

Nadeem Mazen – 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: Increasing diversity means protecting the diversity we have and offering new policies. Protect what we have: City Councilors must organize with leaders and individuals in each community on a daily basis in order to understand the housing justice issues at play among long-time residents, new families, minority communities, underrepresented communities, and immigrant communities.

If the city is serious about protecting its diversity, there must be a city-wide plan. In the absence of such a plan, our elected leaders will continue to approve every luxury project and large scale development they can. If history is any indicator, the lack of a plan means that our city will continue to neglect meaningful affordable commitments unless we demand new leadership and a clear city plan immediately. As part of this plan, the city must introduce financing for several of its own Affordable development projects, alone or in tandem with state/federal programs.

- 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 The K2 and C2 proposals seek to incentivize transit oriented development in Cambridge. However, the language of these proposals actually creates: incredibly large buildings without a meaningful affordable component, loopholes for formula businesses, and a continued driving up of rents/costs.

If elected, I will bring a discussion about the *actual* impact of these proposed zoning changes. Through constant dialogue with the community I will work to implement a city-wide plan which will include city programs, grants, and incentives that work to support meaningful quantities of affordable and middle income housing in our squares and around our transit hubs, as well as innovative solutions to the long-standing shortage of housing throughout the city.

It is only through such a plan that the council can ensure that housing and transportation in Cambridge will meet the needs of its residents.

- 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: In some sense, K2 and C2 proposals promote a useful increase in density. The problem is that they do not help citizens imagine just how large and how continuous this increase in density may be in squares like Central Square. There's no real long-term plan. There is no rendering of what the variances could look like *in aggregate* 10 or 20 years hence, especially if developers are going to trade density (FAR) allowances. It is critical that we push for some density *in specific plots* and sometimes *in entire areas* as part of a city-wide plan. And the reason is that, as ABC seems to propose, a measured increase in density can serve our housing needs as a city. However, given that there is no city wide plan or long-term planning, we are at least one crucial planning step away from really understanding the negative impacts of these studies.

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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: Our neighborhoods benefit from diversity, historical character, green/open space, and safety. In terms of diversity, prior questions scratch the surface on how moderate increases in density (through more deliberate city-wide planning and affordable housing commitments) will benefit each community. In terms of green space, the city must push for the development of more green space and must hold developers to a higher standard for the development/maintenance of green space. More pressure will yield benefits for our communities in terms of city-owned parks and increased access to private parks across the city.

The attitude of city departments toward historical areas seems to be: “historical areas may impede development, but we can work around those designations.” We must correct city planners on this point or our neighborhoods will suffer. With pressure from city council, city planners will heed historical designations more as a resource for our communities rather than a nuisance for developers.

- 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: On a meeting by meeting basis, the planning process is respectful and receptive. But on the whole, it is clear that certain voices and neighborhoods are being neglected. This is partly due to the unreasonable expectation that residents sit through 10 hours of meetings in order to start to understand the issues facing their communities. If elected, I intend to bring the issues to the community through organizing, meetings, and concise videos and animations. However, the root cause here is that while our disagreements are often civil, stakeholders are fighting for different visions of Cambridge’s future. And developers often get preferential treatment in this kind of conflict. Creating a city-wide plan will bring transparency and open up a long-missing discussion on city planning priorities. By increasing transparency in this way, we will also elevate the viewpoints of Cambridge’s most important stakeholders: our neighborhood groups and individual residents..

- 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: 1) The restriction on formula businesses in the the C2 recommendation is very positive. In order to ensure this policy is effective in preserving and improving the character of central square, we must:
a) Create a startup grant pool for non-formula and/or coop businesses that address known neighborhood gaps (need for clothing stores, coop department stores, etcetera).
b) Make the restrictions on formula businesses difficult to circumvent. The current proposal is not sufficient.
2) The proposals suggest that if developers are granted bonus height, 25% of this additional area must be middle-income. I would work to increase this percentage considerably, given that developers can do so and still ensure a more than healthy profit.

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3) We must incentivize residential development close to transit. My commitment is to make sure our proposals (including current versions of the K2C2 study) focus more heavily on affordable and middle income incentives.