

2022 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION COMMISSIONER

Instructions to Candidates: The following questionnaire will be used to evaluate candidates for the office of Democratic Election Commissioner. Please answer each question so that we can compare the answers of each candidate and so that you can give the Cambridge Democratic City Committee a full and fair picture of your qualifications and ideas for the position. Responses should be in a form suitable for reproduction, in single-spaced format. Position Description [here](#).

Questionnaire responses must be received by Secretary Lisa Griffith by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 18, 2022. Responses can be e-mailed to cambridgedems@gmail.com or mailed to 12 Douglass Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

1. State your name, residential address, business address, telephone number(s), and email address. (information besides name will NOT be shared with the public)

Victoria Harris


Cambridge, MA 02139



2. Personal. Give a brief biographical summary, including your occupation and past activity in the Democratic Party, community, Cambridge politics, and voter registration. Attach a resume or CV. Please include your experience, if any, with election law, proportional representation, and Cambridge election procedures. Is there, or do you anticipate, anything (time, other commitments) that would present a conflict of interest or otherwise make it difficult to fulfill your duties as Election Commissioner for the full four-year term?

I've lived in the City for the past 30 years, and currently live in mid-Cambridge with my husband. I'm originally from Rochester, NY, where I lived before relocating to the Boston area. I feel very fortunate to be a City resident, and am grateful that my two children (now in their 20s) grew up here and were educated from kindergarten through high school in the Cambridge Public Schools.

My resume is attached for review. I have masters degrees in public health and social work from Boston University, and worked primarily in program management and evaluation before serving as an election commissioner for the past 4 years. I also have done some consulting work, and currently am the vice-chair on the board of directors of the Cambridge Community Center.

Given my current position, I am familiar with the basics of election law, and seek counsel from the Commission's assistant director (who has a law degree) and from experts in the local community when necessary. As a member of the Commission I've administered the past two municipal elections, so am knowledgeable about ranked choice voting and the City's use of proportional representation. I've also managed primary, state and general elections in 2018 and 2020.

As you will note on my resume, I have experience with political campaigns at the local, and state level, and volunteered on the Obama campaign in Cincinnati in 2008 and for the Clinton campaign in Durham, NC in 2016. I've also been a member of the Ward 6 committee since 2008, and have served as vice-chair of the Cambridge Democratic City Committee for three years.

I do not foresee any situations which would prevent me from fulfilling the full four-year term.

3. Reason for Seeking Office. Please explain why you are seeking the office of Election Commissioner.

I am asking to be considered for the position again because I have worked productively for the past four years to serve the voters of Cambridge and improve the operations of the Commission. Significant changes to ways in which people vote have taken place during the pandemic, and I would like to continue working on many of the transitions that are occurring in election administration in Massachusetts.

4. Please give a brief overview of your managerial experience.

My past managerial experience includes supervising staff and volunteers (approximately 75 people) for reunion weekends, and managing a department of 6 professionals as director of fundraising. Currently I supervise 50-75 election workers as Commissioner each election day, one voting site during early voting periods (6-7 people), and temporary office staff in the weeks preceding elections.

5. Voter Participation, Protection, and Privacy.

- a. Increasing participation. Given the dynamic nature of the City of Cambridge, with a highly transient population, how do you propose to increase the number of people who register and vote across elections for different offices? Do you have any specific suggestions for increasing participation?

During my tenure as election commissioner, I have learned that one of the best ways we can get all eligible persons to register and vote is to partner strategically with groups already active in the City. Organizations such as Harvard Votes, for example, are effective in reaching students to get them registered as part of their orientation process. The Commission provides expertise and follow-up with the registration process and local elections. The Commission now has an ongoing relationship with this organization, and is working with this particular group to staff a precinct housed on the Harvard campus. We look to collaborate in a similar fashion with groups (Black Student Union, Her Votes, etc.) at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School regarding registration and working at the polls. In addition, City-run efforts such as the Community Engagement Team could assist with promoting registration and voting through their work with residents across the City. There are also opportunities to explore with local businesses and corporations to encourage people to register and vote.

I also believe the Commission needs to improve its outreach to the public about registration and upcoming elections through better use of social media, coverage in local news outlets, and text messaging/notification sign ups through the City's website.

b. Do you have any specific suggestions for improving the assistance provided to voters who need it?

