

Mayor E. Denise Simmons



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Press Kit 2008



Making history.

- Community leadership and civic engagement
- Equity and access for all residents
- An open door to city government

Biography

E. Denise Simmons is the current mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts and is the first African American female mayor of Cambridge. She is the first African American lesbian mayor in the United States. On Monday, January 14, 2008 Simmons was elected mayor by the Cambridge City Councilors in a unanimous vote. Prior to her election as mayor, Simmons had served as a member of the City Council since 2002. Simmons was an elected member of the Cambridge Public Schools' School Committee from 1992 to 2001.

Mayor Simmons is a lifelong resident of Cambridge and attended Cambridge public schools. She received a B.S. in Sociology from the University of Massachusetts at Boston and received a Masters degree in Psychotherapy from Antioch College. Simmons owns Cambridgeport Insurance Agency which she established in 1982. A photo archivist and family historian, she has facilitated workshops for public and private organizations both nationally and locally including the Cambridge Public Schools. Simmons has received numerous awards and commendations for her work in the community.

Mayor Simmons is deeply committed to improving the quality of life for Cambridge residents. She is closely attuned to the needs of small business owners. She is also raising her grandchildren who attend public schools in Cambridge.

Prior to attaining public office, Mayor Simmons served for 12 years as Executive Director of the Civic Unity Committee, the first citizens' rights organization funded by the city of Cambridge.

She is a Justice of the Peace and a Notary Public.

Memberships/Affiliations

- Member, Cambridge City Council (2002-present)
- Cambridge School Committee 1992-2001, serving as Vice Chair 96, 98, 01
- Member, Massachusetts Municipal Association (2002-present)
- Member, Massachusetts Democratic State Committee (2001-present)
- Member, National Committee on Youth, Families and Education & Human Development, National League of Cities
- Member of the Baystate Stonewall Democrats
- Cambridge Civic Unity Committee, City of Cambridge, Executive Director 82-02
- License Insurance Broker and Owner, Cambridgeport Insurance Agency, est. 1983
- Justice of the Peace and Notary Public



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Awards

- 2008 — Phillip Brooks House Association Advocate Award
- 2008 — Prince Hall Masonic Family Distinguished Community Service Award
- 2008 — UMass Boston Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy Award
- 2003 — Massachusetts Association of School Committees Outstanding Service Award
- 2000 — Lavender Alliance Gay and Lesbian Community Service Award
- 2000 — Just A Start Youthbuild Appreciation Award
- 1998 — Certificate of Congressional Congressman Joseph Kennedy Recognition
- 1998 — Triad Veterans 1st Annual Bridge Award
- 1998 — Maynard School Service Award
- 1997 — Maynard School Unselfish Devotion and Distinguished Service
- 1996-97 — American Directory of Who's Who in Executives and Businesses
- 1996 — Cambridge Youth Program Outstanding Contribution to Cambridge Youth
- 1996 — MA Black Legislative Caucus Community Service Award for Four Sisters
- 1995 — The National Council of Women of Courage and Conviction Award Negro Women
- 1994 — Harriet Wigfall Community Service Award
- 1992 — A Black Legislative Caucus Education Award
- 1989 — Secretary of State Creating Community: The African Experience in MA
- 1983 — Boys and Girls Club of Cambridge Community Service Award



Mission Statement

Mayor Simmons's mission for the City of Cambridge is to be a voice for citizens in city government. Through town meetings and conversations in Cambridge neighborhoods, meeting with residents in laundromats, churches, beauty parlors, playgrounds, schools, soccer fields — or wherever citizens gather — Mayor Simmons will take all questions and comments and bring the voice of the citizens to City Hall.

The Mayor's staff has extensive professional experience. The Mayor's Office provides citizens, business, and city partners with the resources services and support needed for a positive city experience. Through a formal role as Chairperson of the Cambridge School Committee, the Mayor as well as her school advisors on staff will promote equity and academic excellence for all children through enhanced parent engagement and community partnerships.

