



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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RENT CONTROL BOARD

ROGER MERVIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Robert Healy, City Manager

FROM: Roger Mervis, Executive Director *RM*

RE: Management Report

DATE: December 30, 1982

This memorandum represents the first of a series of management reports which I will be forwarding to you approximately every two months for transmittal to the City Council. The specific purpose of these reports is to update you and the Council on the progress that the Board is making, particularly towards implementation of the the recommendations of the Mayor's Commission. We fully expect that implementation of these recommendations will substantially enhance both the fairness and efficiency of the Board's work. I will be submitting the second report in this series sometime around the first of March, 1983.

I. Personnel

I deem personnel issues to be of paramount importance in the Board's efforts to improve its administrative performance. The first need was to fill the additional slots in our FY83 budget with competent and highly-motivated individuals. Extensive interviews were conducted and references and writing samples were checked for each of the interviewed candidates. With your approval, we have recently added an Assistant Director for Administration and Systems and 3 Rent Adjustment Specialists to our staff. Our new Assistant Director, Edward J. Macioci, has both extensive municipal government experience and substantial computer programming and data processing experience. Ed will have primary responsibility for, among other things, our budget and our data base. We anticipate that Ed will also help us design a performance appraisal system that will be keyed into our management information system.

Our new Rent Adjustment Specialists, Susan Theil, Karen Cooke and Jacqueline Sacks, will be playing a critical role over the next several months in reducing the current rent adjustment backlog (see later discussion). Each of them is undergoing extensive training under the direction of our Assistant Director/Chief Hearing Examiner, Meg Turner, relative to the substantive and procedural aspects of rent adjustment cases. As a part of this training, Housing Rehabilitation Specialists from the City's Community Development Department are teaching both the

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Rent Adjustment Specialists and the Hearing Examiners how to estimate the cost of material and labor involved in capital improvements. We expect each of our RA Specialists (none of whom are attorneys) to be conducting hearings and making recommendations in rent adjustment cases before the end of January, 1983. They will also be assisting both landlords and tenants by answering questions, filling out forms, and giving non-legal advice as required.

Finally, our new full-time General Counsel, Patricia Cantor, will be joining the staff in early January. Filling this position will allow the Board to more aggressively defend appeals of Board decisions, to provide a firmer legal foundation in developing and articulating its public policies, and to rely on in-house legal counsel on a variety of internal house-keeping matters. In Pat Cantor, the Board will be getting an attorney of considerable talent and experience with an extensive knowledge of the public sector and of housing law generally.

An additional element of the personnel issue -- the morale of the staff -- is worth mentioning. It is my considered judgment that although the morale of the Rent Control Board staff was already fairly good when I began, it has substantially improved since that time. Among the steps that we have taken to ensure a continued feeling of teamwork and commitment among the staff are

- 1) weekly staff meetings,
- 2) improved communications and internal information flow both from the bottom up and from the top down,
- 3) staff participation in decision-making where appropriate, such as in screening and interviewing job applicants, and
- 4) creation of opportunities for upward mobility within the organization.

I have found the Rent Control Board staff to be a group of highly dedicated and perceptive individuals, representing our most precious commodity. The ultimate effectiveness of our efforts at administrative reform will depend on maintaining the commitment of these individuals to our work while more effectively integrating them into the work of the office so that we may maximize the use of their substantial talents.

II. Budget

With the help of Louis DePasquale and his able staff, we are making substantial strides in getting a handle on our budget. We are currently using the preparation of the FY84 budget as a vehicle for reviewing, and amending where necessary, the organization of our FY83 budget. Transferring sums between FY83 accounts consistent with a programmatic budget is giving us a more accurate picture of where we stand financially at any given point and how we are spending our money. This will lay the groundwork for a more effective and realistic presentation of our FY84 financial needs, as well as for better internal accounting procedures.

