

**Richard Rossi**

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**1. Are you/were you previously a Cambridge city resident? If yes, for how long?**

Yes, I grew up in Cambridge.

**2. What is your current (former) role / relationship to City government:**

City Manager

**3. Have you held other positions with the city?**

As a kid I worked in DWP and the Water Department. Intern for City Manager, John Corcoran. Assistant to Superintendent in the Water Department. City Purchasing Agent (3-4 years). City Manager Bob Healy appointed me as acting and then permanent deputy city manager (32 years) then city manager for about 40 months.

**4. What aspects of the structure and processes of Cambridge government allow(ed) you to do your office to do its job well?**

Overall I thought and still do that it's a good system, clear lines of responsibility. City manager responsible for the administration of the city. The City Council was responsible for policy. Manager was in charge of implementation of those policies. Then there are different positions that manage checks and balances like the city clerk and auditor.

General position - Cambridge has a structure that produced a system that was/is really successful. Doesn't mean you can't polish it, and add more effective parts.

- Public buildings/ utilities, leader in affordable housing and climate.
- Strengths from bond rating agencies.
  - Successes because of strong fiscal health: rescuing the Cambridge Hospital, investing in housing, capital budget process - rebuilt schools, roadways. Climate studies on vulnerabilities.
- If you had mayors turning over all time, how would that affect employees with regularly changing leadership?
- I think the manager always tried to be in sync and responsive to the council. Needs to be a more public process because of the dynamics between individual councilors.

**5. What aspects of the structure and processes of Cambridge government create(d) challenges for your office to do its job?**

Budget Process:

- Possible addition: In the end of summer or early fall establish public meetings with manager, key staff and council, to capture council goals/ admin goals/ budget requests. Currently often the council is passing goals in January, while the city staff is already ¾ of the way through creating the budget.
  - A new process would benefit from this new mandate

- Also include a finance presentation on the current financial standing of the city.

#### Public Engagement

- Challenge for elected officials, staff and the public to have so many public meetings, can be difficult to know how to participate
- Example: 10 years process for the new library - years of gathering public comments. New people come and go in the city administration, new residents, new elected officials.
- Recognizes some people/groups felt the public process wasn't always safe in the traditional methods, so administration would go talk with certain groups. Found surveys and workshops created a more welcoming environment

#### **6. What do you think worked well in the relationship between city council and the city manager? What are/were some of the challenges?**

It's a process of relationship building, relies on all parties being positive and willing to work together. You learn to understand your role and how processes work.

- Example council wanted investment in affordable housing, started with a small amount of tax revenue to being able to put 10s of million
- For a long time the city was really worried about big tax increases to certain parts of the city. Healy did a lot to hold the budget by not expanding jobs in administration, but now the city has the room to add more roles.
- Often working with local state officials and councilors on issues, like when uber came in and cabbies were being affected, they worked to level the playing field requiring uber/lyft to subscribe to the same rules as local cabbies. Partnering with other communities like Somerville to encourage state action. Or green line expansion.
- Looking to experts in other areas for advice, for example a major rodent problem, looked to NYC experts, and brought their "tsar" to Cambridge to educate the staff.

#### **7. Some of the items that the Charter can impact are issues such as terms for elected officers, department head and committee appointment authority, structure of and allocation of authority in City government, budget process, elections and voting. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share regarding those issues?**

#### Free Cash

- The city has more free cash than a lot of other major communities put together, but Cambridge self insures all our properties that money is the insurance policy
- Some free cash is allocated in the budget to certain departments

As a City manager did you feel in conversations with other cities or orgs at the same level as a mayor?

- Felt it was an equal playing field. Cambridge was a leader on a lot of initiatives like affordable housing/ environment/ bicycle access. Cambridge was offering the expertise and staff.

What would you think about City council approval over city manager staff?

- Prefers a system where the city manager gets to hire experts. Possible to have a structure where the council gets to interview candidates for certain roles, but shouldn't be for everything. If all boards/commissions and department heads were subject to council approval it would be a huge

time commitment on the council. But doesn't support denying the manager the ability to appoint who they want, there is always recourse to terminate the manager if unhappy with administration.

- There are certain positions - like housing authority or similar that council has to approve
- Maybe a chair of a committee gets a review from the council.

#### Elections

- Important to ensure appropriate funding for whatever is needed, are computer systems up to date, do we have the consultant we need?

#### Ward vs at large city councilors

- I think the city should be represented as a whole, anything that could be done that might make it more fair/equitable should be implemented. But I don't know what the actual solution is or have the information
- Consider how it would impact the current voting system
- Different neighborhoods vary in makeup and needs like north cambridge vs alewife. Should survey the public on this question.

#### Cambridge and its financial stability

- How would you stretch cambridge budget muscles that would be allowed within existing laws?
  - Eminent domain of a vacant building, owning the water system, reclaiming Danahy park, are all examples of opportunities the city had to invest in the community because of its financial strengths. Continuing to do that work.

#### **8. Anything else you would like us to know ?**

More open dialogue when there isn't a pressing issue. Important for the city to be investing in building constituencies all the time.

The city has a lot of resources and information like vulnerability study - could benefit from distributing and educating residents