**2021 Cambridge City Council Questionnaire**

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1. Housing is an important issue for the City of Cambridge.
   1. **How would you describe our housing challenges?**

Cambridge has an affordable housing crisis and our low income, middle income residents and families of color are feeling its impacts. Unfortunately, Cambridge’s position as one of the nation’s most expensive and inflated housing markets is pushing out Black and low-income residents, and displacing middle income families. According to the recent Cambridge Community Foundation Equity and Innovation Report, there is a $62,000 income gap between Black residents and all collective Cambridge households. The lack of affordable housing has been one of the top concerns among Cambridge residents and the Cambridge City Council has consistently provided weak solutions to resolving this issue. Increasing affordable housing and pathways to homeownership for low and middle-income residents is necessary for retaining our continued racial and economic diversity in our city.

* 1. **What do you think are the major factors causing our housing challenges?** I am deeply concerned by the disparities that impact low income and communities of color. Our Black residents are being pushed out of the city due to setting lower educational standards for Black students, ignoring housing affordability, and the persistence of the growing wealth gap. Most people don’t realize that, over the last decade, 17 percent of African-Americans have been displaced from Cambridge largely as a result of a lack of affordable housing. At the same time, corporate developers have pushed unsustainable housing policies that do not create pathways to economic empowerment for communities of color. My plan as city-councilor is to incorporate communities that have been disproportionately affected and historically excluded from having a voice at the table. The wealth gap has widened between the have and have nots with Black and Brown communities the most affected. These issues are exacerbated by gentrification which is resulting in displacing mostly Black families in Cambridge.
  2. **What do you think is stopping us from addressing those challenges?** The City’s housing agenda should not be co-opted and dictated by developer-backed PACS like it is now. We need a regional approach to housing that will work with elected leaders in Boston, Somerville, and other nearby municipalities to help end displacement, create reasonable rent stabilization policies, and develop a pathway for economic empowerment for our residents. We need to reject policies such as the “Missing Middle” Housing Plan that prioritizes developers over residents and has no plan for affordability and policies that perpetuate historic inequities, particularly the racial wealth gap. We lack a comprehensive regional approach to housing and transportation that would lead to affordable and sustainable practices for all. Our city’s ineffective homeownership program needs to be revised to allow for families to build equity and pass down their homes to their families, and we need to support tenant protections like right of 1st refusal and right to counsel which drastically decreases peoples’ odds of eviction. With all of these considerations, the government should be centering community input into city planning.
  3. **Describe concerns you might have about existing and needed infrastructure to serve our present and future housing stock, for example: aging sewer lines, electrical grid and most importantly water.**

Our water pipes are more than 150 years old and are falling apart; the electric power sourcing in some parts of the City is maxing out at 98%. On top of all of this, our City has embraced an aggressive growth plan of 25-30% by 2030. I believe that the city of Cambridge can do more to be and build green. I was an original signer and outspoken supporter for the Green Roofs Ordinance Petition, a revision to the city’s green roofs zoning ordinance. I support the Net Zero Task Force and Action Plan that provides a pathway to making our buildings reach net zero emissions because I believe new constructions should be net zero ready. New constructions should be net zero ready and include solar panels as well as rainwater recapture technology. This is important because building emissions are the major source of greenhouse gasses in Cambridge.

1. **Climate Change is real. What changes would you like to see the city undertake to address these concerns locally? How do your views address environmental equity? How do you reconcile the issue of tree conservation and the environment when discussing development?**

As an environmentalist, I have advocated for strong environmental policies to protect our planet but also to protect marginalized communities who are at most risk of environmental injustice. Unfortunately, environmental injustice has drastically changed the way of life across Massachusetts, especially in my city of Cambridge. I am greatly concerned about Cambridge’s need for more affordable housing, more accessible and greener modes of transportation, and educational opportunities for our youth— all issues inextricably linked to addressing environmental injustice. All of these issues must be addressed if we are to have environmental justice, but they cannot be addressed by Cambridge alone. That’s why I’m committed to working with municipal leaders in neighboring cities to create a regional approach around housing and transportation. We need to build with net zero emissions and have our buildings ready to exist as such; we need to invest in our transportation to disincentivize the unnecessary use of cars. We also need more protected bike lanes and incorporate green jobs vocational training in our schools to prepare students for a greener and cleaner economic future.

