**2021 Cambridge City Council Questionnaire**

**Dennis Carlone**

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

There is no question that the city of Cambridge’s focus should be on developing housing and related services supporting our existing residents, rather than commercial development. This can be accomplished through revising zoning and using a greater amount of our financial resources to support low-income and moderate-income construction. It takes vision and commitment.

* 1. What do you think are the major factors causing our housing challenges?

There is no question that the city's focus on commercial development, its resulting taxes base, the city not using its financial resources to supplement housing development and the lack of a housing plan has caused the critical increase in the cost of housing. This especially affects our low and moderate-income residents.

* 1. What do you think is stopping us from addressing those challenges?

As mentioned above, the city administration’s primary focus on commercial development since the 1980s has greatly increase the value and desirability of living in Cambridge especially for those people who work in the new laboratories and office buildings throughout the city. A lack of proactive planning and a strong urban design vision is hurting the future of Cambridge.

* 1. 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.

The Department of Public works has been following an aggressive plan to upgrade aging sewer lines and the Water Department has a well-organized operation maintaining a high- quality water supply. However, the electrical supply is not governed by the city and seems to be working from a strictly reactive posture. This raises significant questions about our future sustainability especially with the increasing commercial base. Perhaps equally concerning is the need to modify our roads and expand our open space system to meet future needs. This includes reducing vehicle speeds on our roads and making them safer for all who use them, and significantly raising the amount of our open space up from the present 50% of the national average. Both roads and open space do not receive adequate funding or have a strong vision.

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?

Although Cambridge has received national attention for its sustainable approaches, it is sadly lacking in many obvious ways. Cambridge needs to more seriously evaluate and dictate how buildings should be designed. All-glass or largely all-glass buildings reflect the 1960s era and are totally irresponsible from an inherent and energy intensity use points of view. The city is also woefully lacking open space. Cambridge has less than 50% of the national average per capita of open space. This strongly affects heat island increases, flooding capacity, outdoor recreation possibilities, etcetera. Including the open space trees are an essential part of making neighborhood streets as livable as possible and there are even studies that show streets with trees have less crime and more neighborhood friendly activities. There is no question in my mind that's saving trees should be an integral part of any development including affordable housing and commercial development. It is a matter of basic urban design envisioning and implementation. It is a sin to realize that the one neighborhood that has the least amount of tree coverage is the MIT campus and adjoining areas and the easiest to rectify.

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?

As mentioned above, the focus on commercial development has altered our city to be a more high-income city. The new focus should be serving our residents through a focus on housing development including related public-serving needs to those uses. The school committee in the past has indicated that we will need 2 new elementary schools in the next 10 years. We know that we have fundamentally lost our middle-income population due to high housing costs. We know that a city as wealthy as ours can support universal pre-kindergarten. We know we lack open space throughout the city, but especially so in the lower income neighborhoods where they have approximately 20% of the national average. Clearly if we want to be the kind of city, we think we are we have to dramatically change our focus to serve our people and neighborhoods in need. Many of us have the vision to correct this injustice. The city has the available funds. Now we have to follow through.

* 1. 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?

See answer immediately above.

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.

No, I don't agree with the criticism. In fact, I believe it is part of ABC’s strategy to dramatically alter existing neighborhoods. The attack goes further and includes attacking existing zoning with their goal of creating a more “open development city” to what I call chaos.

1. 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 up-zoning - 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?

Given state law, it is difficult to see a change in the zoning petition process. For too many years developers and their lawyers have proposed increases in zoning density and height through the petition process. In the last 10 years or so neighborhood groups of all kinds have used the same process, the only one open to them, to gain their perspective in zoning. Although the number of petitions being heard by the city and the Planning Board have greatly increased (as many as seven Ordinance hearings in the next month), it does make sense to allow citizen petitions on an equal basis with that of developers. If Community Development undertook true community planning and urban design, there would be less need for all the petitions. In the end, the quality of councillors including their knowledge of zoning, design, and master planning becomes even more critical in evaluating all petitions.

1. 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?

Sadly, very little actual planning goes on in the city of Cambridge beyond the writing of words. Unfortunately, most words can be interpreted very differently by people with different perspectives. Planning principles must be translated into faithful urban design plans, guidelines, and implementation strategies. It has been said that the Envision process really was a rehash of work done by Community Development in the 1990s. My order on the council was for the Envisioning process to continue through a complete urban design process. I have been told by developers that Community Development has become more a development regulatory agency then a planning agency. Community Development must take the lead in changing their approach and it's likely that a new City Manager, as well as the City Council, are needed to dictate that change

1. 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?

The Cambridge I moved to in 1974 was significantly more like the city we celebrate for its views on racial and economic diversity. My young sons had friends of all backgrounds in our home. That city has changed with the dramatic commercial growth leading to the increase in land value and cost of living. As stated earlier, we have to focus on those underserved who need our help in Cambridge. It will not change overnight just like the problems haven't occurred overnight. We have to have a long-term solution that is broad base and focused on helping those most in need this begins with universal pre-K, extra help in school work and training, expansion of existing programs, housing assistance, and providing job opportunities in our growing commercial world. The question of youth violence is one that is very broad and has multiple forces behind it. We have to listen to those who have lived in that world and follow their recommendations through proper funding and programming until the problem and the issues have made a major difference. Why else do we have a city that's supposedly cares?

1. 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?

There should be a monthly review meeting in which the Manager and his staff report on the areas they are working on or the studies they are undertaking. For city councillors they should make themselves available at neighborhood meetings for an update of the areas they are working on and to gain feedback from those who elected them. We represent the public and we set policy the public. good When the Manager and his staff or councillors do not represent the public, they should be put in their place by residents in a public setting. I would gladly join such a series of meetings at any time.

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?

This of course is the big question in the coming new term. When I first came to Cambridge, the city was in terrible financial state. Over the years we built a dramatically expanded commercial base and tax base. Now we have to serve those who are here and live up to our reputation as a caring city of people from all backgrounds and incomes. The new Manager needs to have a social justice and physical planning background. She/he must understand the commitment of the city to serve all. The manager has to be a team player, which to me means she/he realizes that the Council and residents are those that need to be listened to. The new Manager will be coming to a difficult job but that person will have a Council and a budget that will enable the city to move in the socially just direction.

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

I rent my apartment. It is costly, and once my time on the council is over, I am not sure that I can afford to stay in Cambridge. So I understand how many people who desire to stay in Cambridge but fear that eventually they cannot afford higher rents. We, as a city, must focus on buying land along main street corridors for new housing- affordable for low income and moderate-income residents. Only with a change in focus from commercial to residential development will we have helped existing renters stay in Cambridge. Programs to help people afford a down payment for a condominium unit must also be seriously considered by the city. I have advocated for a public bank owned by the city similar to South Dakota where lower costs loans can be issued for residents who wish to purchase an apartment.

1. 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?

The CCC probably knows that there is an existing program that defers taxes on homes owned by seniors on limited incomes. One could easily see a similar program offsetting a percentage of the rent for lower-income apartment dwelling seniors. I personally can envision more senior housing being built along the main avenues of the city serving more seniors. Ideally there will be pre-kindergarten classrooms on the first floor of such buildings in which the seniors could help the staff working with children.

1. What question do you wish we had asked you but did not? How would you answer it?

The number one question I would have asked is what needed skills and experience do each candidate bring to the council? How has your life experiences prepared you to be open, honest, and forthright in working with the public and the city administration?