Cambridge city council candidates focus on need for affordable housing

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housing is necessary so that people who are not wealthy can live in Cambridge. The rent control issue has an impact on MIT students, developers off campus and must compete for affordable housing with the city. Simplex, a large development site for MIT, leaves hardly any housing in Cambridge, Sullivan said. According to Sullivan, who is a leading candidate, Simplex is in the forefront of the affordable housing issue. The council is thinking of putting limits on MIT expansion in Simplex because of traffic and parking problems that may also arise because of expansion, he said.

The city council has until mid-June to approve MIT's proposed zoning package for development of the Simplex site. If no action is taken on the zoning, MIT cannot proceed with its present plans for development.

Independent incumbent Alfred Vellucci voiced opposition to MIT development. "I'd love it if MIT would build less. I would like MIT to build 14,000 houses with Simplex. I also would like MIT to give back all the Cambridge housing to the people. The [MIT] president's house should go to the homeless," Vellucci conceded that MIT is responding positively to housing problem and development in Cambridge, but added that MIT should show such concern continuously. Candidates disagree on various aspects of affordable housing and development. It is fairly evenly split between the candidates, Sullivan noted. Sullivan said that he supports rent control and would like to see the conversions of condominiums to affordable housing. He also advocates linkage, which would require developers to contribute money to new affordable housing.

William H. Walsh, an independent, said that the present housing policy is "permeated" and that Cambridge is short of homes for people. There should also be a housing trust fund for affordable housing, he said. Walsh also favors linkage, "inclusory zoning" — which would keep development from spreading beyond existing zones — and "downzoning" — which would reduce the size and scale of development projects.

Marzilli charged that Walsh received contributions from developers and landlords so that he is influenced not to favor rent control.

According to Sullivan, anti-rent control candidates serve realtors' interests at the expense of the tenants. The independents are the "pro-rent" and "true-blue blue-collar workers," according to Vellucci. "[They] wear dungarees and work with their hands. They are all good. They were all born in the City of Cambridge."

Vellucci continued, "I support rent control. I put it into effect. For 36 years, I supported downzoning. I support new affordable housing. I build it."

Vellucci also supports municipal bond and government funding for housing development. The independents back the present city council 5-4 over the CCA and the council has 9-4 on the zoning proposal, Vellucci said. He also supports rent control. "The balance will probably not swing against rent control, according to CCA incumbent Francis H. Burney. Nevertheless, the debate is very important and exclusive, he added.

The Cambridge system is most unique, Marzilli said, because of how the mayor is chosen and the proportional representation on the council. The nine-member city council is elected by the public.

The council, in turn, elects a mayor and hires a city manager. Each councillor serves a two-year term.

Proportional representation is the method by which voters elect a member of the city council. Voters rank as many candidates as they want in order of preference. In effect, any group of voters that numbers more than one-tenth of the total population can be sure of electing at least one member of a nine-member Council, Marzilli said.