

2023 Questionnaire for City Council Candidates- Joe McGuirk

How strongly do you support these issues before the city?

#1 is high (for); #2 is moderate; #3 is low (against)

More Accountable City Government: Your support for greater transparency/accountability in the city.

Circle the number that most represents your views. 1 2 3

How have you personally been involved in addressing this? Explain.

Until 2020 my civic engagement was limited. When my kids were young, I simply did not have the bandwidth to pay close attention to matters at city hall. Immediate concerns like housing, food, and childcare distracted me from being more active in local issues. Thankfully, I had family members who would call me every October and tell me what issues were the hottest local topics and instruct me how I should vote. When Covid turned our lives upside down, I ended up with some time on my hands. I started paying closer attention to our local scene. While I believe that most folks have great intentions when they pursue a career in public service, there are forces that make it difficult to remain dedicated to the goals. This is why I am a fan of oversight and accountability. I believe that our city's charter is a useful tool, but even useful tools need to be cared for, or rust will accumulate. I am glad to see citizens involved in charter reform, but personally, I do not agree that we should grant the council more power. There are reasons Cambridge rejected the strong mayor format and opted to grant a city manager executive power. I believe that council members should use the tools granted to them to ensure that the manager performs his or her tasks. Our council members serve for two years. I believe this creates a system that encourages them to do what is best for their reelection, rather than do what is best for the city. A city manager, however, is not elected. They must do what is in the best interest of the residents, or the residents will elect a council that has the will to fire the manager. This is the reason for our form of government. A representative body that amplifies voices from the various constituencies that make up Cambridge. We need to elect council members who are willing to use their toolbox and come to a consensus on how we want our city to proceed. By granting more power to a mayor, we run the risk of giving power to a small group of residents that may not align with our ideals as an inclusive, equitable city.

While knocking on doors, I've had a number of recent conversations with residents on this topic. I explained that if elected, I will be available, accessible, and accountable for all my decisions. My career as a forward-facing worker has no option to hide behind whatever decisions I have made. Full disclosure of decisions is required at my job since I cannot avoid those folks who want answers.

Housing: Your support for new AHO (Affordable Housing Overlay) up-zoning amendment

Circle the number that most represents your views. **1** 2 3

How have you personally been involved to address this? Explain.

I have met with the affordable housing developers who do most of the building in Cambridge (CHA and JAS), and they overwhelmingly say that the amendment will allow them a chance to alleviate the housing crisis for some of our vulnerable residents. I have met with opponents as well. At the end of the day, I think the arguments for the amendments outweigh the arguments against. I have given public support to the amendments which can be found on my website.

Transportation: Your support for re-evaluating city's bike lane/traffic/parking infrastructure and plans.

Circle the number that most represents your views. **1** 2 3

How have you personally been involved to address this? Explain.

In 2021 I met with the cycling advocacy group Cambridge Bicycle Safety (CBS) several times to let them know why I was not going to sign their pledge. As I said then, pledges are not good ways to govern in a representative democracy. While I think we all agree that we should have safe streets, we need comprehensive and unbiased data to ensure that the major works we are doing and paying for in fact create safer streets for everyone. I believe I was one of 3 candidates who did not sign the pledge. I obviously lost which led to a supermajority that did not represent the many different points of view our city had about our safety ordinance.

This year I have met with CBS a few times as well. I will not change my stance on signing pledges. I think we need to gather data on what we have done so far, and also gather data on the impacts going forward. While it would be nice if everyone got out of their cars and got on bikes, I think about how the transportation needs of my youth were going to be met with monorails. With rapid changes to our increasingly hostile climate, we must be sure that the expensive infrastructure changes we make meet the needs of all our residents, workers, businesses, and visitors. A strict, swift timeline would likely prevent that data gathering.

Environment: Your support for keeping our mature trees (in schools, housing, parks, & other contexts)?

Circle the number that most represents your views. 1 **2** 3

How have you personally been involved to address this? Explain.

I am both fascinated by and terrified of climate change. And I love trees (can I highly recommend the novel *The Overstory* by Richard Powers for a beautiful and tragic tale of old-growth forests) It is important that as we make our city climate resilient, we save what old growth we can. But we cannot forget our responsibility to those residents who are vulnerable to displacement. Affordable housing programs should include green spaces for their residents. I also recognize that increasing housing density is good for the environment. I do not see increasing density at odds with increasing green space and canopy, especially in my part of the city, which historically has had less green space than many other neighborhoods in Cambridge. I believe we can both increase our housing density as a way of alleviating some of our housing issues while we sustain and increase our green canopy. Past projects that failed to create green spaces should instruct us how to correct that, rather than be a reason to avoid creating more density.

I wrote about the risks of prioritizing one over the other in my [op-ed](#) from 2021.

