

James Lee – 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: We need to get the universities to build more housing on their own land for their own students/staff. We need to solve traffic congestion and other transportation issues so that those who work or study in Cambridge would be able to live away from Cambridge yet still commute to Cambridge. I support using zoning to require a higher percentage of affordable housing, especially for families, and also using subsidies (including housing tax credits, Section 8 vouchers, etc.) to create incentives for developers to develop (new or refurbished) affordable housing. I am aware that there is talk about the possibility of reintroducing some form of rent control. I would say that, without going back to the days of the 1980s rent control, some debate should be possible on ways of finding some formula for capping skyrocketing rents so that developers can still make profits without rents rising excessively high.

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: Cambridge needs an updated comprehensive master plan for the city's sustainable long-term development. Such a plan needs to provide policy measures for adequate housing near public transportation that supports sufficient retail to meet neighborhood needs, reduces auto usage and encourages energy efficiency. These measures can include zoning, subsidies for developers to develop affordable housing, promoting public transportation (such as expansion of subway lines and keeping fares affordable), and energy efficiency standards such as LEED-certification in building projects whether new or retrofits. Cambridge needs to promote local small businesses that are embedded in their neighborhoods. The city needs to work with the local business community to keep large multinational retailers, restaurant chains and the like from dominating the city's commercial life and landscape. The city should also do what it can to support local retail stores and restaurants that are affordable for local residents of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds..

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: I am still studying this issue of increased density. At present, it is my impression that there is room for mixed zoning and balanced development that promotes sustainable growth while preserving the historical character of the city's neighborhoods. As for ways to expand low and moderate income housing for all populations, including families, I addressed this in my answer to Question #1. What I can say here, in addition, is that we can study ways for the city government -- on its own or in partnership with the private sector -- to develop and operate affordable housing (although this would need to meet certain strict standards and would require enough funding, which is related to other issues of providing financing incentives and finding new financing sources).

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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 a great, unique city home to world-renowned universities, diverse, historical neighborhoods and vibrant communities formed around its fascinating squares. It is also home to numerous parks, sports fields, playgrounds, cemeteries, and other open spaces, including the Charles River bank area. If elected, I will do my utmost to ensure that new development builds upon and enhances these defining traits of our city. For example, if the city needs land for a new municipal facility, police/fire station, etc., and wants to include its parks in its list of potential sites for municipal development, I would oppose any effort to take parklands unless (a.) a substitute equivalent space that properly serves the affected community is constructed and (b.) there is no viable alternative. Cambridge needs an updated comprehensive master plan for the city's sustainable long-term development so that new development builds upon and enhances the distinctive character of 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: Open and constructive engagement among all parties to the planning process is critically important. To help ensure transparent and mutually respectful planning for the future of Cambridge, the City Council needs to watch out for transparency, fairness and accountability in areas such as development planning & zoning permits, public contracts and procurement projects so that the interests of all stakeholders are adequately addressed and city projects are carried out by the most qualified and socially responsible undertakers, not the most politically well-connected or the deep-pocketed.

- 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 am still studying this issue and will get back to you once I have developed a well-crafted position.