The City of Cambridge has made some progress in advancing our climate action goals, but it is clear that we must do more to ensure that we are carbon net-zero as soon as possible.

We must utilize efficient designs to expand net zero ready building requirements for new construction for not only municipal development, but also for private development. I will advocate to ban fracked gas consumption to rapidly reduce its carbon emissions. As a city councillor, I will monitor our city’s investments to ensure there is no support for fossil fuel companies.

An issue pertinent to Cambridge is the rapid decline of our tree canopy that has exacerbated the effects of climate change. Our tree canopy has declined 18% in the last decade, taking away from the beauty of our community and worsening the heat island effect that particularly impacts our seniors and low income residents. Low income neighbors need the same access to trees as the privileged and environmental justice is serious. The highest rates of asthma are prevalent in low income communities and communities of color. As a community organizer, I urged the city council to pass our tree-cutting moratorium in order to stem this tide and study its root causes. I have and will continue to advocate for and support our green and solar roof scapes policy and the Cambridge Green New Deal to help end the climate crisis -- that will be impossible if we do not have the full weight of our city and its institutions behind us. As city councilor, I will continue to be an advocate for the environment and environmental policies that promote the full inclusion of people of color and low income residents to ensure a livable and sustainable environment. Our current climate crisis demands that we build a city that is a model for how to address climate change, and provide a healthy environment for our people.

1. **“Development” is a commonly used term of public policy. Notions of economic development evolve over time. In the current moment, ideas about development must address concerns about climate change, global capital flows and rapidly growing economic inequality.**
   1. **The City for decades developed commercial property to increase taxable income that allows residential tax rates to remain low compared to many other cities. Has that strategy reached its limit? If so, what should replace it?** I think we are at risk for relying on commercial property development to fund most of our services. I don’t think we have reached our limit in terms of what we can charge. I am concerned about overdevelopment due to concerns about our infrastructure capacity. I would like to see our linkage fees increase because I think it is not high enough and the formula is based on the Nexus study.
   2. **What is your view on economic development for the City of Cambridge in 2021? What kind of economic development do we need or not need?** I think the City’s economic development programs are weak. Our programs are inconsistent and not based on community needs. However I do believe we have a very strong small business program. We need a COVID economic recovery plan that prioritizes the needs of small, local and minority led businesses, many who have been most affected by the pandemic. The small and Mom and Pop businesses tend to employ residents. There are many empty storefronts and many more expected. We need plans to get people back to work; we need to develop programs to reboot businesses and establish a pipeline for start-ups. I would love to for the City to provide opportunities for workers and former workers to consider starting their own businesses or forming worker-owner cooperative businesses.

It is documented by various reports, including the recent Cambridge Community Foundation’s [Equity and Innovation](https://cambridgecf.org/ei-report/) report that many of our young adults between the ages of 18-25 years old who are low-income (many who are men of color) are underemployed. I called this young group the real “missing middle,” because these young adults have underachieved in our public school system; they were given few options for vocational training and skills building; and they were not adequately prepared for career options beyond high school. There is an uptick of violence in the 18-25 age group, and I believe lack of jobs is a factor.

My economic development plan includes addressing the economic inequities that exist within Cambridge. My goal is to create an inclusive, equitable and diverse ecosystem for businesses and job development. I would live to develop specific job development and job readiness programs for the 18-25 age group, including exploring vocational initiatives such as offering free CDL training for becoming a truck driver, and bolster and support other programs from our nonprofit partners working with this demographic.

I also would like to expand the Mayor’s summer youth jobs program into a year-round Fellowship program for high school students. This Fellowship program would provide a stipend and pair the students with institutions, local businesses, and local corporate partners, and will be supplemented with workshops relating to job readiness, resume development, interview preparation, financial management, and other the opportunities. The goal is to build real life skills, facilitate mentorship opportunities, and expose them to career options to consider. I would also like to boost the offerings at our youth centers by offer vocational and entrepreneurial programs.