Currently, we work with the Disability Commission to assess accessibility for all polling sites in Cambridge. The Commission is taking additional steps to understand how we may best serve all voters, and is meeting with members of the Disabilities Commission in March to review our current operations and identify areas for improvement. The machines that provide assistance at the polls are becoming increasingly cumbersome to use (Automark), and we are looking at ways to obtain more up-to-date and user-friendly equipment. The Commission now offers a system in which qualified individuals may use an electronic system to cast their ballot.

c. Information. Do you have or support any proposals for improving the existing voter education program?

Some of the materials that exist, such as the voter guide, should continue to be part of outreach efforts to voters. But the Commission needs to increase their efforts in posting information on social media and through PSAs to reach a broader audience that is more accustomed to receiving information through various media outlets/platforms. As mentioned in question 5, there are a number of organizations that the Commission should partner with (and already do in certain cases) to help with voter education in their communities. I'd like to see renewed efforts with CRLS administration and groups at the High School to formalize registration efforts and provide guidance and support with voting and elections.

With Cambridge Public School Administration and the School Committee, it's worth exploring what type of education program could be developed at the middle schools. It would be excellent practice for students at this age to begin using proportional representation in school elections as has been done at the high school.

I'd also like to provide opportunities for the voters to use proportional representation voting before the municipal elections to reinforce how to complete the ballot and provide information on the process. For example, the Commission could supervise the next "I Voted" sticker design using ranked choice voting in the selection process.

d. Protection and Monitoring. How can the Commission protect the privacy of voters, ensure that all voters feel safe, and allow no kind of intimidation or electioneering, while also allowing other entities access to polling places for purposes of monitoring and evaluation?

Enforcement of current regulations, which include a 150-foot boundary between any type of electioneering and the entrance to the polling location, has provided a safe space for voters to go into the precinct and mark their ballots. A police officer is at every polling location to assist election workers in maintaining a welcoming environment for voters. Current law affords the opportunity for people to observe the election process, and the Commission encourages those who would like to do so to notify the office so precinct staff may make appropriate accommodations.

6. Accuracy of Voter Lists. What ideas do you have for improving the accuracy of voter lists?

There are two ways in which we could improve the accuracy of the voter lists in Cambridge: 1) engaging in more effective communication regarding residents filling out their annual City census forms; and 2) having Massachusetts enroll in the Electronic Registration and Information Center, which assists states in improving the accuracy of their voter rolls.

7. Election Commission Staff. What is the proper balance between the commissioners and the staff? How will you work with the Commission's staff?

Over time, the position of election commissioner has developed from one that directly managed the Commission office, to one whose duties have shifted now that the City has an executive director managing the day-to-day activity of the office. The Election Commissioners main responsibilities now are developing policy and overseeing the voting process during early voting and on election day. The commissioners recruit, hire, train and supervise workers to staff the polls. Commissioners need to collaborate with staff in the office to carry out these functions; examples include developing training materials, completing paperwork for all hires, and developing recruitment material. In the same vein, the office relies on the input of the commissioners in creating new policies and procedures. A prime example of this is the development of a robust mail-in balloting program during the pandemic, where commissioners: a) helped develop public health protocols for the polls; b) provided guidance regarding drop box implementation, and: c) identified new precinct locations and assisted with their relocation.

8. Election Commission Budget. What experience do you have administering and managing budgets?

As the Development Director at Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, I was responsible for a \$500,000 budget. As a member of the Board of Directors at the Cambridge Community Center, I monitor and approve a budget of approximately \$1,000,000. As a commissioner, I work with my colleagues and Commission staff to identify needs, most recently advocating for funds to purchase new voting booths.

9. Operation of the Election Commission. Do you have any comments on, or changes to propose, in the day-to-day administration of the Commission?

As answered in question 7, the current division of labor seems to work well, with commissioner focused primarily on policy and the handling of the election worker process. The day-to-day management of the office is the purview of the Executive Director. A good working relationship between the commissioners and the office staff is critical, and the success of the office depends on teamwork, particularly when advocating for resources to carry out the work of the Commission.

- a. How would you evaluate the Commission's training of election workers? How important is it to you that election day workers live in the communities where they serve?

