

Luis Vasquez – Response to A Better Cambridge Candidate Questionnaire

1. DIVERSITY: ABC is committed to strengthening the social, cultural, and economic diversity of our neighborhoods.

If elected, what policies will you support or propose to help strengthen the diversity of our community through increased affordable housing and greater economic opportunity for all residents?

RESPONSE: Once elected I will focus on the following priorities affordable living, non-profit sustainability and CPS Alumni Support. I firmly believe that all three are connected to the social, cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods.

Affordable Living

This issue is very important to me. Many of my friends and family have been forced to move out of Cambridge as a result of the outrageous prices for rental units and homes. Cambridge should be a city where everyone has an equal opportunity to rent or own a home that is affordable.

Non-Profit Sustainability

Our non-profit organizations across the city help to enrich the lives of others. It should not be the norm for these organizations to fend for themselves until one of them needs our help to stay afloat.

Cambridge Public Schools Alumni Support

Our teachers do a wonderful job of educating and empowering our youth to be launched into success after high school.

2. SUSTAINABILITY: ABC wants to build a strong and sustainable community where current and future residents will be able to work, shop, and play near their homes.

If elected, what policies or initiatives will you support to ensure that there is adequate housing near public transportation that supports sufficient retail to meet neighborhood needs, meets the needs of current and future residents, reduces auto usage and encourages energy efficiency?

RESPONSE: I feel that we have lost too many families since the elimination of rent control. The gentrification that happened in Cambridge cannot and will not continue to push out our families. It is important that we focus on creating more affordable housing opportunities for families so that they are able to enjoy the same opportunities and privileges I had as a child. We need to educate residents about various services that the city already offers so that they are able to take advantage of them.

I am often urged by others to move away from Cambridge into a neighboring city where I could pay a mortgage on a house that would cost me less or the equivalent to renting in Cambridge. When you have kids, like I do, it is very tempting to do. However, I'm conflicted by what I would be giving up in order to decrease my living costs. Cambridge is where I want to be, and it's where the people that grow up here deserve to stay.

I want to keep families in a Cambridge where they are able to enjoy everything our city has to offer. We need to maintain our commitment to being inclusive. We need to work together so that we don't lose our identity, which revolves around diversity.

3. GROWTH: ABC is working to preserve and expand the diversity of our community by supporting sustainable growth and appropriate density.

Do you agree that in order to support diversity and meet the housing needs of sustainable growth in Cambridge, increased density may be necessary? If elected, what specific policies or initiatives will you support to achieve sustainable urban growth and to increase low and moderate income housing for all populations, including families?

RESPONSE: With a family counting on me at home, I'm on a pretty tight budget to get the most out of my money. I know many families are in the same predicament. I would love to help local farmers continue to grow locally and bring their produce into Cambridge, to expand farmers markets and the affordability of this option.

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I would like to help locally owned bodegas and convenience stores work on a strategy to increase their reach in the community. Finally, it's important to continue to create tax incentives for local business that are passionate about food and are willing to work with us.

- 4. LIVABILITY: We want to reinforce the distinctive character of our neighborhoods, ensuring that new development builds upon and enhances their defining traits.**

What traits of Cambridge neighborhoods do you find most distinctive? If elected, what policies or initiatives will you support to help reinforce these characteristics through new development, public and open spaces and other means?

RESPONSE: The most distinctive trait our neighborhoods have to offer is our open space. We have some amazing parks where parents are able to take their families and interact with other Cambridge residents. We need to continue to preserve our parks and other recreational spaces so that our residents are able to set their roots in Cambridge. I do not support building expensive high rise condos in Cambridge, this will only drive up the priority value at an exponential rate that does not support a livable wage for most Cambridge families. We need to continue to support our small businesses so that they are able to stay in Cambridge. Our bodegas and family owned businesses deserve the opportunity to thrive here in our neighborhoods.

- 5. DIALOGUE: We want to support open and constructive engagement between all parties to the planning process, based on mutual respect for differing views.**

In your opinion, do public planning processes in Cambridge support open and constructive engagement between stakeholders? If elected, how will you help ensure transparent and mutually respectful planning for the future of Cambridge?

RESPONSE: I firmly believe that we need to create various spaces where we can have open dialogue and constructive engagement in regards to our city. These gatherings need to be held in different places in Cambridge where residents are welcomed and encouraged to attend. We need to build bridges and encourage our residents to be involved in discussions and all aspects of our city's government.

- 6. Earlier this year the Central Square and Kendall Square Advisory Committees (K2C2) proposed recommendations to guide the future development of these key residential and commercial districts in Cambridge.**

Which three K2C2 recommendations do you believe should be top priorities for the City of Cambridge over the next few years? What specific policies or initiatives recommended will you support to ensure these priorities are achieved during the next City Council term? Are there policies and recommendations that you oppose?

RESPONSE: It absolutely killed me to see homeless people sitting outside in Central Square on Christmas Eve. My wife and I were on our way to a family dinner and we felt helpless. We ended up pouring them cups of coffee from a Dunkin Donuts Box 'O Joe. While bringing in new businesses to Central Square is part of a strategy to revitalize the area, we should put an equal amount of focus into helping the growing homeless population become stabilized and matched with services. As a city we are not doing all that we can to help those in need. We need to deal with the real issues that create homelessness Cambridge and not try to mask the problem by opening fancy businesses.

We cannot continue to mask a very serious problem and believe we can solve it by up scaling our neighborhoods and commercial spaces.