



CAMBRIDGE TENANT SENATE

March 18, 1997
Carol Savage, President
Cambridge Tenant Senate
136 Washington St.
Cambridge MA 02139

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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE MA
Mayor Russell, Vice Mayor Born, and the Cambridge City Council

Dear Councilors:

I must write to protest the way in which our proposal for a public housing organizer has been transformed by the City Manager and in your discussion on Monday, March 17.

I have enclosed a copy of the order which we proposed and you passed 9-0 last May. The order called for a public housing organizer which would be funded by the City and contracted out to a non-profit. It called for this organizer to assist the Tenant Senate in organizing public housing tenants to fight the cutbacks and/or to deal with the results of the cutbacks. This order was in line with the City Home report calling on Cambridge to do everything it could to fight the federal government cuts.

We asked for an *organizer*, not an *advocate*. An advocate usually helps represent an individual tenant, helping gain access to services or benefits, sometimes in a dispute with the owner or manager. That is not what we want in this case. It is not what the order was about. The organizer would be helping us fight the cuts, something the CHA favors as well.

This organizer was supposed to help the public housing tenants *organization*, which is the Tenant Senate. The Tenant Senate was to have a say in hiring, job description, and ongoing supervision. However, since we are not prepared to handle administrative duties like payroll, etc., we asked that this position be contracted out to a local non-profit.

Although we plan to work alongside the CHA in fighting cutbacks, the Tenant Senate is not a ward of the CHA. You cannot communicate with us through the CHA. The tenants have a right to be involved in the defense of our homes. It is more effective that we are involved. We want to act for ourselves. We don't want others to do for us.

If the City Manager says he will implement the Council's wishes if the Council so expresses them again, the Council should re-pass the original order. The one passed Monday night creates a position completely different than what last May's order called for.

Sincerely,

Carol Savage
Carol Savage

PS I have also enclosed another copy of a letter to you dated Jan. 24 which I signed along with members of the Eviction Free Zone and the 2000 Homes Campaign.



City of Cambridge

41.

IN CITY COUNCIL

May 20, 1996

COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

WHEREAS: The City of Cambridge committed itself in the City Home report a year ago to do everything possible to preserve the affordability of public housing; and

WHEREAS: Recent events such as the repeal of the Brooke amendment combined with the cutbacks in the federal budget for housing and the desire to do away with public housing as we know it all suggest there is urgency to public housing tenants' concerns; and

WHEREAS: A public housing organizer to assist the Tenant Senate would be an effective means to preserve public housing; and

WHEREAS: The Cambridge Housing Authority shares this commitment to fighting to preserve public housing, so the tenants are working with the Housing Authority and not against it; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council of Cambridge request that the City Manager allocate \$35,000 of the \$2.25 million budgeted for City Home to fund a public housing organizer position, similar to the At-risk Housing Organizer for expiring use tenants; and be it further

RESOLVED: That this position be contracted to an outside non-profit, and that this organizer work with the Cambridge Tenant Senate, helping it to build Tenant Councils and organize public housing tenants to preserve their homes against cuts and deregulation, and that the Cambridge Tenant Senate have representation on the hiring committee for this position.

CAMPAIGN TO SAVE 2000 CAMBRIDGE HOMES

Campaña para Salvar 2000 Hogares

Kanpay pou Sove 2000 Kay

11 Inman St., Cambridge MA (617) 868-2900

January 24, 1997

Dear Mayor Russell, Vice Mayor Born and Cambridge City Councilors,

We continue to feel that it is urgent that the Manager implement the Council's request to hire a public housing organizer. We understand that in a Council/Manager form of government, the Council can't compel the City Manager to do something; nevertheless, it is still unusual when the Council votes 9-0 for something that is low budget, like the public housing organizer, and it is not done.

In this letter, we hope to address some questions raised about the request for a public housing organizer. During discussion at the Housing Committee meeting on Jan. 21, there were three questions raised about this position. 1) Is public housing really at risk? 2) What exactly would be the responsibilities of this position? 3) Why doesn't the CHA fund it? We will attempt to address these questions in this letter.

Public housing is at risk

Public housing is indeed at risk. One need only look at the recent report by the McCormack Institute which received a lot of publicity. It cites drastic reductions in the HUD budget for affordable housing. This includes reductions for public housing. Enclosed is a section of another report prepared by the Center for Community Change and sent to us by the Mass. Union of Public Housing Tenants. It further details the risks to public housing.

What are some of the main risks facing public housing?

