

## CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS (CAN)

### Questions for Cambridge City Council Special Election Candidates – May 2023

1. Two senior members of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recently resigned to protest inadequate enforcement by the City of HPC determinations and Unified Development Code (UDC) requirements. What is your position on actions the City should take to enforce HPC determinations and UDC requirements?

Having served on the HPC for 3 years as Chair, I know first hand the perception of inadequate enforcement and support. The reality is that we have a structural problem within the city that cannot be solved overnight. I have a great deal of respect for the 2 commissioners that resigned and my only answer is that things are being put in motion to tear down silos, install departmental leadership and build a code enforcement and planning department that aligns with the HPC and UDC legal enforcement framework. Eventually we will be able to provide the consistency of enforcement that they were absolutely correct to demand. I can tell you that we've hired a special projects coordinator who is very qualified to address all of this and we are making progress, but unfortunately it takes much longer to rebuild departmental structure than we'd expect. We're also investing in dashboard technology to make it easier to transparently communicate with constituents, submit complaints and follow the progress of complaint resolution, measure our success, and enhance accountability.

2. If elected, do you intend to live in the Ward you will represent for the remainder of your term?

Absolutely. The decision to purchase a home for my family was not an easy decision, and was a massive investment for my family and demonstration of my commitment to Cambridge. I'll admit that the timing of when the ideal home for this season of my family came available wasn't perfect because it forced me to go through this special election with the mere hope that I can at least finish out my 4 year term of city government. I am so fortunate to have the opportunity of home ownership and it's something that I will continue to advance for more families in Cambridge by following through with the City's neighborhood revitalization plan.

3. The Shoreline Resiliency Committee has proposed constructing a seven-foot berm at the shoreline from Long Wharf to Great Marsh Park. Do you support this proposal?

I think we should count ourselves lucky to have such resourceful individuals as Larry White and his team of experts that are planning for the property, financial and environmental risk of pending sea level rise, saltwater intrusion and more frequent storm events. I will continue to support his efforts in finding the best solution, which to my knowledge may not only include a protective berm that respects private property rights, but living shorelines, wave reducing oyster reefs, and even strategic acquisition of our most vulnerable properties. During my tenure in office we've set aside funding for an entirely new organizational unit within the city to ensure that we are building a lasting solution and that any investment in shoreline resilience is properly funded and maintained.

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4. Currently the Hearn building is slated to house 44 moderate income apartments. Do you agree with this? If not, how do you think the Hearn Building should be repurposed?

This is an incredibly complex issue because everyone wants housing affordability, but the project as it is currently proposed will set us up for another generation of housing failure. There is a way forward where the Hearn building can be developed with a healthy mix of market rate and workforce housing, first floor retail, and the promise of a day when we no longer have to subsidize housing for it to be affordable. The Hearn Building, in its current state, and the proposal to also demolish the adjacent building and turn them both into 100% subsidized housing, 30% for mentally impaired persons with no provision for services, is symptomatic of a legacy of failed federal housing policies in Cambridge we cannot afford to continue. Recent studies show that other programs, such as housing vouchers that pay a portion of a household's rent, are cheaper per unit and far more economically beneficial.

It's also fiscally irresponsible. The developer has indicated that they want tax abatements despite the likelihood they will put further strain on our public agencies. At the cost of roughly \$20.8 million, \$475,000 per unit to develop, we could conceivably build 44 homes and just **give them away**. Instead this developer will receive a \$2.5 million "developer fee" and rent subsidies for upwards of 40 years. Competing proposals have come in at less than half, \$6-8 million but we've been unable to entertain them because Green Street has a contract on the property until 2024.

We need to continue to direct resources to home ownership, repairs and improvements to our existing housing, and enact zoning changes that put us on a path towards genuine wealth creation and the construction of "naturally occurring" affordable housing such as duplexes and accessory dwelling units built by local small-scale developers for our citizens and not towards a project like the Bradford House that does nothing more than concentrate need in an already economically depressed area. Large housing complexes of concentrated need are not what Cambridge's recently adopted Neighborhood Revitalization Plan calls for, so I cannot support it as proposed. It's also not the outcome that the federal legislation that pays for these programs intends. Believe it or not, relative to surrounding areas, housing is already affordable in Cambridge, just not of the best quality. We need to put our resources into improving the quality of our existing housing stock instead.

5. Currently, single family homes that have been converted to multifamily units must revert to single family use after being vacant for 90 days. Enforcement of this provision has been inconsistent. Are you in favor of consistent enforcement of this requirement?

Yes, and we need to couple the enforcement of this provision with changes to our zoning code that will address the fundamentals of why our older neighborhoods are struggling to attract investment and in fact have experienced a generation of disinvestment. We need to direct resources to home ownership, repairs and improvements of our existing housing, and make

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zoning changes that put us on a path towards genuine wealth creation. Development done with respect to the healthy fabric of our neighborhoods is something we should embrace.

#### 6. What should be done about development of the Mill Street School property?

The current developer claims they are serious about restoring the building and respecting the concerns of the neighborhood. I'd like to see the old school building turned into a condo regime and the property behind the school placed into perpetual easement as greenspace, which would complement our coastal resilience efforts. I've seen enough successful restorations of buildings like this in other cities to know that it's possible with the right developer. It's such a unique opportunity to enhance the neighborhood. I hope the opportunity doesn't get squandered because done properly it will enhance the value of the neighborhood and be a very desirable property.

#### 7. The Municipal Marina has not been properly maintained for years and now needs extensive renovation. How should these renovation needs be addressed?

It's unfortunate that the original project was done so poorly. We now need to invest heavily in correcting the wave motion and resize the slips so that the marina will attract more slip holders. The marina at face value appears to be a cost to the city budget, but its existence, along with the adjacent park is why the West End is such a desirable place to live.