1. **In recent months the Cambridge Historical Commission, Conservation Districts and Neighborhood Organizations have been criticized as obstacles to more affordable housing as well as to racial and economic diversity. Do you agree with this criticism? Please explain why?** I do not agree that Cambridge Historical Commission, Conservation Districts and Neighborhood Organizations are obstacles to affordable housing. I do believe there is some historical context that have excluded certain races and classes, and today, we need to continuously work on improving that. As a Vice President of my neighborhood association, I believe that our associations need to be more diverse, both racially and socio-economically. We also have two neighborhood associations: Area 4/Port and Riverside that serve significant Black and Hispanic residents but are not fully operational.
2. **In recent months there has been an upsurge in citizen petitions (including the Donovan petition supported by the CCC and the Missing Middle Housing (MMH) petition supported by ABC) that attempt to formulate zoning, housing and related public policy. Developer upzoning - also known as contract zoning - has also been in regular use. Please describe your opinion about governing through the use of citizen petitions and contract zoning. Are there changes to the petition process that should be introduced?** The petition process provides opportunities for citizens to engage in public policy, which I support. I do believe however that the Cambridge Community Development department has been partial to developers by the way they respond to certain petitions and the amount of time they put into helping certain petitioners, such as the ABC petitioners make their case to the Planning Board and ordinance committee. Also, I have seen that some planning board members seem to be directly lobbying for certain petitions that fit their ideological believes and have a direct connection to the petitioners. I do not believe that is a fair process and thus believe the entire process needs to be reviewed and protocols need to be put in place to prevent this level of abuse.
3. **Members of the Cambridge Planning Board have expressed frustration with existing constraints on their ability to plan. As volunteers meeting several times a month to process individual cases, members have little time and resources to engage in planning. The absence of planning guidance from this committee is likely related to the increased use of citizen petitions. How should this problem be addressed?** I feel that the City staff and even the current City Council do not have a practice of planning or goal setting. The lack of planning and goal setting has put our Planning Board in a vulnerable position. As a business owner, I am used to planning and goal setting. I believe with proper planning we can implement good policy. For example, the City’s Envision “Plan” was not a plan, but a set of over 170 goals and we as citizens are still waiting for a full sanction of Envision “Plan,” which is riddled with conflicts amongst the various goals that must be reconciled.
4. **Cambridge has long been celebrated as a city that promotes racial and economic diversity. Do you believe this reputation is currently well deserved? If not, what measures would you take to promote genuine racial and economic diversity? How would you address recent issues of youth gun violence?**

I believe in a Cambridge for all residents, regardless of their race, income, or documented status. I am running for City Council in Cambridge because I am truly dedicated to making a community I’ve called home for over 30 years more inclusive and equitable. Over the last decade, 17 percent of African-Americans have been displaced from Cambridge, the lack of affordable housing has pushed low and middle income families and individuals out of the city, and corporate developers are increasingly eliminating outdoor spaces for low-income communities in Cambridge, leading to more environmental devastation in our city. We also need to address closing the racial achievement gap in our schools. Early gaps in academics have a lasting impact on our children and limit our children’s participation in an economy that demands increasingly higher levels of education. I would prioritize investing in programs to invest in our youth and the real "missing middle" — young adults ages 18-25 who are low income and jobless and unfortunately, often resort to violence to fill those gaps. Increasing affordable housing and pathways to homeownership for low and middle-income residents is necessary for retaining our continued racial and economic diversity in our city.

