Overlay District, which

could allow for the development of a few thousand new housing units. The plan currently

features a minimum of 40% residential (vs. commercial) use along with density bonuses

in exchange for developer-funded infrastructure improvements, but ultimately excluded

the Fresh Pond shopping center (“East Quad”), which had been proposed at 18-20

stories for residential. Do you support the proposed overlay district?

[Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Do you support also rezoning the Fresh Pond

shopping center? [Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Please explain.

Housing Affordability

● Do you support the proposal to expand the Affordable Housing Overlay to allow

more height for 100% affordable housing development in major squares (15

stories) and corridors (12 stories)? [Yes/No] Please explain.

● Following an initial fiscal ‘24 budget proposal featuring flat funding for affordable housing

- an effective cut given inflation - ABC successfully advocated for an additional $20

million for the Affordable Housing Trust, bringing AHT funding up to ~5% of the city’s

operating budget. Do you support further increasing city funding for affordable

housing to 10% of the City budget? [Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Please explain.

Housing Stability

● As the 2019 Tenant Displacement Task Force Report notes: “Cambridge will continue to

experience the effects of displacement with greater acuteness unless dramatic

measures are taken in order to assuage this trend.” How can Cambridge better protect

tenants against displacement? Please focus your answer on strategies within

municipal authority (i.e. do not require a home rule petition), and clearly indicate if any

strategies you mention are outside of municipal authority.

● ABC has repeatedly supported state legislation enabling cities to better protect tenants.

Do you support such legislation? [Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] If something like

it passed, what kind of city tenant protections would you favor? Would you

support any kind of rent stabilization, such as the petition from Mayor Wu, which

would cap rent increases at a maximum of 10% while exempting new construction,

along with requiring just cause for eviction?

Environmental Sustainability

● ABC believes housing policy is climate policy. There is a growing body of academic and

think tank research indicating urban infill is a powerful tool, if not the most powerful tool,

that local governments have at their disposal for reducing carbon emissions. Cambridge

is a job-rich, transit-oriented community where people can live much more sustainably

than elsewhere. Do you believe we have a climate obligation to pursue greater

density city-wide and allow more people to live here? [Yes/Generally/Generally

Not/No] Please explain.

Governance

● Cambridge has kicked off a charter review committee to reassess the city’s form of

government.

○ ABC strongly opposes transitioning from at-large proportional representation to

any ward-based system because of the negative effects on political

representation and housing production. Do you favor an at-large system over a

ward-based system? [Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No] Please explain.

○ Are there any other potential charter changes you believe would

significantly help or hinder the city in addressing the housing crisis?

● Unelected land use boards, notably the Planning Board, the Board of Zoning Appeal,

and the Historical Commission / Neighborhood Conservation District commissions, have

been granted significant input on housing decisions despite being unrepresentative of

the city at large, particularly in terms of age and homeownership status, but also with

regards to race and wealth. For example, the BZA shot down a proposal for affordable

housing at 2072 Mass Ave, just across from the Porter transit station, that most City

Councillors supported. Also, the Historical Commission is currently holding up a project

at 231-235 Third St. in East Cambridge to demolish two buildings and build a 5-story

19-unit apartment complex with four inclusionary units. The City Council is currently

considering NCD reforms which would increase diversity on boards and commissions,

amplify the voices of renters, exempt affordable housing, and enforce term limits.

○ Do you believe these bodies need reform generally?

[Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No]

○ Do you support the proposed NCD reforms specifically?

[Yes/Generally/Generally Not/No]

○ Please explain.

● ABC is concerned that Cambridge’s executive branch is not taking strong enough action

to fight the housing crisis. For instance, Cambridge is falling behind its Envision

Cambridge goal of 12,500 net new homes by 2030 and seems to lack an explicit plan to

accelerate housing production, notwithstanding the goal itself being too low given the

historical imbalance between job and home growth. Also, the City’s housing functions

are scattered across different departments, including the Office of the Housing Liaison in

the City Manager’s Office; the Zoning and Development and Housing divisions within the

Community Development Department; and homelessness and eviction services in the

Department of Human Service Programs. In contrast, the state of Massachusetts

recently formed a new Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities in

response to the housing crisis. Would you support combining the City’s housing

functions in a new Housing Department headed by a new Assistant City Manager,

or is there an alternative approach to organization / staffing you would support?

How specifically would you hold the City Manager and city staff accountable for

meeting housing goals?

Other

● Do you have anything else you’d like to highlight about your candidacy?