

2023 Questionnaire for City Council Candidates –

Robert Winters

I How strongly do you support these issues before the city? #1 is high (for); #2 is moderate; #3 is low (against)

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

a. 1. 2. 3 _Circle the number that most represents your views.

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

I have been writing and publishing the Cambridge Civic Journal since 1997.

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

a. 1. 2. 3 _Circle the number that most represents your views.

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

I opposed the original AHO as a member of the Housing Working Group of *Envision Cambridge* when it was first proposed. The current proposed amendments are even worse. Affordability in housing is important but this is the wrong approach in terms of intention, scale, and loss of meaningful public review.

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

a. 1. 2. 3 _Circle the number that most represents your views.

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

There are many ways to address safety of cyclists (and pedestrians). Separated travel lanes make sense in some circumstances but not in others. Impacts on residents and businesses should also be factored into these decisions. The specific roads and rigid timelines of the Cycling Safety Ordinance require far more scrutiny and flexibility than what was mandated in 2020 during the initial panic of Covid.

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

a. 1. 2. 3 _Circle the number that most represents your views.

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

I am generally supportive of efforts to maintain and grow the tree canopy in Cambridge, but I also believe there needs to be some flexibility for homeowners who need to make reasonable decisions about their property without incurring substantial penalties.

II. We are interested in how knowledgeable and active candidates are in city issues. (Short answer – 1-2 sentences)

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

I want to play a central role in ensuring that any proposed revisions to the City Charter receive full scrutiny by people who actually understand the City Charter, its history, and what actually needs improvement without harming what generally works well.

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

I applied to be on the Charter Review Committee and was blocked from membership. So John Pitkin and I engaged in extensive research on the subject anyway and produced a video documentary on the history of the Cambridge City Charter from Town Meeting to Plan E.

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

I am generally supportive of the choices for City Clerk, City Auditor, and City Manager – but I remain eternally watchful of management of the City.

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

I have never been silent in matters regarding City governance – especially in regard to the City’s Operating Budget and Capital Budget. My involvement consists primarily of my writing frequently on all matters involving City government and serving (and continuing to serve) on City Advisory Boards as I have done for over 30 years.

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

There have been many disappointments – mostly relating to the arbitrariness of decisions and lack of public accountability. Among these are the AHO (original and proposed amendments), the inflexibility of the Cycling Safety Ordinance, and the consistent failure to get ahead of the game in urban planning, e.g. the failure to act early in establishing goals and zoning for the emerging Alewife Quadrangle area.

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

Again, my principal role has been in writing and hopefully influencing decisions.

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

The appointment of Owen O’Riordan as Deputy City Manager and the related reorganization of which City departments report directly to him.

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

I don’t believe anyone can take credit for this other than the City Manager.

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

Traffic Department generally, but I also have deep concerns about policy decisions made within the Community Development Department that have broad consequences and minimal accountability.

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

Again, my principal role has been in writing and hopefully influencing decisions.

III. 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

Part of that balance is finding ways for retail, and especially neighborhood retail, to survive. It can’t all be cannabis outlets. We still need barber shops, diners, hobby shops, and clothing stores other than Amazon.

___ More budget accountability

I review the City Budget carefully every year and have done so for decades.

___ More engagement by residents

My main goal in writing the Cambridge Civic Journal as well as the Cambridge Candidate Pages has always been public education about City issues and informed electoral choices.

___ More equity in healthcare, environment, schooling, housing, and related issues

Though I am less active in some of these areas nowadays, some of my early claims to fame were in being one of the people who initiated the City’s recycling program, being the main person behind the distribution of backyard compost bins, and (very early on) serving on a water & sewer advisory committee appointed by then-Mayor Al Vellucci. Housing is a far more difficult matter to address, but that’s why I volunteered to serve on the Housing Working Group of *Envision Cambridge* as well as on its overall *Envision Cambridge* Advisory Committee.

___ More transparency in Council and City decision-making

Again, I have been writing and publishing the Cambridge Civic Journal since 1997 with this as the main goal.

___ More prioritization of historic building reuse

I would certainly support this whenever feasible – which is almost always.

___ More support for local businesses

The best form of support for local businesses is to simply get out of their way by keeping regulations as simple as possible while remaining consistent with overall City objectives. I will add that ensuring at least a chance at

parking along or near major corridors and Squares is still important even if reduction on the dependence of motor vehicle use is an overall goal.

___A more multi-dimensional and resident-engaged city planning

While I may not want to see obstructionism in resident involvement in city planning, I absolutely respect the role that neighbors and abutters must play in decisions that may greatly affect their homes and neighborhoods.

___A more inclusive environmental policy

Inclusive also has to mean respectful of residents' ability to pay for such things as energy retrofits and roof reconfigurations. I also respect the right of residents to have some choice in heating systems and their kitchens as long as overarching environmental improvements are met.

___A more comprehensive transportation policy

That's a tough question since public transit is largely decided on a regional basis. That said, I would not want to see the ability to own and maintain a motor vehicle become overly restrictive. People have needs and choices, and it's not really for elected officials and City officials to force all such choices.

___Other (explain in 1-2 sentences)

It often seems as though few people are paying enough attention to the rapidly growing City Budget, the likely shift of the tax burden onto residential taxpayers, and the excessive dependence on commercial development in order to balance the budget and pay for ever-expanding City initiatives.

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

Questions revolving around the City Charter were central to my decision. I also strongly feel that voters need far better choices in candidates than they have had in recent elections. I hope I can be one of those better choices.