

Ronald Peden – 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: Most noticeable to me in Cambridge is the wide imbalance of wealth between the city's dominant majority and its minority residents. I am promoting a social justice agenda that gives greater priority to race and gender equality to move Cambridge closer to economic equality. It is true today, as acknowledged 50 yrs ago by Dr. Martin Luther King, that economic equality cannot be realized without achieving some degree of social equality. And while Cambridge abuzz with numerous projects and plans for economic development there are zero projects afoot for corresponding social development. Of the 25 largest employers in the city exactly zero are of Black, Latino or Female ownership and management. Therefore, I am proposing an arm of accountability within the CDD to specifically promote the development and growth of minority businesses, so as to bring affordable housing within reach of more citizens and to increase economic opportunities.

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 problem of adequate housing nearby the places where people work and shop is complicated. It is currently being addressed in Kendall Square where new housing development has been added to meet the needs of an expanding technology and bio-medical sector. The problem, however, is the new housing is exclusively priced beyond the means of average workers and citizens. To address this dilemma in the city's traditional communities, the focus instead needs to be on the development of local businesses that blend seamlessly into the fabric of the various neighborhoods to provide jobs and services to residents they would otherwise have to travel outside the community to obtain. This will of course require more comprehensive planning and a rearrangement of priorities away from the favored technology and bio-medical sectors in favor of traditional neighborhoods and communities overlooked by Cambridge's innovation and economic planning.

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 Do Not believe an increase in density is necessary to support diversity and meet the housing needs of sustainable growth in Cambridge. The true objectives of increasing population density have to do with the profitability of development in the city's soaring housing market, which actually works against the interests of Cambridge's diverse population by pricing them out of the market. My belief is the city's ever-widening wealth and income gap is most responsible for the lack of affordable living options because it creates a bottle-neck of demand for low-income housing. Decreasing the wealth gap will ease the tremendous pressure on the low-income housing demand and spread it more naturally over the entire market. If density is increased, it should be allowed only for the purpose of reducing the ever-widening gap between Cambridge's rich and poor communities through minority business development and modest-income housing.

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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: Because of the presence of large university's in Cambridge, many neighborhoods seem to have a mix of young students and older, established residents, in addition to a collection of professionals, artisans and service workers. Again, the best thing to strengthen and preserve this cultural mix is to insure the availability and affordability of Cambridge's communities so that regardless of your station, you will have comfortable, affordable access to the neighborhood of your choice, rather than being forced to live in a particular area because it is the only place to find something affordable. This can only be done through a comprehensive planning process that looks at the housing and economic needs of individual communities and targets those needs in measurable and accountable ways that prevent neighborhoods from losing their unique character.

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: In my opinion, public input into the planning processes in Cambridge leaves much to be desired. Too often, projects move forward against the overwhelming objections of residents who feel they will be negatively impacted. This is a troubling occurrence that appears to place special interests and the self-interest of individual councilors above those of city residents and voters. I would like to see a greater use of referendum polling and the use of petitions as tools to increase voter leverage. I also think regular, required town hall meetings with voters in their effected communities would help individual councilors better understand voter sentiment in ways they might not when sitting as an entire council in city hall.

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: When you look at the progress of development in both Kendall Sq and Central Sq thus far, the recommendation that has most clearly been realized the least is support for economic and cultural diversity, and should therefore be given top priority in the near future to have any chance whatsoever of being realized at all. The fact that this goal hasn't been achieved shows the need for strict accountability going forward, so I would be in favor of halting all other development unless and until measurable progress is realized and ongoing in this area, including program support for minority business development, comparable housing and retail options, as well as quality of life amenities that support diverse cultural interests. Inclusionary zoning and city surplus funds are options, among others, that might be utilized to advance progression of achieving these goals. The status quo of only lip service is unsustainable, and unacceptable.