



Vice Mayor Henrietta Davis news-in-a-letter

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Dear Friend,

It's the 2011 election season in Cambridge! There are 18 candidates who are competing for nine seats, and a fair number of strong candidates, many of whom have run before. My strong finish in the last election does not guarantee me a seat so I am explicitly asking for your #1 vote. I am running an energetic campaign and hoping you will elect me to continue to serve you. I would be honored to do so! The key issues I'll be addressing in the next term are as follows:

1. Smarter energy and sustainability
2. Healthier kids, school, and families
3. Better aging
4. Housing solutions
5. Sustainable development
6. Transportation options
7. Fresh and healthy food

These have been consistent themes for me as a city councillor and now as vice mayor. I promise I will continue to produce results on these and other issues for Cambridge.

SMARTER ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Net Zero Schools ► What does the term “net zero” mean? It means that a project produces more energy than it consumes. School buildings are prime candidates for this type of project because they do not operate 24 hours a day and have shorter hours in the summer. Around the country and around the world net zero is getting to be the gold standard for school buildings where solar, solar thermal or geothermal heating (among other types of heat or power) are good options. I will be meeting on this issue in the fall—September 21 at City Hall, 4:30 to be exact-- with interested parties such as the School Committee and others. All are welcome.

District Power ► For the past several months I've also been researching new ways to produce energy in Cambridge. With the help of community members who would like to see us not only be less dependent on the grid (NSTAR) but also produce cleaner power, I've been exploring ways we can prod developers in large developments (such as Harvard, MIT and Alexandria, a large property owner in Kendall Square) to create on-site power. Want to work with me on this effort? Email me at hdavis@cambridgema.gov.

The Cambridge Energy Alliance ► Do you have questions about how you can become more energy efficient? Wonder who to contact about having a home energy assessment? Call the Cambridge Energy Alliance (CEA) 617-349-5323. This agency is now part of the City's Environment Department!

HEET ► The Home Energy Efficiency Team (HEET) is holding a training session for managers of older buildings with limited budgets. This training event will be held on Saturday, Oct 1 from 9-5 at First Church Cambridge. Contact heetma.com for more information.

Fuel Assistance and Weatherization Program ► This is a city program for low income residents and homeowners that helps both homeowners and renters to lower their heating costs. Contact 617-349-6252 to apply. Check out extensive information at the City's website.

Think Outside the Bottle ► Mountains and mountains of water bottles are clogging our solid waste and recycling facilities. The public cost is great as people buy imported water from around the world rather than drinking tap water in Cambridge, where we have some of the best water in the world. I'm working with the group Corporate Accountability International to promote tap water over bottled water.

The Bottle Bill ► Despite a huge effort from environmental advocates the state legislature has so far blocked efforts to pass an expanded bottle bill. I'm working with the Sierra Club, Mass PIRG and others to get a new bottle bill on the ballot next fall. This will mean collecting thousands of signatures from Cambridge. The purpose of this bill is to allow deposits on all those water, seltzer, vitamin water, and juice bottles that are costing cities thousands of dollars to pick up and dispose. There will be a need for many signature gatherers. Can you help? I'll be carrying a referendum clipboard with me as soon as the petitions are available.

HEALTHIER KIDS, SCHOOLS, AND FAMILIES

Danehy Park Family Day: Saturday, Sept. 24 - 11am to 4pm ► A fun festival for kids, families—really for everyone—with kite flying, free hot dogs, and information tables about all kinds of helpful things. Also plenty of meeting and greeting with friends, neighbors and, yes, people running for office. Come on down!

Tap Water in Schools ► We know that drinking water is better for kids instead of sugary beverages and juices. Now the FDA is requiring that all schools offer drinking water as a beverage choice to students at lunchtime. This federal policy is good for kids because it encourages them to drink fewer calories. Here in Cambridge, in conjunction with the Healthy Children Task Force, I'm helping school officials provide tap water at lunchtime. We need pitchers, cups and efficient fountains that are conveniently located to make this happen.

Greener Cambridge Rindge and Latin Re-Opens ► Back to school this year has special meaning for high school students. The completely refurbished CRLS will re-open on schedule. An official grand opening with ribbon cutting and tours has been scheduled for Saturday, October 1 at 10:15. Sneak previews have lead to ooos and aahs over the design scheme by local architects at HMFH. The firm designed a highly energy-efficient and attractive building and, yes, there will be tap water in the new cafeteria.

