

E. Denise Simmons – 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: City Hall itself must reflect the diversity we wish to see citywide, so I'll continue pushing for more diversity throughout the City's leadership. I'll continue introducing and supporting policies that strengthen and improve the City's Inclusionary Unit program, zoning ordinances that encourage creation of more affordable housing units, and policies that strengthen our job training and job placement programs; I recently pushed for our Office of Workforce Development to create ties to Boston's Building Pathways program for the very first time, and I'll work to grow that relationship. I'll also work to reignite the Buy Local Cambridge initiative to help grow local small businesses, placing them in a better position to increase their workforce. All of these items address, from different perspectives, the housing needs, the employment needs, and the overall economic needs that ultimately determine the degree of social, cultural, and economic diversity that is possible within our neighborhoods.

- 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 will certainly work to bolster the fine efforts of the K2C2 Committee, which speak to this. To a large extent, though, the elements of what ABC is seeking are already in place. Cambridge has an infrastructure and a layout that has most areas near either a subway stop or a bus stop. The City also has ready access to supermarkets, restaurants, cafes, and convenience stores throughout all the various neighborhoods, along with concentrated shopping hubs like Harvard and Porter Squares. The challenge is really to ensure that there is no reduction in public transportation – and ideally, there is expansion. I will continue to express the needs of our residents directly to the MBTA, as I have done in the past, and I'll continue insisting that service cutbacks, unreasonable consolidation of stops, and particularly reduction of service in senior-heavy areas will not be tolerated by the City's leadership.

- 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: Increasing density in underdeveloped areas may be necessary, but not without careful deliberation and intensive community discussions first. I will continue pressing, as I have done in the past, for developers to commit to creating more family-sized affordable units. I have personally worked with many families over the years who would not have been able to stay in Cambridge, were it not for my pushing for this kind of housing. Yet the need remains, and there needs to be pressure on developers and the housing organizations not just from the City Council, but also from an organized community. I will also be asking the Community Development Department to conduct an intensive study and then report back on how other communities similar to Cambridge have addressed this issue, to learn if there are other options that we simply have not yet attempted that are now worth consideration.

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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: I find the mixture of people of different cultural, generational, and socio-economic backgrounds living side-by-side, to be the most distinctive and most enviable aspect of our different neighborhoods. That diversity is what makes each neighborhood so vibrant and unique from one another. To the extent that it is possible to plan this kind of diversity, the City must increase its inclusionary zoning efforts, we must create a deliberate plan for moderate-income families, and we need to craft policies that encourage stores and cafes that are affordable to lower and moderate-income people throughout the city. I will certainly continue to support and promote policies that will help Cambridge achieve this balance to a greater degree in the coming term.

- 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 absolutely feel that all stakeholders should be at the table during the planning process – and throughout the entirety of the process. I am proud of my record of working to open up these conversations, insisting that planners and developers need to do more than just speak with the city councilors and administrators, the local business community, and some of the more prominent neighborhood activists when they're looking for support. These conversations are certainly important, but I also tell developers they need to go the local churches, to the schools, to the neighborhood meeting centers and other places where people gather. I will continue to urge that they truly reach out to all the diverse voices in the community, so that lasting relationships can be formed, understanding on all sides will be increased, and the end result will be beneficial for all.

- 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: I support the work the K2C2 Committee has engaged in, and I broadly agree with the general framework that they've presented us to work with. Three recommendations I would like the City Council to address at the outset: we must work to incentivize the creation of more mixed-income housing in and around Central Square; we should explore a greater partnership between the City and the CSBA to address the human and social service needs in Central Square; working with the MBTA to introduce real-time transit service information signage in/near Carl Barron Plaza. I believe these are items the City Council can begin pursuing immediately, and in tandem with the wider list of recommendations presented to us, I believe we have a chance to make a truly positive impact in the coming years.