The First African American, Openly Lesbian Mayor in the Nation

A Brief Statement

Mayor Simmons has made history as the first African American, openly lesbian mayor in the nation. In keeping with her personal style, this milestone has received little special attention in Cambridge. She receives numerous requests from both national and international press to comment on this, and offers the following statement.

“Just like being a Cantabrigian, a grandmother, a Justice of the Peace, a small business owner, and Mayor, being gay is part of who I am. I live in a city where my friends, family and colleagues just know me as Denise, not as the first African American lesbian mayor. One of the main reasons that public service has drawn me is that I believe in fairness and equality for all people, whether they are gay or straight, African American or of another background, women or men. Equity and access to services and opportunities is what raises all of us to a higher quality of life. I started the GLBT Commission in Cambridge for that reason, to engage the broader community in policy issues that would make Cambridge a better place to live and work for gay individuals and families. I'm proud of the progress the Commission has made. All of my work centers around civic engagement — I truly believe that is how the strongest communities are built, on the vision, involvement and actions of their citizens. Although being a lesbian is not something that defines my work, I realize that this is a great step for the GLBT community and I am truly honored to have this opportunity to be a leader.”



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Purpose and Overview

The Mayor is selected by the City Council from among its membership, and serves a two-year term. In the City of Cambridge, the Mayor serves as Chairperson for both the City Council and the School Committee. As the official leader of the City, the Mayor fulfills political, ceremonial and community leadership functions on behalf of the City. The Mayor's Office serves as the entry point for many constituents and visitors seeking information, resources, or services that may or may not be aspects of Cambridge City government and municipal services. Offering consistent, timely, considerate, and multi-lingual support and service to these inquiries is a core philosophy of the Mayor's staff. The Mayor personally makes herself available to the public with walk-in office hours one day a week, returning phone calls directly, and providing technical support and direct referrals as needed. The Mayor and her staff debrief daily in one-on-one updates and action plans, as well as gathering weekly for staff meetings that include citywide updates, cross-training and advising, and Mayoral Office planning. Mayoral Office staff share in the organization, sponsorship and implementation of diverse citywide public events and celebrations throughout the year, conducting public policy research, drafting legislation and serving as liaison between City, federal and state agencies, community groups and citizens. The Mayor herself maintains an open door to receive visiting dignitaries and distinguished visitors from near and far.

Administration

The Mayor's Office, under the leadership of Mayor E. Denise Simmons, is collectively represented by approximately 50 years of experience in Cambridge government, schools, public health and human services. An outstanding team of professionals has been convened to create a foundation of informed customer service and expertise accessible to both external constituents, including Cantabrigians and visitors, as well as internal constituents comprised of City colleagues and other departments with whom we share service provision. It is a specific goal of this Mayoral administration to provide a record of the responsibilities, functions, systems and resources that are essential to the running of the Mayoral office - with the goal of providing smooth transition to new Mayoral leadership and staff and providing service to constituents with a minimal gap in service during changeover.



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Governmental Relations

The Mayor and her staff have a diversity of professional backgrounds and experience that allow them to actively participate and contribute in the various Committees of the City government as well as in ongoing initiatives, program planning and development, and special events. The Mayor's office hosts a number of visiting delegates, as well as local colleagues and officials interested in growing their partnership with the Mayoral office and the City of Cambridge. The Mayor also attends a variety of conferences and participates in municipal and educational policy bodies. Nationally - Mayor Simmons participates in the U. S. Conference of Mayors, the National Conference of Black Mayors, the National League of Cities, the International Gay and Lesbian Elected Officials (INGLO) and the National School Board Association; Statewide - Mayor Simmons is a member of the Massachusetts Mayor's Association and the Massachusetts Municipal Association; Locally – Mayor Simmons is on the board of the YWCA and the Kids Council.