Fresh Food at CRLS ► Through the urging of the Healthy Children Task Force, which I co-chair, the new high school will also have a new, full-service cafeteria. I'm very proud of this achievement. We're aiming to end the days when the only place students felt they could get a tasty meal was across the street at one of the stores on Cambridge Street or Broadway. In the spanking new cafeteria, there will be a salad bar and a kitchen. Now, cafeteria workers can prepare fresh and healthy food on site, which was not the case in the old high school building. I commend the foresight and the healthy food committee in making this happen.

Trauma ► This year, with the Healthy Children Task Force and School Committee members Alice Turkel and Nancy Tauber, I have convened a series of meetings to see if we can promote success in school for children who have experienced emotional trauma. Some of these children have witnessed domestic violence or been bullied or abused and for them the classroom can feel like a dangerous place. We have met with Superintendent Jeff Young and recommended that for the new middle grade schools there is training for staff and parents to be trauma sensitized.

BETTER AGING

The Boomers are Coming! ► In my last newsletter I wrote that there will be more older people living in Cambridge in years to come. The baby boomers, those born shortly after WWII, are now coming of retirement age. They, (and I include myself) are senior boomers. Cambridge, already a destination for empty nesters, needs to plan for this influx.

Silver Ribbon Commission ► Since last fall I've been chairing a group called the Silver Ribbon Commission which is comprised of a group of interested Cambridge residents and elder service providers. Our goal is to come up with a plan for better aging in Cambridge. This year's work is focused on housing opportunities. While we know that most people want to stay in their homes as long as possible and that the city can help to plan for that, there is also a need to look long term for more housing alternatives. The commission has found a significant demand for shared housing of some kind, including co-housing where each person or couple has an individual unit with some shared benefits such as meals. The commission hopes to find public and private resources to create more of these opportunities. We will report preliminary results at the end of the year.

Soliciting Your Ideas about Aging in Cambridge ► I'd like to hear from you about what you think are the key issues for the city as the aging population increases. We know that sidewalks and snow shoveling are issues that need help. Does taxi service need to improve? Are there enough social opportunities, or places to get information? Please send me your thoughts at my email address hdavis@Cambridgema.gov.

Subsidized Housing for Seniors ► People as young as 55 are eligible for rental housing at the Cambridge Housing Authority at no more than one third of their income. Income limits are up to nearly 50k, from all sources with unlimited assets for people in this age group. (You may not own a home.) Units are available all over the city, though there may be a waiting list. Call 617-864-3020.

HOUSING SOLUTIONS

City Helps with Housing ► With matching funds from the state's Community Preservation Act, the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust has been able to develop new units of housing around the city. For resources to rent a home, buy a home or retain and improve the home you have, go to this website: cambridgema.gov/cdd/hsg.

Are You Eligible for Subsidized Housing? ► The city is committed to retaining subsidized housing at a 15% level of all housing in Cambridge. For information about renting or owning an affordable unit, to apply for available units, or to obtain information about Cambridge affordable housing in general, call the Community Development Department, Housing Division, at 617-349-4622. Subsidized units are available to low or moderate and, in some cases, middle-income families and individuals. Top income levels for some units reach \$96.3 thousand for a family of four.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Demographics and Development ► According to the U.S. Census, Cambridge has grown by several thousand people in the past ten years. This trend will likely continue as large scale developers continue to approach the city government to obtain zoning and other permits for big projects. One of the points that I'm making urgently is that we cannot create more job opportunities without building more housing. New high-end job holders will look for housing in the city and drive prices up as they did in the 1990s. Let's not make that same mistake twice. Developers of large scale projects should provide housing for the workers they bring to the city.

MIT ► MIT has been slowly developing its campus for the past few years, including opening a new, very green Sloan School. In terms of development, MIT is really two entities: campus developers and the investment management company (officially MITIMCo.) MITIMCo has come forward with a plan to build more than a million square feet in Kendall Square. The plan is appealing because in addition to new biotech or other tech office space, it offers a new ground floor retail complex. Though the complex is small, it encourages the opening of other shops in the area. However there are other issues. What about housing? Where are all these workers going to live? Will they displace existing residents? Also the developers are asking for a height limit of 250 feet, which is about as tall as any building in the city.

MIT Development on the Fringes ► In Cambridgeport, MIT is proposing to move its Buildings and Grounds operation to the edge of the residential Cambridgeport neighborhood in the former California Paint facility. This is in contrast with earlier indications – and current zoning—which only allow this area to be for residential uses or, at least, purposes that are not deleterious to housing.

Novartis on Mass Ave ► This Swiss-based biotech company has gotten Council approval for zoning that allows for half a million square feet of additional space on Mass. Ave. near MIT. The first half of their operation is the former NECCO factory. The new complex will be across the street from the Novartis operation. Maya Lin, the designer of the Vietnam Memorial wall in Washington D.C. is the architect.

