**Dana Bullister**

**2021 Cambridge City Council Questionnaire – August 9, 2021**

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

Cambridge is in the midst of a housing crisis fundamentally propelled by disproportionate demand for housing near to the masses of commercial development providing jobs in our booming life sciences, technology, and research industries. Many more people desire to live in our city, close to jobs, than our current resources allow.

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

Our growing local industries incite disproportionate demand to live in this area, which strains our city's ability to provide appropriate resources and adapt our planning and infrastructure.

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

Our current strategy of enabling further commercial development at the expense of needed housing and people-centered amenities is one crucial factor in exacerbating this crisis.

* 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.

Sewer and stormwater mains, quality and reach of public transit, quality of roads and sidewalks.

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?

Climate change is an existential crisis. Even at the local level, our city can take numerous steps to enact smart, sustainable initiatives that model what it means to do our part. I support moving the city toward net zero carbon emissions, expanding our tree canopy, and expanding permeable surfaces. I'm also a supporter of the local Green New Deal Zoning Petition taxing large commercial developments based on carbon emissions that are then used to create green jobs and initiatives.

All of these environmental programs should ensure equity is front and center. I believe each of these goals should be broken down by neighborhood so that every area of the city, not just certain privileged regions, experience the overwhelming benefits of better air quality, lower temperatures enabled by tree cover, and green space.

As a vibrant hub of innovation, Cambridge also has the opportunity to partner with local research and innovation institutions to explore creative new ideas and technologies in urban agriculture, energy use, and infrastructure monitoring.

The city should also remain true to the approach outlined in the Urban Forest Master Plan to maintain and expand tree canopy. In addition to expanding tree cover, the city should ensure the implementation of quality services for maintaining our current canopy such that trees are healthy and not posing safety hazards to surrounding residents.

Tree conservation is a critical component of a healthy and responsible city and it must be reasonably balanced in relation to our priorities regarding producing more affordable housing, supporting local businesses, and respecting the rights of homeowners. Just as there are some instances in which homeowners may have to remove part of a tree due to immediate health and safety concerns, sustainable building must have priority, especially when we plan commercial developments. We need nuanced, clear thinking when it comes to balancing these needs.

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?

A functioning, sustainable city requires an integrated and balanced mix of housing, commercial and office space, and people-centered amenities. According to the 2020 census Cambridge has added 45,000 jobs since 1980, yet only 12,629 of additional housing units. Such a trend forces explosive demand on current housing stock and forces tens of thousands of people to commute in from outside the city, causing traffic congestion, pollution, and inefficiency.

At this point, we need to reverse our strategy of runaway commercial development in favor of balancing housing, needed infrastructure, and people-centered resources that enable Cambridge to continue being sustainable and livable.

* 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?

We need to invest in our people, not just in our commercial development. Cambridge is struggling in its ability to provide equitably accessible resources like diverse options for affordable housing, youth and development programs, and green space. Such initiatives are investments in what fundamentally powers a livable, sustainable city and enables a locally based economic workforce. We also need to invest in programs that support small local businesses that enrich the diverse local economy of our city.

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.

Historic and Conservation Districts have an important role to play in the diversity, culture, and vibrancy of our local community. The Cambridge Historical Commission and Conservation Districts, as organizations, do great work. That said, we should continually revisit the community processes by which such work is implemented to ensure these resources are engaged in ways that both support their desired functions and reinforce local confidence in their effectiveness. These should be suitably productive, democratic, and inclusive.

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 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?

This is not my field of expertise and I intend to learn more about the specific processes here as well as their advantages and drawbacks.

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?

This is not my field of expertise and I intend to learn more about the specific processes here as well as their advantages and drawbacks.

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?

No. Our city is in desperate need of programs that serve our less advantaged residents and especially our youth. The upsurge in youth gun violence is one symptom of this failure as a city. First and foremost, we need a deliberate and targeted investigation of the root causes of this recent violence. This can inform potential programs that provide safe, supportive environments for our young adults. Programs can include additional workforce and skills training initiatives that connect youth with local employers for internships. Such programs can help tie this demographic into their local communities, hone marketable skills, and forge mentorship relationships.

