

Sam Seidel – 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: On the Council, I want to lead the discussion of housing in Cambridge, the most important topic today in this city. The core issues before us are: how many new units of housing should be created and where? What impact will these units have on the housing market and housing costs? Can we increase the percentage of affordable units? How will "middle income" housing work? I support increased supply, increasing the percentage of affordable, and the creation of the new category of housing at these middle ranges. The middle income housing is the newest concept, and I want to see that implemented so that Cambridge can continue to be a city for many. Of course, there will be trade-offs, including the possibility of increased height in exchange for units at a certain price point. The job of this next Council will be to examine our housing policies, and as an urban planner, I want to lead this effort.

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: When I was on the Council, I worked with neighbors along the Mass Avenue corridor to develop a plan for street scape improvements that will support the retail environment there. I worked on the zoning that is bringing the Art Institute of Boston to Porter Square. I have spoken out in support of reduced parking to unit ratios in new construction, which reduces auto uses and supports alternate forms of transportation. I have been speaking in support of increased density in Central Square. I myself am a bike rider. As an urban planner and former city councillor, I understand how these pieces come together and I know that we are moving in the right direction in Cambridge in so many ways. We must manage our growth effectively, to create a city that reflects our values but also reflects our current place as one of the global innovation hubs. I have been a strong voice for energy efficiency both when I was on the Council, and since.

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: Yes, increased density at transit nodes will be necessary. This obviously will represent change -- in Alewife where new housing is being created, in Central Square right in the heart of Cambridge, and at North Point near the Lechmere T stop. Central Square is where this conversation will be most active, since building heights are largely set in the other locations. The challenge remains -- how do we create the right unit mix in new development, in particular three and four bedrooms units. Developers respond to the market and say that the market is telling them that smaller units are what people are looking for. We have this perennial problem that families get priced out of Cambridge because larger units are rarer and more expensive. I support the creation of larger units to balance the needs of the community.

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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: This is a very interesting point and a very important one. Density and height are undeniably part of the equation, but good architecture and good urban design are equally important in creating senses of space and place that are so crucial. In the Alewife area, a sense of neighborhood needs to be created among the new developments, with an emphasis on ground floor retail and links back to the Alewife T to reduce the demand on auto usage in the area. Central Square is obviously Cambridge's civic square, with the central post office and City Hall. It has an interesting mix of building heights that reflect different eras in the city. It's a 19th century square that could never decide if it was the main street of a small town or the central hub of a bigger city. Harvard Square obviously sits under the imprint of the university and the residential neighborhoods that surround it. Kendall is Cambridge's 21st century square, where land uses have remained commercial, but building types have changed radically with economic changes and with architectural styles. The demand that ground floor retail be part of the mix of new development must continue, though we must grapple more effectively with two issues: what do consumers actually buy in stores these days (as opposed to online) and what is the right amount of square footage to support this. We obviously do not shop in the way we did in the 1970s, or even the 1990s for that matter. Just as online has brought about a radical transformation of our consumer patterns, we must also recalibrate our understanding of a central business district. Working with the business associations, it also makes sense to determine the unique niches for the various squares.

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: Good, effective, open dialog is very important to addressing challenging issues like new development. To me, the end goal is that Cambridge remain Cambridge -- an energetic open diversity community -- but has room for the changes that always come to cities. We are in such a time of change, with increasing wealth, large development pressures and projects, and changing demographics. Much of our discussion to date has been about fighting old battles, not addressing new challenges and opportunities. I am running for the Council exactly for this reason. I want to bring my track record of thoughtful, inclusive dialog to these debates as well as my urban planning background. We must make room for the future while always remembering and respecting our past. Similarly, we need to treat each other with respect even when we differ on issues, and we need to incorporate new voices into these conversations, so that Cambridge's next generation will have a part in shaping a city that is being built with them in mind. I did this when I was on the Council, and I will do it if I am returned to the Council.

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: The particular point of the C2 study that I am focusing on is housing in the Osborn Triangle, for a couple of reasons. This area makes sense as a location of increased residential density and height to me though I see two conflicts that will need thoughtful leadership to deal with. One is the final decision on building heights themselves. My own view is that about 12 stories is the correct top height. The recommendations call for higher. This will need a thorough vetting and respectful dialog so that we give this

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place a meaningful urban form while not making only a token gesture towards the creation of new units. Secondly, I am certain that there are land use conflicts inherent in the plan and the sooner we can deal with these, the better for everyone. MIT stated in an early meeting on the topic that some of the land in the study area is MIT-owned, and has been slated for lab/office use, which is not reflected in the plan. Addressing this conflict -- MIT's vision versus the community's vision -- up front will go a long way to legitimizing the final decisions. So much is changing so quickly in Cambridge, it is very important to get out in front of this all. This area to me should be a residential zone.