The FY83 budget provides us with some challenges. Although the Council and Manager were quite generous to the Board through the creation of additional slots on our staff, each of these slots brings with it the need for a variety of one-time support expenditures, such as funds for desks, adding machines, tape recorders, etc. Transfer of unused personnel funds (for new slots not filled until well into FY83) to support service accounts has given us some flexibility. Additionally, we have found and are continuing to look for ways to limit these expenditures. Among the steps we are taking are

- 1) using Cambridge Rindge and Latin vocational students to do office renovations to accommodate new staff,
- 2) obtaining surplus law books free of charge from libraries and law offices,
- 3) obtaining surplus furniture such as desks and tables, from the City's stock of surplus materials, and
- 4) purchasing tape recorders and adding machines from discount houses, many of which advertise weekly specials in the Sunday paper.

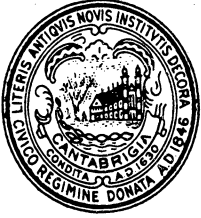
Finally, as a part of our budget analysis, we are also currently collecting and analyzing cost data relative to the varied functions of this office in support of a new filing fee schedule which the Board hopes to implement in the next month. The Board collected approximately \$57,000 in filing fees between July 1, 1981 - September 1, 1982, when the Council decided to implement an across-the-Board fee which was later rescinded. The original filing fee has for some time been under challenge in the Courts, the plaintiffs alleging that the fee is in reality an unauthorized and, therefore, illegal tax under the guise of a user fee. Working closely with the Budget and the City Solicitor's offices, the Board has been attempting to develop a new filing fee schedule which will clearly document the relationship between the fee charged and our actual costs in processing the application, hopefully making it impervious to legal challenge. While the Board feels that this cautious approach is warranted, it continues to insist that the original fee structure bore a close relationship to our administrative costs and was, therefore, legal.

III. Backlog

With the recent addition of new personnel to our staff, we are now in a position to tackle more effectively the backlog of cases facing the Board. Most of these cases are applications for individual rent adjustments, tenant complaints or special cases. Applications for certificates of evictions and removal permits are in general heard and decided expeditiously, except where the matter presents a particularly complex factual or legal issue which requires more careful consideration. The Board has since October been using a 2-Hearing Examiner backlog team to tackle the rent adjustments.

The new Rent Adjustment Specialists have now permitted the Board to develop a more comprehensive approach to the processing of cases, with a special emphasis on elimination of the backlog. The Assistant Director/Chief Hearing Examiner has developed such a comprehensive plan which I believe will work. Consistent with Recommendation 9 of the Mayor's Commission Report, this plan calls for the designation of two backlog teams. The first will be made up of 2 experienced Hearing Examiners who will tackle the special case/tenant complaint backlog. The other team, comprised of 1 full-time Hearing Examiner and 3 Rent Adjustment Specialists, will handle the rent adjustment backlog. Other recommendations of the Commission, including prioritizing cases based on their simplicity and urgency, are either already being implemented or else are under serious consideration. It is our expectation that the current backlog of cases will be substantially reduced, if not eliminated altogether, by the end of FY83 (June 30, 1983). However, should the Board decide over the next few months to implement a general adjustment of rents, this timetable might have to be set back. Before any such general adjustment of rents is implemented, we will carefully analyze the administrative burden that this task might create for our staff as one key element for the Board's consideration.

cc: Ed Macioci



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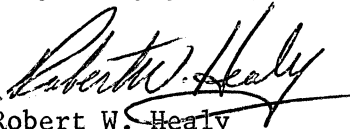
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

January 3, 1983

To the Honorable, the City Council:

With reference to Awaiting Report Item No. 19,
I transmit herewith "Management Report" from Roger
Mervis, Executive Director of Rent Control, pertaining
to progress being made towards implementation of the
recommendations of the Mayor's Special Commission to
Study the Administration of Rent Control.

Very truly yours,


Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/b

Agenda Item Number Four #245-11

Re: response to Awaiting Report Item No. 19
Re: implementation of recommendations of the
Mayor's Sepcial Commission to Study the Ad-
ministration of Rent Control.

1/10/1983

Placed on File.

In City Council,

January 3, 1983

1/3/1983

Charles Wright

By

Councilor Pinsky