Community Benefits ► The state courts have ruled that municipalities can request that developers voluntarily contribute a community benefits package when they request consideration for zoning relief. I support setting up a Community Benefits Fund that is managed by a board, similar to other city fund boards, such as the Affordable Housing Trust and the Community Preservation Board. This is the proposal that the City Manager has presented to the council to give us a systematic approach to processing community benefits from large projects.

Norris Street and the former North Cambridge Catholic High School ► After careful study, the City Council has modified the zoning that allows re-use of large non-residential buildings, such as old schools, for housing. Norris St. neighbors brought this issue to the attention of the Council because they were concerned that the re-use of a former Catholic high school would be too dense for their street. The revised zoning, passed by the Council and which applies across the city, will limit how much housing can be built in formerly non-residential buildings. In addition, the new zoning places a value on using space in the building for community or common space. This meets with my goal of creating more opportunities for co-housing and mixed-generation housing.

Sign Ordinance ► Last fall a big brouhaha erupted at the City Council about an ordinance passed by the majority of councillors that permitted lighted identification signs on tall buildings in some parts of the city. I did not support the ordinance because I felt it was not sufficiently restrictive. This issue arose again in zoning proposed by MIT for its Kendall development. I continue to oppose proposals for illuminated signage.

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

The Grand Junction Railroad ► You may have been reading about this issue in the newspaper as Lt. Governor Murray presses for commuter rail service from Worcester to North Station. Currently trains run from Worcester and intervening communities like Newton, to South Station. Adding service to North Station would mean running trains across the rail bridge at BU and along that track, the Grand Junction line (through Cambridgeport, MIT and East Cambridge.) I object to this idea because of its impact on our city neighborhoods, safety issues, and because in the long run this track should be used for more important transportation purposes, not just for commuter rail. I want to see a really good bike trail here and if the Urban Ring, a major new transit line, is ever built, here's where it should go.

T Buses and Kids ► I intend to start on this project in the fall to make it easier and more fun for kids to take buses. I think of these young people as future travelers. If more of them learn to love and use public transportation we'll have less traffic congestion, more public transportation customers, and a healthier life style, where people get around using cars less often or only for long trips. I'm looking for members for this committee and will be working together with the Healthy Children Task Force and Greenstreets Initiative starting in the fall.

Bike Share Program ► The city will be rolling out the new bike share program—Hubway—very soon. Boston has already begun and if all the details are ironed out our 14 rental sites will be open this fall. Otherwise they will be available in the spring. All around the world, bike share has helped to decrease traffic congestion. It also encourages us to create safer streets for bikes. For pedestrians to be safe, we need more education and enforcement of biker behavior.

FRESH AND HEALTHY FOOD

Community Gardens: North Cambridge and Cambridgeport/Riverside ► I'm urging the city to acquire new land for gardens and to use our existing space better. Two projects are on the top of the list right now: First, purchasing land to preserve and add plots to the Whittemore Ave. gardens. This garden is now privately owned and the city hopes to purchase it soon, preserving this longterm community garden for decades to come. Second, at Riverside Press Park, on Memorial Drive, the city is responding to the request of local residents to add garden plots. There's money in the budget this fiscal year and I'd hoped the plots would be in by now. Surely by Spring 2012.

A Farmers' Markets a Day ► The Fall harvest has begun and it's time for those last incredibly delicious tomatoes. Once they're gone, we'll all have to make do with the inferior varieties offered in stores! In preparing for this year's election season, I've produced a farmers' market card and from that I learned that there's a farmer's market every day in Cambridge, though the Thursday market closes soon. We are so fortunate—other parts of the country have been declared food deserts. Let's keep these farmers in business and patronize the markets! I'm also glad to have supported the effort that allows almost all the markets to offer a subsidy program for low-income households called Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and that the EBT value is doubled at most Cambridge farmers' markets.

Urban Agriculture Fair ► For the third year in a row, I've been working to help the Harvard Square Business Association stage an urban agriculture fair on Sunday, September 18, 11a.m. to 5 p.m. The fair will celebrate local efforts by backyard and community gardeners. While we may not have the largest pumpkin in the state, there are some pretty juicy fruits and vegetables grown right here in Cambridge. At the event there will be lots of food to taste, music, and fun. Plan to stay late and also attend RiverSing—an equinox event that takes place on the banks of the Charles River starting at five p.m. Incidentally, at the Agriculture Fair I'm hosting a table to swap gardening related books and cookbooks. Bring a book or two and take a book or two. It's lots of fun.

Sincerely Yours,



P.S. Come celebrate Cambridgeport History Day - October 1: 12 noon, Dana Park. *Fun for all!* See actors play the part of Cambridge residents from the past.