We also need to ensure equitable access to all of the resources our city has to offer. This means socioeconomically integrated, connected, and vibrant neighborhoods that enable people from all backgrounds access to the same, largely geographically-based, community resources. Cambridge as a tale of two cities will not be solved unless we ensure less advantaged residents are not confined to worse neighborhoods with poorer infrastructure and public services. Our deliberate affordable and mixed-income housing policies should reflect this goal.

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?

Investing in the maintenance of clear, up-to-date communications materials on websites is a powerful way to ensure transparency in city processes. I will do everything in my power to encourage and provide resources for such practices. Regular newsletters are also effective ways of informing the public about upcoming meetings and engagement opportunities. I also support allowing ongoing zoom participation by the community (with reasonable timing or other restrictions), which increases both transparency and access by the public to the community conversation.

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 hope to help choose a next City Manager who prioritizes maintaining a good relationship with the Council as well as the fundamental values of transparency, inclusion, and community engagement. The next City Manager would understand the importance of investing in well planned, people-centered amenities, quality physical infrastructure, and an approach that emphasizes a larger proportion of new housing relative to new commercial development. He or she would also understand the importance of effective, streamlined tools to manage affordable housing programs such as online portals for easily navigating options.

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

Cambridge should take measures to support and protect tenants both within and outside of the eviction process. One key element of this is implementing tenant right to legal counsel. While 90% of landlords typically have access to lawyers, only 10% of tenants typically do. Tenants should have ready access to such resources and a full understanding of their rights. The city might also consider providing mediation services.

The city can also implement an efficient, easier-to-navigate system for applying for affordable housing, similar to Housing Navigator. Other online systems could also be useful in connecting tenants with each other so that they can share insights. Such networks and tools can empower tenants with critical information and leverage.

The city can also implement flexible, sustainable loan options for low-income tenants in addition to bond programs that facilitate accessible paths to home ownership.

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?

Local seniors should be supported in every way possible. Maintaining an active, engaging selection of community events is key, which can help both seniors and the city as a whole to feel connected. Services to help with transportation, whether to voting booths or to other critical destinations, is also something that should be explored. Importantly, all available services should be communicated to local seniors in a way that is most easy and convenient for them, whether through physical newsletters, at public venues, or otherwise. Reaching out to these services should be possible in many ways as well, including by phone and online.

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

I would be happy to address which other policy priorities I intend to make my focus. In addition to supporting an affordable, livable, safe, and sustainable city, I would like to champion a fairer election process. I would like to explore allocating one 24-hour period before election day for voting, to enable easier access by service workers and others who may not have a more typical work schedule.

I would also like to restrict campaign contributions to the greatest extent possible. Here in Cambridge, individual campaign contributions are capped at $1000 per person per year. This does restrict the practice somewhat. However, we live in a reality where nearly half of Americans would have trouble paying an unexpected $400 expense, let alone a $1000 gift. People who can contribute $1000 are simply not fully representative of our population.

In addition, there is no limit on what candidates themselves can contribute to their own campaigns. So nothing at all prevents a millionaire or billionaire from plowing as much as they want, without any limit at all, into an election that directly enriches their bottom line. Amazon already tried to do this in Seattle, injecting millions into a local election that would decide critical real estate priorities impacting their office headquarters. Something similar can happen here. And to be frank, why wouldn't it?

We need to plug this loophole. There are undoubtedly limits to what our government can do, given federal court decisions about money as political speech. However, even if we cannot fully implement 100% public financing, we must do everything within our power to restrict the impact of campaign contributions in every way possible.

I also support a city structure that leads to greater accountability and transparency as well as a long overdue feasibility study for municipal broadband. Community and arts events as well as ongoing support for local restaurants (and patios) are other priorities of mine.