



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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*Mayor*

HOUSING INITIATIVES

OF THE MAYOR

1982 and 1983

AN OVERVIEW

MARCH 12, 1982

I am today announcing my "Housing Initiatives" which I intend to take during my term as Mayor for the years 1982 and 1983.

I believe that the City of Cambridge is desperately in need of a comprehensive housing plan to insure that Cambridge can properly house its citizens, particularly its poor, its working classes, and its elderly. This first set of Initiatives is not a total housing package. Yet it does begin to deal with some of our most pressing housing needs on a number of different levels.

The Mayor believes in rent control. The Mayor believes in eviction controls. I have voted my beliefs many times in the past and did so again shortly after being sworn in as Mayor for the current term. Anyone who was active in Cambridge during the late sixties knows that housing pressures fueled by unchecked speculation in this city were intense and knows as well that without rent and eviction controls our city would be subject to an intolerable level of strife and divisiveness over housing. I believe that the housing where people live is an inappropriate vehicle for unprincipled speculative investment.

There is, however, more to housing in Cambridge than Rent and Eviction Control. Other components of our housing profile have been ignored too long while condo controls in particular have dominated the Council agenda.

We can no longer afford to ignore other housing issues in Cambridge. President Reagan's proposed Fiscal Year 1983 budget makes it clear that the housing needs of the city are being cut loose. We are being deserted and left to our own devices. He is calling for the virtual elimination of all new construction and rehabilitation under Section 8 and public housing programs.

Devastating cuts are being made in Fiscal Year 1982 as well. For example, this year the President has cut the number of newly developed public housing units from 24,000 originally planned down to only 310 actually funded. As you would expect, it is those at the bottom of the economic ladder who suffer the most from these cuts.

My fear is that in spending so much time dealing with condominiums we have ignored our obligations to the poor, the working classes and the elderly. Some state that it is just these people who benefit from the endless litany of condo regulations. I know better. I know that the needs of the truly needy are only marginally affected by this legislation.

I hope that the Initiatives which I am announcing today will begin to redirect the attention of the City Council towards those in our community who truly need our help.

I have said before that in times of scarcity we have an even more acute obligation to insure that available resources go first to those who are most in need and most deserving. In my book, the time and energy of the City Council is a precious resource. I believe we have squandered this resource on the housing needs of the upper classes to the detriment of the housing needs of the poor, the working classes and the elderly. While we debate condos, their housing is lost to fire. While we debate condos, their housing is lost to abandonment. While we debate condos, their housing is lost to neglect. Once lost, it is nearly impossible to ever retrieve this housing. As we wait while housing falls off the edge, these people must live in housing that is apallingly substandard. I believe that if we ask people to live like this, we ask them

to live without dignity or self respect.

I do not believe that in good conscience we can allow this state of affairs to last any longer. I ask my colleagues on the Council to take their condominium amendments and hold them until another day. Hold them in abeyance. After we have dealt with the problem of housing for the poor, then, and only then, can we in good conscience return to the problems of condominium conversion.

Today, I am giving an overview of my Initiatives. As they are put forward at later dates, one by one, they will be explained in further detail.

My Initiatives are:

(1) I will designate a Special Commission to study the operations of the Rent Control Board. The announcement will take place during the third week in March. The Commission will be asked to make recommendations which will insure that the Rent Control Office works smoother and more efficiently, especially for the needy, so that the endless backlog is relieved as best as is possible under present budget constraints. The Commission will make its recommendations to the City Council by June of 1982.

(2) As I have said, I am terribly concerned about the conditions of housing where poor people live. Much of it is falling off the edge, and eventually falls victim to fire, abandonment, condemnation or neglect. During the past 12 years, the rent control years, our Fire Department has responded to over 8,000 residential fires. Many of these fires have resulted in the wholesale loss of large number of rental housing units. Meanwhile, poor people continue to live there with neither safety nor dignity. During the month of April, I will announce a detailed

Initiative to deal with this problem. It will be a program involving the Mayor's Office, the Housing Department, the Building Department, the Health Department, and the Rent Control Board. The program will operate on the "County Agent Model", helping people to help themselves, help their housing, and in so doing, help the poor who live there.

(3) Cambridge is undergoing an unprecedented period of economic expansion. Right now we have eight hundred and thirty-nine million dollars worth of construction ongoing or planned. This should generate 7,100 new jobs over the next 3 years and an additional 12,900 jobs by the year 2000. I am concerned that new people who come here to fill these 20,000 new jobs will compete with present citizens for what little housing is available. As such, I intend to develop an Initiative which will be designed to encourage the construction of new rental housing to meet this inevitable need. Obviously, we have got to actively anticipate this coming housing pressure and create incentives for the development of new housing. To refuse to face up to this oncoming dilemma is to live with your head in the sand.

(4) The Cambridge Housing Authority is our largest single source of public housing for the poor and the elderly, providing shelter for two thousand two hundred (2,200) people. I want the C.H.A. evaluated to insure that all of its resources are being used to the fullest to help Cambridge people who truly need help.

(5) Condominiums have spelled nothing but trouble and strife in Cambridge. I want to make a comprehensive set of recommendations which will hopefully bring fairness and peace to this situation once and for all. This shall be the last of the Initiatives which I have panned as of now.

It is not accidental that the problem of squalid and dangerous housing for the poor is higher up on my list of initiatives than the problem of condominium legislation. I believe it is important for the Mayor and the City Council to take radical steps to make the housing where poor people live housing that is safe, decent and suitable for families to live in with their dignity maintained. I believe this task is more urgent, more vital and more deserving of our attention than the task of deciding whether or not affluent your professionals live up on Buckingham Street as owners of their apartments or renters of their apartments.

Those who cannot seem to get through a single sitting of the City Council without dabbling in condo politics are jut going to have to cool their heels and wait. Poor people are living under unbearable conditions. They are in danger of losing their lives and the lives of their children to fire.

The poor have been sidelined too long. Let others understand that while they clutter the agenda with an endless string of amendments to an ordinance that smacks of high ward politics, the poor of our City must sit outside the door and patiently wait their turn.

Enough.

I am truly frustrated by the incessant bickering over condos. What frustrates me most is that it inevitably means that other, more urgent housing problems receive little or no attention. This is plainly worn.g It is plainly unfair. I hope my colleagues will be fair and reasonable and allow the condo issues to temporarily move to the back burner so that the housing needs of the poor can receive our full attention.

Any City that fails to keep faith with its poor is derelict in its duty. That is the measure of a City. Let us keep faith with our poor and in so doing keep faith with ourselves and our duties as elected officials.

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Comm. from Mayor Vellucci entitled "Housing  
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