Ceremonial Functions

Throughout the year, the Mayor's office plans and delivers several major events which target various constituent demographics. Many of these events have a long history and tradition at City Hall, while some have grown out of more recent Mayoral administrations. The Annual Saint Patrick's Day luncheon, Holiday luncheon and Senior picnics at MIT and Harvard are among the longstanding traditions. Newer events and functions include the GLBT Pride Brunch and hosting the Cambridge Science Festival. All of these events provide high visibility for the City and the Mayor's Office as well as an important opportunity to directly connect with and get to know the constituents we serve. Additionally, each month of the year, the Mayor's office leads or assists in the planning and implementation of observances and celebrations that include a month-long Black History celebration and related events, a Women's History Month celebration, a Holocaust Remembrance, Dance Month celebration and Fair Housing Month. Simultaneously, throughout the year on a smaller and much less visible scale, important ceremonial interactions are taking place in the Mayor's office. Actively participating in the meeting process, gathering professionals to do their work, and convening colleagues to celebrate milestones and accomplishments is an important role of the Mayor's office. Opening the "Mayor's Parlor" to a diversity of professional groups and organizations from within the City, as well as visitors, conveys an important message of support, engagement, participation and inclusion.



Community Leadership

By chairing and actively participating in the City Council process, the Mayor provides the citizens of Cambridge a significant and critical form of leadership. Here her challenge is to generate participation and cooperation, while at the same time allowing for individualism and a diversity of constituent voices. Actively participating in Committee work, either directly or through representation from her office, is an important aspect of the Mayor's ability to lead well. Additionally, Mayor Simmons will use the "town meeting" style of constituent engagement to provide a forum for community voices and to gather important information that will allow her to lead effectively at the Committee and Council levels. The Office of the Mayor, as informed by events or public sentiment, may find it necessary to appoint commissions or task forces that pursue policy discussions about issues which are of concern to our citizens. The Community Leadership Fund is used for printing, mailing and other organizational and public information-related expenses. Also included in this section is funding for the Sister Cities Program, which maintains relationships and fosters exchange between the City of Cambridge and several cities around the world.



F.Y. '09 Goals

Based on extensive dialog with constituents, staff input and the Mayor's extensive experience as a public servant in Cambridge, the following priorities will be explored in the coming year:

- Co-Chair, with the City Manager, of the citywide Committee on Neighborhood Safety. The Neighborhood Safety Committee will seek to identify opportunities that give our children hope and provide a feeling of safety for all of our residents no matter where they reside or what streets they walk.
- Focus on the achievement gap and serious science/math vigor in the Cambridge Public Schools.
- Provide a forum for public discussion and government inclusion through the planning and provision of public meetings that focus on issues of importance to the diversity of families and subpopulations in Cambridge, and constructively channel that community experience and wisdom to advise the City Council and School Committee.
- Appoint members to various Blue Ribbon Committees as needed to address particular constituent or City concerns, including the inception of a Blue Ribbon Committee on Municipal Energy.
- Enhance resources to establish employment opportunities for our youth and "difficult to employ" adults. Develop a dialog, partnerships and actions steps toward the creation of a green collar workforce which recognizes new job opportunities that will be created in the area of environmental wellness.
- Facilitate and support conversations and decisions about the types and kind of housing that are available for the residents of Cambridge; securing both rental and permanent housing opportunities that support the Community Preservation Act and programs like Just-a-Start Home Owners Rehab and our Community Development Department's programs.
- Lead our schools, families, parents and the community in working together on a shared goal of providing the best education possible for our children. Support the continued development of a more effective and attractive high school, new and state-of-the-art programming, increased Kindergarten registration, coordinated curriculum and more efficient use of school buildings. Lead the continued increase in academic achievement rates by exploring and curing the gap between African American and Latino students and white and Asian students. Facilitate identification of new and improved ways to support accelerated learning by partnering with not only the School Department but public health organizations, Police Department, faith-based organizations, community-based



organizations and the business community to re-engage, in order to figure out ways to work together to improve student achievement.

- Continue to support the work of the GLBT Commission and create a safer and more inclusive community that serves as a model for the rest of the nation and the world.



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