

Cambridge City Council
795 Mass Avenue
Cambridge MA 02139

March 4, 1999

1999 MAR -4
Harvard's impact
on affordable housing

Members of the Cambridge City Council
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

I write in response to the letter from Mary Power, Director of Community Relations at Harvard University, dated January 28, 1999. The subject is "background for the Housing and Community Development Committee hearing on Harvard's housing impact for March 2, 1999."

The calculations and numbers describing how Harvard houses their students are beyond my ability to verify. I have no knowledge of the actual number and percentages of undergraduates, graduates and affiliates who are housed on campus, in or around Cambridge. I cannot be certain if what Harvard states about their land transactions "over the past ten years" is accurate.

Harvard's self praise that they have "demonstrated a significant commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing" needs scrutiny. A neighbor told me that over the years, Harvard has added to the number of affordable housing units over all. But that conflicts with their efforts at 474 Broadway in 1998.

I've lived at that address for 4 years. During that period I made numerous complaints to Harvard Planning and Real Estate (HPRE) about interference with my quiet enjoyment of my residence. It is within the ability of Harvard to resolve the difficulties I complain about. For four years Harvard ignored my complaints in violation of law.

In June, 1998 Harvard issued a notice to quit claiming that there were water intrusions into the basement apartments. There are three residential units on my floor. Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) agreed to represent me in the eviction proceedings. I spent many hours searching for an alternative apartment in the area. I was unable to find one. I travelled to other states exploring living conditions. When Harvard failed to bring a complaint for possession by September, 1998, CASLS closed my case.

In November, 1998 Harvard issued another notice to quit. Again the reason given was water intrusions. Some time in September, 1998 I learned that HPRE planned to make the three basement apartments at 474 Broadway into offices. Harvard offered to compensate me for taking the apartment off of the market. Again CASLS agreed to represent me. This attorney encouraged me to accept the money. But I was reluctant to do so until I found an alternative apartment. I again spent many hours searching for an alternative place to live. I refused to accept the money.

As of this date Harvard has not issued a complaint for possession. I learned about a meeting on January 12, 1999 attended by Mary Power and members of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association. Ms. Power allegedly said that Harvard had changed their plans to covert the basement of 474 Broadway into offices,

Letter to Cambridge City Council from R Bercaw

and that the existing tenant would be invited to remain for a longer period.

I am that existing tenant. I wonder about the meaning of the word "affordable." It is a relative term. In my case there are few apartments which are both liveable and affordable.

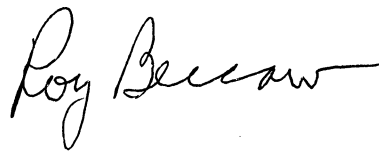
I cannot be sure what Ms. Power meant by her words in the letter to the City Council. Whether she meant the historic role of Harvard or about contemporary efforts to increase affordable housing. I am unable to determine if Ms. Power believes what Mark Twain said: "The truth is so precious that it should be dispensed only sparingly. ... [that] The lie lubricates; the truth may only abrade." Or if she believes what Henry Louis Mencken said, "The men the American people admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth."

In a letter dated December 30, 1998 a manager at HPRE asked me of my plans to vacate the apartment. In a fax dated January 8, 1999 the CASLS attorney replied to the December 30, 1998 letter.

In a letter dated January 20, 1999 I asked HPRE about the change of plans to convert the three residential basement apartments into offices. I asked if that was true and for a reply in writing. As of this date I have not had any reply from Harvard to either my letter or the letter from the CASLS attorney. I live in a state of uncertainty as a result.

Two apartments at 474 Broadway sit unoccupied and I live under a notice to quit my apartment. This is in addition to the concerns I wrote to the Council about in December and January. The professional harassment and abuse continues.

I am aware of the outrages that are tolerated these days as normal in America. I remain grateful that I am housed and that I am mobile and can communicate. That does not mean that I accept abuses and deliberate actions to diminish my quality of life. Thank you for your attention.



Roy Bercaw
Porter Square PO Box 400297
Cambridge MA 02140 USA
617-499-7965

Consent Communication #11 *5-170*

A communication was received from
Roy Bercau, relative to Harvard's
impact on affordable housing.

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In City Council March 15, 1999

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