**How would you increase transparency both by the City Manager and departments that report to her/him? How would you increase transparency by City Councilors?**

* The City needs to engage neighborhood associations more. I see there is a recent effort to do that, but I do hope it will last and the CDD is serious about engaging neighborhood associations.
* Developers have more access to the City Manager and City Councillors than the public. I would like to see the City Manager conduct bi-annual Town Hall meetings via zoom and in person (when safe) with the public so we can engage in the state of the City of Cambridge. At these meetings, the City Manager and Council should report out to the public its accomplishments for the prior six months and measure their results and impact based on the goals that were set
* The City Councillors need to do their jobs and review the City Manager on an annual basis and share the review report with the public. The public should also have an opportunity to rate the performance of the manager, even if it is non-binding.
* I advocate for an independent Ombudsman position to represent and advocate for the neighborhood groups so that groups are not attacked unfairly, and the City leadership remains accountable to the people.

1. **Cambridge is about to hire a new City Manager. Describe your ideal City Manager for this time in Cambridge history. What qualities will you look for?**

I would love for a progressive Manager with strong community centered experience. Also, I would seek out more diverse candidates, including women and people of color. They need to support municipal broadband and have a strong fiscal background. They also need to demonstrate leadership skills as well as being able to work with diverse communities and diverse opinions and agendas. It is also important for the Manager to understand the meaning of an equitable, inclusive and diverse community.

1. **Recent estimates declare that over 60% of Cambridge residents are renters. How should Cambridge government address the needs of renters?**

After rent control was abolished in Cambridge as a tenant, I was facing a 50% increase in my rent, which I could not afford. After doing the math, I realized that it would be more affordable to own my unit. I organized my building, hired a lawyer to represent all of us, and approached the owner who agreed to sell us our units. I took home-buying classes and shared resources with my fellow neighbors and we were able to purchase our units at a very reasonable price. I had the best chance to own where I lived and I want the same chance for all Cambridge residents. Nobody should be displaced due to a lack of affordable housing. I am attempting to institute rent stabilization policies that incentivize property owners to offer below-market rents for stable housing. From December 1970 until 1994, rental units built before 1969 were regulated in Cambridge by rent control which tightly restricted rent increases and the removal of rentable units. The intent of the ordinance was to guarantee affordable rental housing and ensure financial stability of tenets. In 1994, Massachusetts chose to eliminate rent control with 60 percent of Cambridge residents voting to retain the ordinance. That is why I support Cambridge adopting a form of rent regulation called rent stabilization. NYC has seen huge success with 50% of their rental market classified as rent stabilized units. Essentially, once in a stabilized apartment, it is impossible for the landlord to increase your rent beyond a percentage determined yearly and there is a guaranteed right to renew your lease unless there is some breach of the agreement.

**There is always room for improvement however senior citizens in public housing receive reasonable public support. What is your plan to enable and support seniors living independent of public senior housing settings?**

 This is a great question. The Senior services at the Cambridge Senior center are available to any Cambridge Senior and they have a robust set of programming relating to health, wellness, and socializing.

Seniors who are not living in public housing are most concerned about their housing plans. I have spoken to many who would like to downsize but feel that they can’t downsize because they cannot afford to move. Our population is aging, and we must recognize that all seniors need support, and not just those who live in public or senior housing.

Some ideas include:

* Free financial planning workshops for seniors offered by our local banks
* Cooperative and social housing options for seniors who do not qualify for public housing or senior housing, but who would like to downsize
* Sponsoring recreational senior-focused programs such as free/heavily discounted seniors only movie gatherings at the Brattle Theatre; free seniors only classes at the Cambridge Adult Center of Education; knitting crawls; senior arts and craft shows

1. **What question do you wish we had asked you but did not? How would you answer it? One question that I wish you asked was “What are your thoughts about the environment and the city’s response to climate action?”**

Cambridge has a strong Climate Action Plan, yet we exempt affordable housing developments from compliance with our plans. I feel this it is environmental injustice as it compromises access for our low-income neighbor to access a healthy environment and the same privilege of the enjoyment of trees.

I am concerned about our shrinking tree canopy, which has been regressing. Although we have made progress with initiatives with the new tree cutting ordinance, and the approval of green roof plan for projects more than 25,000 square foot, we still have not made enough progress.

The City has done a really good job in the composting program and I am pleased to see the restaurant composting pilot program, as well as the green roof ordinance, in which I advocated for.