

Edward J. King, Governor
Byron J. Matthews, Secretary

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Communities and Development

Office of the Secretary

100 Cambridge Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02202 (617) 727-7765

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HOUSING AUTHORITY
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May 16, 1979

Mr. Daniel J. Wuenschel
Executive Director
Cambridge Housing Authority
270 Green Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts

RE: Cambridge 667-3

Dear Mr. Wuenschel:

A recent review of the status of your Chapter 667 elderly housing project has indicated that your Authority has fallen substantially behind the development schedule established on September 25, 1978.

As you know, the Department has established a requirement that the feasibility phase of planning -- including site selection, the execution of an option to acquire the property, completion of schematic plans, and the issuance of zoning approvals -- must be completed within a six-month period, which expired April 2, 1979. According to the schedule established for the project, your Authority is now more than four months behind schedule in reaching agreement with the City of Cambridge regarding the acquisition of the Russell School and Putnam School sites.

Although we recognize that progress in planning the project has been delayed due to neighborhood concerns regarding the two proposed sites, we cannot allow planning to be delayed indefinitely. As you know, we are not able to proceed with architectural planning until this important matter has been resolved. Accordingly, please be advised that the Department will authorize a final one month extension to your feasibility grant to permit your Authority to reach final agreement with the City of Cambridge regarding the acquisition of the Putnam School and Russell School sites.

If your Authority is not able to reach agreement regarding the acquisition of these sites by June 15, 1979, the Department will exercise its right as described in your Contract for Financial Assistance, "Planning Phase, paragraph a" to terminate your grant or take other action to bring your site feasibility study to a successful conclusion.

Sincerely,

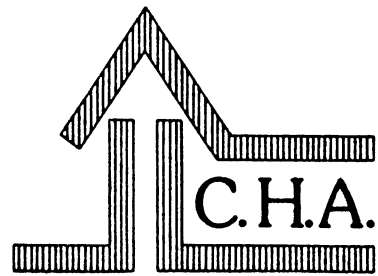

E. James Gaines
Administrator

EJG/RLP/mr

cc: Norman Watson, Chairman
Cambridge Housing Authority

James L. Sullivan
City Manager

CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY



C A M B R I D G E
M A S S A C H U S E T T S

02139
(617) 864-3020

MEMORANDUM TO: The City Manager and the
City Council

FROM: Daniel J. Wuensche
Executive Director

RE: Elderly Housing on the Russell School Site

DATE: June 1, 1979

In the fall of 1978, the CHA received approximately 2.5 million dollars from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to develop some 80 units of state-assisted elderly housing under Chapter 667. Following program requirements the CHA formed an Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from the Council on Aging, the Committee of Elders, and several existing CHA elderly developments.

The next step in accordance with these same program requirements was the selection of an architect, Monacelli Associates of Cambridge, to undertake an analysis of potentially available sites to accomodate these elderly housing units.

After a rather extensive search encompassing some 14 sites, the architect and the CHA submitted its site report to the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Communities and Development. This report recommended the placement of 28 units in the Putnam School and 52 units of new construction on the site of the former Russell School. The initial reaction of the EOCD staff was to suggest that all 80 units be planned for the Russell School site alone because of the economy of scale to be achieved and, because they (State staff) were concerned about the cost implications evolving from two sites. The CHA was successful in convincing the State that this posture (two sites) was acceptable and that we felt that the combination of new construction and rehabilitation was economically feasible.

Our architectural schemes for the two sites were presented at a series of community and Planning Board meetings prescribed by the City Council and presided over by the City's Community Development Department. During the process the CHA proposal for the Russell site experienced considerable opposition from abutters and residents from the neighborhood. At the same time, Councillor Wylie

advised that a "very limited" number of units was necessary for acceptance. In response, the CHA dropped its proposal for Russell from 52 to 40 units (to include 2 private house lots) in its presentation before the Planning Board at the Tobin School on March 27th.

While this reduction of over 20% of the proposed units did not apparently reach the levels envisioned by Councillor Wylie's order or the neighborhood opponents, it did result in Planning Board approval of the CHA proposal. The CHA then went back to EOCD to convince our funding source that 40 vs. 52 units was both necessary and feasible for the Russell site. After some consideration, EOCD agreed with the CHA 40 unit compromise.

Unfortunately, in my view, it has become apparent that both neighborhood and City Council opposition to the CHA 40 unit proposal prevail as of this date. The Council meeting of May 21st at the Tobin School would indicate that a Council vote favoring the CHA proposal was unlikely.

With this reading, the CHA went once again to EOCD to propose yet another reduction from 40 to 24 units at the Russell School site, in an attempt to rescue what seems to be an important elderly housing resource, albeit, a limited one at this scale. This meeting was conducted in the context of the attached letter from DCA threatening the withdrawal of some or all of the elderly housing funds because of the CHA's failure (due to various required local approvals) to conform to the prescribed EOCD timetable.

Without hesitation, the EOCD staff confirmed my earlier stated position that any reduction below the 40 unit compromise would prove not economically feasible within the 667 guidelines and must, therefore, be rejected by EOCD.

As a "last ditch" effort it was suggested to EOCD that, referring back to Councillor Wylie's March 19th order, it may be possible to reduce the number of units from 40 to 24 if the City were to agree to assist the CHA by "underwriting" the additional cost from such a reduction in scale by programming some \$100,000 garnered by the sale of now 8 private house lots for the elderly housing effort. This proposal was somewhat reluctantly accepted by EOCD with the provision that such monies be clearly made available to the CHA for its total 667 project and that these funds be available from other city sources should the sale of the private house lots lag behind the elderly housing progress.

As a result of these discussions, the CHA would propose the following alternatives for City Council consideration:

Alternative A:

That the Council favor the CHA proposal for 40 units of elderly housing at the site of the former Russell School and vote to dispose of this land accordingly, namely, the 4 private house lots be sold through a process deemed appropriate by the Council and the City Manager and that the remainder be transferred to the CHA for the development of 40 units of elderly housing under Chapter 667.

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Memo to: City Manager and City Council

Dated: June 1, 1979

Alternative B:

That the Council select a compromise solution by designating eight private house lots (of an originally proposed 12) of approximately 5,000 square feet and that the remainder of the site (less 15,851 square feet for community open space) be donated to the CHA for the construction of 24 units of elderly housing. Furthermore, that the Council make \$100,000 available to the CHA to defray the additional costs involved by the reduction of units and the necessity to obtain, if possible, a third, presumably privately owned site, for the approximate remainder of state funded elderly housing units. Finally, that the City further agrees to donate the Putnam School for state assisted elderly housing consistent with approvals and/or recommendations of the East Cambridge Planning Team and the Planning Board of the City of Cambridge.

In summation, there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the CHA's attempt to develop both these elderly and additional family housing units funded by the Federal Government which seem to require some clarification.

We may have, in some cases, proceeded too rapidly in deference to funding agency timetables and concern for the effects of inflation on the construction dollar to insure the level of City and neighborhood participation necessary for harmonious development of additional housing resources. For this we apologize.

In the future the CHA will take additional measures to communicate any development plans and/or activities in the earliest possible stages to the recognized neighborhood organizations and the City through the office of the City Manager. To this end, the CHA staff and board are currently meeting with the Community Development Department and the Planning Board regarding any future plans over the next several years.

Finally, I would hope that the Council will make its decision as much as possible on the merits as presented on both sides of this admittedly difficult issue.

S-312

Comm. from Daniel Wuenschel, Exec. Dir.,
Cambridge Housing Authority, re: elderly
housing on the Russell School site.

In City Council,
June 4, 1979