([Link to op-ed: https://www.joemcguirkforcambridge.com/news-2021/haze-over-the-city](https://www.joemcguirkforcambridge.com/news-2021/haze-over-the-city))

What is the one key problem/issue you want to achieve in City Council next term?

Retaining lower and middle-income residents who are vital to our city's well-being.

Explain any role you have had as Councillor or resident in related actions.

I was part of a pop-up restaurant in March 2022 directed at raising awareness of the issues essential workers (in this case, restaurant workers) face while trying to live and work in or near our city. Lower and middle income residents are vital to our city's well-being but we are not doing enough to retain these essential residents. [McGuirk's Folly](#) was an experiment to see if a zero-growth restaurant that focused on both environmental sustainability and sustainability for the workers, could pay a livable wage for our city while offering great food in a way to have as little impact on our environment as possible. We set out to pay everyone \$50 an hour, which we determined would be the minimum pay for a person to be able to live in our area and have a fulfilling life. We achieved this by limiting staff to reduce labor costs, removing tipping from the equation, and setting a price for our food and drinks that would allow us to generate enough revenue to pay that scale. We limited food waste (a huge issue in the restaurant industry) and sourced our food with sustainability in mind. The response was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. One of the main points of this was to show that there are plenty of people who live and work here, who are happy to simply have enough income to remain here. We are not looking to buy homes or become wealthy. We just want to do our jobs with a rate of pay that is commensurate with the costs of doing those jobs in Cambridge while living nearby.

([Link to Article: https://boston.eater.com/2022/1/13/22881028/mcguirks-folly-fishermans-tavern-cambridge-2022-fair-wages-joe-mcguirk-pierce-kelley](https://boston.eater.com/2022/1/13/22881028/mcguirks-folly-fishermans-tavern-cambridge-2022-fair-wages-joe-mcguirk-pierce-kelley))

What City Council decision over the last term are you most supportive of?

I believe AHO 2.0 will be a part of the solution for creating more affordable housing in our city. I support the Rise Up initiative, as well as the Block Party and Play Street programs.

Explain any role you have had as Councillor or resident in related actions.

Since the passing of John Clifford, I have been talking to folks about reviving the Central Square World's Fair. I applaud every attempt to build community in our neighborhoods. Focusing on what brings us together will help us empathize with those of us who are struggling to remain here and remind us of how special and unique our city is.

What City Council decision were you most disappointed in the last Council term?

One of the first things that motivated me to run in 2021 was my disappointment in our council spending so much time on issues beyond what I considered the remit of our city council. As my neighbors were dealing with hardships, I watched as we spent hours of time talking about whether Cambridge should support or condemn actions happening in other nations. While these are certainly important, the cost came at the expense of our fellow residents who were facing hardships. I want a council who is not interested in performative platitudes, but who instead makes positive differences in our residents' lives. Let us have robust conversations on solving our own housing crisis, or on how we can address public safety that includes all stakeholders rather than spend valuable time calculating how many votes one will win or lose on a performative position on the actions of a foreign government. Once our own house is in order, we can solve the rest of the world's problems.

Explain any role you have had as Councillor or resident in related actions.

I have advocated on the state level for legislation that would aid our restaurant community through the difficulties they have faced due to the pandemic and innovations that have changed the industry. I spoke at Boston University's School of Business about the impact of innovations on both restaurant owners and workers and the challenges they face. I hope to be a council member who is focused more on actionable solutions, rather than platitudes that might garner votes but will have little impact on residents' daily lives.

While Cambridge is fortunate to have resources other cities are envious of, they are not endless. And time is one of them. The time we spend on issues beyond the remit of our council means that issues we should be reckoning with are delayed. I have advocated for a separate session to address issues that are beyond our city's borders. This would allow city council meetings to spend that valuable time addressing local concerns.

What Issues Help Define You? Highlight those core interests/goals for the 2024-6 Council and explain why.

- More balance in commercial and residential needs
- More budget accountability
- More engagement by residents
- More equity in healthcare, environment, schooling, housing, and related issues
- More transparency in Council and City decision-making
- More prioritization of historic building reuse
- More support for local businesses
- A more multi-dimensional and resident-engaged city planning
- A more inclusive environmental policy
- A more comprehensive transportation policy
- Other (explain in 1-2 sentences) see below

What incident or set of concerns got you interested in running for City Council?

I see too much of our city's bandwidth spent on performative issues. I want to see our government do work that can improve residents' lives. I am dismayed that our lower and middle income residents, many of whom are renters, are underrepresented on our council. I believe that lower and middle income residents are essential to the health of our city. I think it is important that the folks who are at risk of displacement have people with similar lived experiences on the council. As a renter and a lower income worker, I believe I am such a candidate. I will amplify the voices of those residents who, like me, are a vital, at-risk, population of our city.