- Overall budget cutbacks. The reduction in operating subsidies will require that public housing be increasingly given to higher income people to increase overall gross rents to cover the loss of subsidies. Other cuts to benefits for the poor could also hurt gross rents and increase this pressure further.
- Voucherization. Proposals have been made to voucherize project based Sec. 8's and public housing. This has not happened yet but it has broad support. It was originally put forward by the Clinton Administration and naturally found support in the Republican leadership. Such proposals would end the commitment to physical buildings. They would give a subsidy to the individual rather than to the unit. The subsidy given to the individual would be less than that given to the unit, since this *plan is part of* reducing the HUD budget. Also, the subsidy given to the individual would be much easier to cut over time once it is divorced from the real operating costs of a physical unit. Furthermore, *in Cambridge*, individuals possessing vouchers would likely be forced to move out of the City in order to use them, given the market rents being charged; this is the current experience of those possessing Sec. 8's.

- **Deregulation.** Deregulation could allow LHA's (local housing authorities) to sell developments that were publicly owned to private interests. Despite the good reputation of the Cambridge Housing Authority and its opposition to these schemes, budgetary pressures could force such sales.

Public housing is a crucial national resource. It is housing that has never been in the private market. Therefore, it is not subject to the speculative increases in rent we are seeing all around us now with the end of rent control. The rents need only pay expenses, not profit or interest on loans to finance increased value. It is nevertheless being severely criticized. One of the major party candidates even described public housing as the last bastion of socialism.

In Cambridge, public housing is a critical component of our remaining affordable housing. We are often depending on it as an alternative for families and individuals displaced by the loss of other kinds of housing. Our public housing supply must remain stable or expand.

The threats to public housing are not completely implemented. It is very important that public housing tenants be as organized as possible to help fight them. This is in line with the City Home report from early 1995 which committed the City to doing everything possible to preserve its affordable housing against proposed cuts.

What would the public housing organizer do?

The \$10 Million Plan originally laid out the idea of a public housing organizer. This Plan was designed to speak to the needs of low and moderate income tenants in all 3 types of rental housing - a) privately owned, formerly rent controlled, b) privately owned, federally regulated (including expiring use), and c) publicly owned. All were threatened.

The public housing organizer spoke especially to the needs of the Cambridge Tenant Senate, which represents the City's public housing tenants. The order introduced May 10, 1996, specifically says that a public housing organizer "work with the Cambridge Tenant Senate, helping it to build Tenant Councils and organize public housing tenants to preserve their homes against cuts and deregulation..." A copy of the order is attached.

This order further says that tenants are "working with the Housing Authority and not against it..." to fight proposed cuts. The public housing organizer is not hostile to the CHA. That is why the CHA has expressed no opposition to it.

Exact duties of a public housing organizer would have to be worked out in consultation between the City and whatever non-profit it is contracted to; but these duties might be generally as follows:

- Assist the Tenant Senate in organizing new Tenant Councils in developments where they don't exist.
- Assist the Senate in leadership training and development so that these Tenant Councils can be as strong as possible.
- Assist the Senate in disseminating information about rapid changes in rules affecting public housing, so residents are prepared to deal with whatever happens.

- Assist the Senate in organizing residents to oppose further cuts and harmful deregulation. For instance, major efforts to influence national legislation are planned in March and May by a national coalition supporting public housing. It would benefit the City of Cambridge to have its residents very involved in these efforts.
- Assist Tenant Councils in accessing all possible social service resources which could aid residents in maintaining their incomes and supporting rent structures.
- Assist Tenant Councils in enhancing a sense of community in each development and participating in existing local community structures.
- Take advantage of whatever new possibilities exist for decentralized resident management or partnership management with the CHA. Organization is necessary for this kind of effort to succeed.

Appropriating \$35,000 for this position is an exceedingly cost effective investment of city resources. Why wait until the crisis reaches the stage where millions of dollars are required? Why not try to act now to try to prevent this crisis.

The need for the public housing organizer in no way dismisses the ongoing fine efforts of the Tenant Senate Board or the leaders of the Tenant Councils where they exist. All these people do a fine job on their own time as volunteers. But volunteers can't be asked to build organization and disseminate information among thousands of apartments with no staff assistance whatsoever. The position of public housing organizer will enhance existing volunteer efforts in public housing, not diminish it.

CHA funding

The CHA is now experiencing the same significant cutbacks as all other local housing authorities around the country. It is not appropriate to expect the CHA to fund this position. Further, the position should work directly with the tenants themselves through its organization, the Tenant Senate. That is best accomplished through the small City funding requested, contracted out to a non-profit, as the order passed by the Council requests.

Sincerely,

Carol Savage, President, Cambridge Tenant Senate
 Bill Cavellini, Eviction Free Zone
 Louise Dunlap, Elizabeth Koundakjian, Campaign to Save 2000 Homes

Consent Communication #7

S-164

Communication was received from
Carol Savage, President, Cambridge
Tenant Senate protesting the way in
which their proposal for a public
housing organizer has been transformed.

In City Council March 24, 1997

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