

Cambridge City Council – Reconsideration No. 2
Peter Sturges, Chairman, Common Cause Massachusetts
June 2, 2014

WP

Good evening. My name is Peter Sturges and I live at 98 Lexington Avenue in Cambridge. In addition to speaking as a resident of Cambridge I am also here today as chairman of the board of Common Cause Massachusetts. And, for the record, I should note that I served as a Cambridge Election Commissioner for eight years and was the general counsel of the Office of Campaign and Political Finance for ten years.

Ensuring free and fair elections has always been at the heart of Common Cause Massachusetts. As you may know, Common Cause helped put in place the modern day framework for campaign finance in state elections, including establishing the Office of Campaign and Political Finance. Among many reforms, we have consistently fought for the public financing of elections, which along with overturning the Supreme Court's ruling in *Citizens United* are the two changes that are essential to fixing the key flaws in our democracy today.

On overturning *Citizens United*, I believe there is little or no disagreement here in Cambridge since the City Council has passed a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* and an advisory ballot question was passed in all 5 state representative districts that comprise Cambridge by an average vote in favor across the city of 85%. And there may be little disagreement about public financing in general either since 77% of Cambridge voters voted in favor of the Clean Elections law in 1998.

Now, we are a long way from passing a constitutional amendment, but we can do something about public financing and we can do it in Cambridge and we can do it now. Why publicly finance elections? Common Cause Massachusetts believes that there are many reasons. Let me note a few of these:

- Public financing has been tested and proven successful in a number of states including our neighbors in Connecticut and Maine. And different types of systems have also been tested in a number of cities big and small including New York City, Albuquerque and Santa Fe, NM, and New Haven, CT.
- Public financing has been shown to enable elected officials to spend more time interacting with constituents and less time fundraising, to increase the number of donors, to encourage more people to run for elected office, and to lead to policies better aligned with public preferences.¹

¹ <http://www.demos.org/publication/fresh-start-impact-public-campaign-financing-connecticut>

- Public financing has been proven to increase the number and proportion of small donors and to diversify the demographic and class profile of campaign donors.²
- Public financing has also changed the relationship between voters, candidates, and donors: winning and losing candidates have similar demographic backgrounds to the districts they represent and donors are more representative of the voters.³⁴
- Public financing reduces corruption and the appearance of corruption by decreasing the influence of big dollar political contributions and creating incentives for broad based, small donor fundraising.⁵

Now let me talk a bit more specifically about our City. While there will always be exceptions it generally costs \$40,000 to \$50,000 to run a competitive campaign in Cambridge. This is comparable, and in many instances more than, a competitive legislative race in Massachusetts. Putting aside an entirely self-funded campaign and the ability of anyone of significant wealth to spend unlimited funds to elect a specific candidate, a campaign could raise \$50,000 from just 100 contributors. In fact, if the campaign starts the year before an election year, for example in 2014, it could raise \$50,000 from just 50 contributors, each making a \$500 contribution this year and again in 2015. Clearly, such a campaign represents a starkly different approach than one that limited contributions to say \$50, which would require contributions from 1,000 contributors to raise the equivalent amount of funds.

For the vast majority of residents in Cambridge or Massachusetts, \$500 is a significant amount of money. Indeed, for someone earning the current minimum wage it constitutes one and one-half week's wages. Even a \$50 contribution is approaching a day's wages at the minimum wage. I mention these specific numbers not as a recommendation for a specific matching contribution amount but as a simple example of how the dynamic of campaigning and governing is impacted by election financing.

² http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/state/NYC-as-a-Model_ELJ_As-Published_March2012.pdf

³ <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/donor-diversity-through-public-matching-funds>

⁴ <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/small-donor-matching-funds-nyc-election-experience>

⁵ https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CFMQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fresearch.policyarchive.org%2F96100.pdf&ei=3S2GU5nuA6eqsASr8YDgDw&usq=AFQjCNFp0N4CZlHyYOY4pCyM6XZizp5xXA&sig2=TaABwuy5E-q_MyDX5YUMMA&bvm=bv.67720277.d.cWc

As a resident and voter in Cambridge and as chairman of Common Cause Massachusetts, I commend the Council for giving consideration to the adoption of a public financing system. Of course before adopting any system of public financing, there are many questions that must be asked and answered including, in Cambridge's situation, how any system might have to be adapted to proportional representation. For this reason, the first step in the process is rightly the City Manager's consulting, reviewing, analyzing and reporting to the Council the options that are available to Cambridge. Informed with all the information, the Council or one of its committees can thoughtfully and carefully make an informed decision which public financing system would be best for the City.

New Haven's experiment with public financing led the way for Connecticut's adoption of a robust and successful public financing system. I see no reason why Cambridge can't do the same for Massachusetts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.