

2010 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION COMMISSIONER  
Answer Sheet

1. Tom Stohlman

Residential Address: 19 Channing Street Cambridge, MA 02138

Business Address: Same

Telephone: 617-547-5246

Email: [tom@tomstohlman.org](mailto:tom@tomstohlman.org)

2. I was born and raised in Washington, DC. I came to Massachusetts to attend MIT, where I received three degrees (2 in Architecture, 1 in Chemical Engineering). I married one of my best friends from college and settled in Massachusetts to raise three children and practice architecture.

Along the way I discovered civic volunteerism and citizen government. I am a lifelong Democrat. I have been a member of Town Meeting in Hingham, MA and Reading, MA. I have been elected to the Planning Board and School Committee in Reading. I have been a delegate to the Democratic State Convention from Reading and Cambridge. I ran for State Representative (20th Middlesex District) against the Republican incumbent in 1992 and Cambridge City Council in 2009. I have served on numerous volunteer boards and commissions in Hingham, Reading, and Cambridge.

I am currently a member of the Mount Auburn Neighborhood Association. I have been a member of the Cambridge School Superintendent Budget Advisory Committee, the Morse School Council, and have donated design services to the Cambridge Public Library. I have run two successful campaigns for Nancy Walser, a former member of the Cambridge School Committee.

I am an enthusiastic proponent of proportional representation. I have participated in the two hand recounts of the past decade as an advisor (official and unofficial) to multiple candidates.

I have attached a one page resume and suggest any interested party should visit my City Council campaign website [www.tomstohlman.org](http://www.tomstohlman.org).

I do not anticipate any commitment which would make it difficult for me to fulfill my duties as Election Commissioner for the full four-year term.

3. I believe the right to vote is the most important right we have. I want it to be easy and convenient to practice that right. I want the results to be an accurate reflection of the will of the voters.

4a. 79% of eligible voters register to vote in Massachusetts. In Cambridge, only 70% of eligible voters are registered. This is due to the transient nature of Cambridge residents, where fully 1/4 of the population are college students, most of whom consider Cambridge a temporary home.

I think some increases in the number of registered voters can be made with same-day voter registration, but it would be better to focus on voter turnout. I support changing

current Massachusetts absentee voting law to a "no excuse" system, which would permit Cambridge to have simple weekend voting prior to Election Tuesday.

More vigorous outreach, education, and advertising will always help voter participation. And the Election Commission should participate more aggressively in new forms of social communication (social networking sites) as well as more traditional methods (cable TV, newspapers, mailings, door-to-door outreach, and neighborhood gatherings).

4b. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 54 and the Acts of 1931 Chapter 239 require the Election Commission to establish new Wards and Precincts after the US Census. The precincts cannot contain more than 4,000 residents and should have nearly equal populations. Since change can be disruptive to voters, I would support maintaining current Precincts, Polling Places, and boundaries as much as legally possible.

If it can be shown that a particular polling place causes voters chronic problems because of the physical nature of the locale, I would support relocating that Polling Place to a more convenient spot.

4c. I have answered the first part of this question in 4a. Specifically, I think the Election Commission should embrace more modern forms of communication (online videos, social networking, and emails) in addition to the more traditional methods.

I support the posting of the MA Voters Bill of Rights, but I don't think voters will be reading unless it is placed in every voting booth.

I support an online, searchable voter list, similar to the property database, with limited, statutorily required information available to the public.

5. The current voter list is accurate as evidenced by the small number of provisional ballots requested in most elections. That said, I think all precinct workers should err on the side of a potential voter by providing provisional ballots without hassle or delay.

I support a policy of removing registered voters from the voters list if they have not voted and have not filled out the census form in four consecutive years. The yearly census is fine, easy to complete, and helps to keep the voters' list accurate.

In addition, it should be as easy to unregister as it is to register, and the list should quickly reflect such changes.

6. A better question would be what are the proper boundaries between the Commissioners and staff. The law appears to give the Commissioners pretty broad discretion in hiring staff. I would hire staff based on proven competency and experience, not politics. I would let them do their job without micro-managing. I would provide them clear expectations and fair and timely evaluations based on those expectations. This applies to all staff from the Director to the newest poll worker.