The Commission needed to go to an on-line method of training workers during the pandemic, and this method has turned out to be very appreciated by, and beneficial to our workers. It is convenient and provides reinforcement of key concepts. It has been

supplemented by Zoom meetings to answer questions and provide follow up if necessary. Once pandemic restrictions are lifted the Commission would like to schedule in-person sessions to focus on specific topics and also provide training on equipment. As part of our on-line training, each learning module contains a brief quiz, which helps both commissioners and the workers identify areas which may require additional review and explanation.

Beginning in 2019, I worked with my colleagues to meet annually with precinct supervisory personnel from across Cambridge to gather feedback on election procedures. I also am compiling a database of information from precinct clerk sheets to document the number of spoiled ballots and affirmation forms completed, for example, to identify areas for improvement.

While it is beneficial for both the Commission and the workers themselves to live in and around the precinct at which they work it is not necessary for well-functioning polling place operations.

10. Early Voting and Election Day Procedures. How can early voting and election day procedures be improved? What role should the Commissioners play in ensuring trouble-free elections? Do you favor the continued use of optical scan voting devices in Cambridge elections? How would you evaluate the way in which the proportional representation “count” was done in November 2021?

Gaining feedback from the people we serve would be critical to improving how we do business, and the Commission is discussing ways to gather information - possibly through questions that could be included in the annual City survey. I am also researching ways in which the Commission could have surveys included with mail-in ballots as well as QR codes at precincts for those voting in-person.

The Commission has recently updated worker manuals to include information for emergency situations, and that work should be done annually to address potential issues as they arise. Of course, one cannot be prepared for every situation, but planning should be in place to address concerns we are aware of.

I do favor the continued use of the optical scanning equipment currently used by the Commission.

The count in November 2021 was done well overall given the additional challenges of having three ballots, however, the Commission should consider how ballot scanning times can be decreased.

11. Recount Procedures. What is your evaluation of the recount procedures of the Commission? With reference to the Commission’s handling of previous City Council and School Committee recounts, what changes, if any, would you suggest?

They have been conducted efficiently and I do not have any changes to propose at this time.

12. Miscellaneous. Do you have any other suggestions for carrying out the powers and duties of an Election Commissioner? Is there anything else you would like the Cambridge Democratic City Committee to consider in evaluating your candidacy for the office of Election Commissioner?

Given that election administration has come under intense scrutiny in the past few years, it is imperative that those in the field focus on maintaining the integrity of the process. Without voter trust, we run the risk of a recount every election by those who don't like, and therefore won't accept the results. While we don't have a contentious situation in Cambridge regarding election administration, the Commission nonetheless should be a leader in providing information and activities that reflect a fair and transparent process. The Commission should be seen as the reliable, trusted source of information, and should do its utmost to be approachable and welcoming to all.

That translates to getting information out to the public in ways that make the most sense and do it effectively. And that information should include not only registering to vote, and how and where to vote, but how votes are tallied and results generated. I would advocate for completing annual audits to demonstrate the accuracy of Cambridge's results, and trust that this is something the Commonwealth would do as well.

Adequate staffing during voting is also a major concern currently in election administration. With my colleagues, I've focused on building a student poll worker program, which is in process. We had 12 student workers serve at the polls this past November, and both voters and precinct staff gave them rave reviews. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Commission to find new personnel and also expose the next generation to the election process so they can vouch for its integrity.

Throughout my term I've also sought the input and advice from others in the field, and my work has benefitted greatly from professionals offering their advice and support from across the country – particularly during the pandemic. I've also taken advantage of the superb resources in Cambridge, which includes the MIT Election and Data Science Lab (MEDSL), and its wealth of information on best practices. I also greatly appreciate the counsel I've received from members of the Cambridge Democrats.

During the past four years, I've developed a collegial relationship with my commissioner colleagues, office staff, and our amazing poll workers in serving the voters of Cambridge. In the next four years I'd like to help the Commission focus on using data to enhance the services we provide to be a model for other jurisdictions.

When applying for this position four years ago I never imagined that voting would take center stage as it has in our democracy. It has been a privilege to help a record number of voters cast their ballots in such a difficult and challenging period in our country's history. I would be honored to serve another four years in this role, and respectfully ask for your support. Thank you.