

persons of moderate or low income. With the economics of private rooming houses so favorable to lower housing cost, why would the City want to deprive its low- and moderate-income citizens of the opportunity to live in the lowest-cost form of private housing?

4. Several comments in the meeting made one point repeatedly: that private or "for-profit" rooming houses are in competition with non-profit (i.e., tax-subsidized) rooming houses. Therefore, the conclusion was drawn, the city should prohibit private rooming houses – to make it easier for non-profit developers to build tax-subsidized rooming houses. This point of view is seriously flawed. **It is totally counterproductive and fiscally irresponsible to prohibit the lowest-cost form of private housing and then throw the burden of providing it onto the public treasury and taxpayers.** Public dollars should only be spent when absolutely necessary. If there is no prohibition on rooming houses and low-cost ones fail to appear, then non-profit developers will obviously have plenty of work to do. But to deliberately prohibit private rooming houses so that only non-profit developers can fill the need is wrong. Here is an instance of deliberately blocking the free-market supply and then justifying public intervention. It's the same contradiction with zoning regulations: the City passes more and more down-zoning that reduces density, thus effectively and deliberately reducing the housing supply – and then the City complains about high rents. You cannot have it both ways.
5. Housing built with public subsidies is inherently expensive, so expensive that it can help only a relatively few households at most. **Subsidized housing can never meet the demand.** To prohibit private rooming houses is therefore depriving Cambridge citizens, especially its low- and moderate-income citizens, of naturally low-cost housing.

If Cambridge prides itself on its compassion for the poor and its progressive housing policies, then it surely must turn the tide and affirmatively permit private rooming houses to be established anew in any reasonable residential district.

I might also add that, as a graduate student in the 1960s, I myself lived in a rooming house on Irving Street with my boyfriend, and I have the fondest memories of sharing the kitchen and having good times with all the people there.

We most strongly urge the City Council to affirmatively grant the right to operate a lodging/rooming house in C and C-1 districts.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lenore Monello Schloming". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Lenore Monello Schloming
SPOA President
617-497-5341

Small Property Owners Association

FAMILIES WHO OWN AND CARE FOR 75% OF ALL RENTAL HOUSING
P.O. BOX 398115, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139 617-354-2358

2001 APR 20 P 3:41
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Cambridge City Councilors
City Hall
Cambridge, MA 02139

RE: Restricting rooming/lodging houses in C and C-1 districts

Dear Councilors:

We are sorry that, due to a family emergency, we missed the Housing Committee hearing on March 27.

We have read, however, the City Clerk's minutes from the meeting, and we see several misconceptions expressed during the discussion at the meeting, which we would like to address.

1. The critical importance of rooming houses was not discussed. Please do remember that **Massachusetts has lost 96% of its rooming house units over the last three decades**, the largest drop of any state in the country (based on a report last year from the Executive Office for Administration and Finance). Over the same period of time, our homeless population has grown directly in proportion to this drop, and Massachusetts now spends more per capita on homelessness than any other state in the country (from the same report). Homelessness clearly will not be solved even with substantially more public spending. Phil Mangano, a leading homeless advocate, agrees that **our loss of private rooming houses accounts for fully 80% of our homeless population**. Restoring the viability of rooming houses would solve a huge part of our homeless problem – and then allow public spending to focus on those 20% of the homeless with truly serious problems, who now are deprived of help because funds are diverted to the 80% who could live satisfactorily and independently in private rooming houses.
2. Nor was the economy of rooming houses discussed. **Rooming houses are the private housing market's naturally lowest-cost form of housing**. It makes no sense for a City that prides itself on wanting low-cost housing to prohibit in any way this most economical housing form. Rooming houses also respond to Cambridge's very high demand for economical single-person residences.
3. The suggestion that private rooming houses will inevitably be "upscale" and high-rent is false. We are not talking about hotels or motels where each room has its own private bath plus a chambermaid. **Sharing kitchens and, especially, sharing bathrooms with strangers automatically limits how much can be charged for a lodging/rooming house unit**. Sharing kitchens and bathrooms also means that the "natural" income level for rooming houses is limited to

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Communication #1

A communication was received from Lenore Monello Schloming, regarding restricting rooming/lodging houses in C and C-1 districts.

In City Council May 7, 2001

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