

Dennis Benzan – 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: If elected, I will support coordinated urban planning efforts and job training initiatives. Some of my initiatives are:

1. Kendall Square Open House. These open houses with companies in Kendall Square will be opportunities for dialogue, socializing, networking, and more practically will increase local knowledge of the economic and educational opportunities that greatly benefit residents seeking employment.
2. Citywide Job and Career Fair. The Job Fair is much needed to bring employers and job seekers together. A citywide fair would provide an excellent opportunity for corporate human resource departments to become acquainted with the tremendous talent we have in Cambridge. The fair would help to transition graduating students to their first professional career opportunities as well as assist seasoned professionals secure new jobs.
3. Master Plan for Neighborhood Development. A master plan should be based on neighborhood-specific plans and surveys, some of which already exist. I want us to create a map that will plot the buildable lots in our city and give us a better sense of the needs in each neighborhood.

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 support development that prioritizes investment in spaces that provide green space for recreation, improve retail marketability, and incorporate office space for nonprofits and local businesses. If elected as city councilor, I believe it is vital to assess the impacts of already existing studies, like the K2C2 Plan, on our transportation systems.

I believe that neighborhoods should be at the center of development in Cambridge. I plan to launch a Neighborhood Walk program where, as councilor, I will meet with residents and planners to do walking tours of our different neighborhoods to get local perspectives on plans for future development.

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, I believe that it may be necessary to increase density in Cambridge to accommodate the growing needs for housing.

However, no decisions should be made prior to a comprehensive survey of all buildable lots in Cambridge. If elected, I support a master planning process that works to combine the content of existing plans with an overarching plan for development that works to improve the quality of Cambridge's built environment and preserve the human scale of the city's neighborhoods and commercial districts. Currently, Cambridge has several plans - including the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study and Concord Alewife Planning Study - that can be used as building blocks for creating a larger citywide plan that contains a cohesive set of goals for development that guide future studies and planning.

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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: Cambridge is special in that each neighborhood of this city has worked hard to preserve its historical character. Agassiz is known for the intellectual, international crowd that it invites due to its proximity to Harvard. Central Square is renowned for its wealth in the arts. If elected, I would support initiatives that bring the arts to our centers in order to preserve the cultural richness of Cambridge and continue the legacy of Cambridge Square as an arts district. The technological and artistic innovation in Kendall Square is one of the driving forces behind the growth of Cambridge as a city. We should invest in more public spaces for the arts and STEM training to reinforce these qualities in our city. I will support initiatives that encourage the development of more mom and pop businesses in order to help us maintain our community identity in the retail arena as well.

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 believe that we can improve the public planning process in Cambridge to be more inclusive of community members. A concerted effort needs to be made between neighborhood organizations, residents of Cambridge, and the City Council to ensure that all proposals are subject to an open public planning process.

To ensure transparent and mutually respectful planning, I believe that it is important to engage with the community through regular meetings, to contact community residents via mail, email, and telephone regarding proposals for their neighborhoods, and to ensure that we do not rush proposals through the Council without making a sincere effort to reach residents first.

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: Recent proposals for zoning changes in Kendall Square are not geared toward development that includes affordable housing and retail space for small businesses and exclude the vast majority of businesses that need to develop and grow as institutions in the Cambridge community. Central Square is poised to be a big player in the growth of the information economy and of smart industries in Cambridge. Central Square is a vital public space that needs public investment in spaces that provide green space for recreation, improve retail marketability, and incorporate office space for nonprofits and local businesses. I support policies that further Central Square's role as a vibrant cultural hub with many that connects Cambridge residents with small businesses, the arts, and creative industries.

I believe that it is in Cambridge's best interest to support (1) the inclusion of local residents into new enterprises, particularly those in Kendall Square, (2) the development of community-owned creative spaces that allow our residents to tap into the information age economy, and (3) the preservation of recreational spaces, particularly in the Central Square area.