#### 8. How should the City address the rising rate of violent crime? What can be done to address the recent increase in dangerous traffic violations downtown and elsewhere in the City?

Outdated housing policies, lack of investment in the fabric of our neighborhoods, concentrating poverty in specific areas, segregating young and old, rich and poor through federal mortgage guidelines and restrictive zoning has contributed to the isolation and despair that causes societal decline. Eyes on the street and undoing destructive zoning policies will incentivize all ages and incomes to move back into or stay in our neighborhoods and will resolve a lot of the seemingly intractable issues our city faces. There's a movement called Strong Towns, an offshoot of the Congress for New Urbanism that focuses on the fact that since WWII we've largely abandoned all the lessons we learned over thousands of years of city building. We know how to design great cities, examples are all around us, even globally, we just need to renew our focus on neo traditional design. Near-term, however, we will continue to support our officers with competitive pay and community policing and enhance opportunities for young families.

There's a saying in planning circles that if you have to tell people to slow down, you've designed the street wrong. It's important to recognize that our streets are our largest public spaces and we've focused on engineering them for fast speeds instead of designing them as beautiful public right of ways. We need to follow best practices to slow traffic and make our city more

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livable, safe, and a comfortable place to raise a family. Departmentally, we're not ready for it yet, but a complete and green streets policy, as well as a vision zero policy is something we need to adopt and leverage funding to implement. The most progressive city planners are realizing that if you design a city for cars, you get more speeding cars, but if you design it for people and invest in their ability to move around freely and safely no matter what form of transportation they choose, it raises the quality of life tremendously.

9. Are you in favor of relocating the YMCA to Cambridge Harbor? If not, where should it be located? What should happen to its current location?

I attended the meeting and heard the statements during the CAN/YMCA meeting a few weeks ago and am entirely sympathetic to the concerns of both sides. What I heard was that the YMCA has a dire need to increase its membership for the financial sustainability of programmatic changes they want to make and they hired a firm proven to give them suggestions on how best to do that, so they can replicate the massive membership growth they've seen in Chestertown. I also share the very valid concerns of the neighborhood about the potential loss of that facility and the void it might cause. The overarching fact is that the YMCA is an asset to the tax base of any neighborhood and we need to keep discussing this to make sure that we arrive at the best outcome. I will also promise that if the Y leadership decides to move the facility, I will work hard to ensure that a void is not left in the existing neighborhood.

10. Climate change is already causing damage in Cambridge. What would you recommend to address the effects of climate change?

I think a "solar by right" policy as well as community solar for homes that cannot install solar capacity would be a great policy. We're investing in battery and hybrid technology for our city vehicles where practical and installing solar on our public buildings to reduce our carbon footprint. We need our public works and planning departments to lead efforts to plant more trees, remove excess pavement, and implement policies and best practices for a sustainable future. Reducing our dependence on cars for everyday needs such as healthcare, education, groceries, and recreation will go a long way towards reducing our carbon footprint. One of my first initiatives as an elected official was to follow the city of Salisbury in removing minimum parking standards which should put a stop to the creation of vast, unproductive and empty parking lots along our Route 50 corridor and make infill development more affordable. It will also reduce the runoff impact to our beloved Choptank River. Once we get our public services department back on track, we can consider composting our yard waste to reduce the stress on our landfill as well as recycling those materials where a market exists such as aluminum, glass, and cardboard. The growing volume of oil-based plastic waste is another serious issue we need to address.

11. Please describe one additional issue that you think the City needs to address.

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We need to focus on our tax base and either demonstrate extraordinary value for our taxes or reduce the costs of living in the city. We can't have relatively high costs compared to our nearby towns and low quality of life or we will continue to struggle financially.

I also really hope our law enforcement, school system, fire departments and healthcare facilities can get reinvigorated in the near term as well. Those essential services of ours and every community seem to be struggling despite our local commitment to their success, they seem to be undergoing incredible challenges right now on a national scale.

Please include a short paragraph describing your biography, qualifications, and reasons for running.

I am a lifelong resident of Cambridge with the exception of when I lived outside of Philadelphia for 10 years for my undergraduate and graduate education and early working years. I moved back because I have been passionate about enhancing the quality of life in Cambridge my entire life. Becoming an elected official shouldn't be the only impressive thing on your resume when you run for office - it's important that the voters recognize those candidates that have been involved in the selfless pursuit of the betterment of the city long before they decided to run for office. Hopefully the other candidates have at least been voted into leadership roles by their peers on a board of directors or been formally recognized as leaders within their place of employment. There's a rare initiative over the last 17 years that I haven't been involved in on some level, most often at the leadership level. I'm absolutely committed to embracing the people, organizations and resources that are working to make our city safe, healthy and prosperous now and for the next generation.

I've learned something about how the government operates in the last two years of elected office, which is, pardon the tired old cliché that "slow and steady wins the race." I've also learned that compromise in the face of what are often polite disagreements is essential. The 3-2 vote we saw for many years is now a rarity and not the rule because we value each other's constituent's goals. It's imperative that we respect the values of our fellow commissioners that are representing the needs of other constituents in our community. It would be a shame to disrupt the current ability of this diverse council, often with vastly differing opinions, to continue to work together building a productive framework for success. We've had setbacks with our mayor and we've had the unprecedented challenge of the global pandemic, so at this point if nothing else, we need to maintain stability for our city departments and our city manager as they work to build for you, the citizens of Cambridge, a modernized and more effective local government and services. My promise is to continue to lead by serving the citizens of Cambridge and at the same time demonstrating respect and building long standing relationships with those in the nonprofit, business, and government sectors that are helping us achieve the shared goals of a safe, prosperous, healthy, and inclusive city.