I'm not sure I understand the question about Commission turnover, which seems more appropriate for members of the Democratic Town Committee itself. The terms are four years. It is up to the Democratic Town Committee and the City Manager to appoint candidates who are willing to serve for four years.

7. I don't know enough about the inner workings of the Commission and staff to ascertain whether the budget is adequate or not. I do have over 20 years of experience analyzing and voting on municipal and school district budgets. I feel confident I will have more helpful comments on the budget after a few months on the job.

I have no professional experience as an administrator or manager of budgets, but I do have experience in managing budget managers.

8. I have no comments on the day-to-day administration of the commission, this seems a better question for the sitting commissioners and staff.

The Commission's responses in the past Municipal Election regarding the hypothetical disposition of write-in ballots left many candidates (and commissioners) unhappy. It was fortunate that most write-in voters correctly filled out ballots and the hypothetical did not occur in meaningful numbers.

I think there is a general lesson to be learned from this episode: Do not convene meetings to answer questions which cannot be answered. It leaves all participants frustrated and mistrustful, not a good combination prior to an election. Other than that, I have ultimately found the Commission (and staff), to be helpful as a candidate, campaign manager, and voter.

Evening hearings and meetings are better than daytime meetings if you expect public participation.

Every election should be followed by a meeting of the Commission, Precinct Captains, Election Workers, and the public for the purpose of evaluating and improving the conduct of the vote.

Staff should be hired based only on competency and experience. All things being equal, I would prefer competent, experienced staff who live in Cambridge.

9. Problems can be avoided with up-to-date lists, well-trained and experienced workers, and well-maintained equipment.

Modern communications allow Commissioners to be out and visible at polling places, while remaining available for consultation and resolution of problems. The optical scan devices have proven reliable and fairly trouble-free.

The 2009 count could've been improved by making the public more comfortable, it was too crowded and this was a direct result of the architectural layout of the rooms. I also think a greater effort should be made to inform the observers frequently and make them feel welcome during the count.

10. Because the recount resulted in affirmation of the original count, it was a successful process.

Again, the public could have been more comfortable with a better layout of the room, more frequent updates, and a welcoming attitude. Having participated in both of the recounts this past decade, I found the decision to place the Commissioner's table close to the public in the 2001 recount to be more open and welcoming than the placement of the table in 2009. Small courtesies mean a lot to the candidates and the public.

I have seen, literally, dozens and dozens of creatively marked ballots in the 2001 and 2009 recounts. I will err on the side of human intent when it disagrees with the machine's reading. I think it is important to be consistent in deciphering ballots.

11. The ballot format is well tested, although I would cut down on the number of preference ovals after each candidate to the minimum number needed. I think the instructions are clear. The recent change to reject over-votes and allow voter re-dos was a good one, as evidenced by a much smaller number of poorly marked ballots in the 2009 election compared with 2001.

12. I also think that any community should have the right to determine who can vote in elections within that community. That said, I support a citizen's right to vote and do not favor granting that right to legal residents who are not citizens. I support lowering the voting age to 16. I favor same-day registration. I favor requiring proof-of-identity for registration, but not voting.

Extending non-citizen legal immigrants and 16/17 year olds the right to vote will result in the creation of multiple voter lists and voter confusion if such a right is not granted statewide and nationally. I don't think same day registration will be any more complicated than current voting procedures. It will require some additional training for poll workers, but I feel they can handle it.

13. Voters are royalty in America and deserve to be treated that way. Their vote is precious and should always be counted. Public service is essential to a healthy society. I know voters, I have voted in every election since moving to Cambridge. I know candidates, I have been one many times and managed campaigns. I know PR, I have attended every day of every hand recount in the past decade. I think Proportional Representation is the best way to elect single and multiple member bodies yet devised.

I would love to be an Election Commissioner and help make every citizen feel as enthusiastic about exercising their right to vote and serving their community as I am.