

I would like to speak tonight about one of the most important things you do as city councillors: elect a mayor from among you. Since attending your inauguration a week ago, I've been thinking about what qualities I'd like to see in a mayor. I haven't been paying attention to goings-on here as long as many of you and certainly not as long as I should have as a resident of Our Fair City, but I think I've seen enough to have some ideas on this subject.

1. The mayor should be a good chair for the School Committee. I doubt that most voters think too much about this when they go to the polls every odd-numbered year, but the mayor's role on the School Committee is very important, perhaps even more important than the mayor's role on the City Council. Just consider the greater weight each School Committee member's vote has, one out of seven rather than one out of nine, and the effect that body has on the daily lives of our children. I have heard people suggesting that the mayor should not automatically chair the School Committee but should instead be just another member. That's something else you might think about implementing, but you definitely need to consider the mayor's role in the huge amount of work needed to bring about all of the changes currently brewing in our schools.

2. The mayor should treat everyone with respect, not just people he or she agrees with or who are easy to get along with, but everyone. That respect should be on display whenever the mayor is acting as mayor, whether at a formal meeting or out in the community. Saying insulting things about or otherwise denigrating any Cantabrigian is beneath the dignity of the office. It's only two years, but you should endeavor to be on your best behavior for all of that time.

3. The mayor should actively encourage people to become involved in civic life. People are messy. We don't always behave or think the way you want, and we can be real pains in the neck, but we all have something to contribute to making this the great city that we want it to continue to be. You never know when the person you have a hard time with will be the one who makes all the difference in making something good happen.

4. The mayor should be transparent and work for maximum transparency in all city business. Transparency is a buzzword, I know, but I couldn't think of another way to express this. Keeping secrets just makes people think you have something shameful to hide. We have all done things we wouldn't like other people to know about, but that is no reason to hide information from the public you were elected to represent. We're footing the bills, and we have a right to know what you are doing with our money and in our names.

5. The mayor should be straightforward. Honesty really is the best policy. If people know that they can trust you, they will work hard for you. On the other hand, if your argument can't hold up in the light of day, then maybe it's not a good argument.

Obviously, none of us can live up to these standards all of the time. We're human, and humans are not saints. However, I hope that all of you will consider which among you will have the easiest time acting in a way that brings real credit on the city and on the office of mayor, and that your vote will reflect that honest judgment.

Heather Hoffman