

August 3, 1970

To the Citizens of Cambridge:

In behalf of all the residents of public housing, the Tenant Senate is petitioning the Cambridge City Council to express its concern about the recent action of the Cambridge Housing Authority in arbitrarily levying major rent increases on a substantial number of families. We believe these rent increases raise serious legal and policy issues that the Housing Authority has seen fit to ignore. Therefore, we are asking the City Council to demonstrate its concern for the rights of public housing tenants by passing the following resolution tonight:

WHEREAS

The Cambridge Housing Authority has levied major rent increases on a substantial number of families in public housing; and

WHEREAS the purpose, the rationale, and the justification for these increases have not been publicly stated; and

WHEREAS the manner in which the Housing Authority has imposed these increases raises serious legal issues with regard to the terms and conditions of the Modernization Contract stipulating consultation between tenant and management representatives on matters of rental policy and, also, with regard to the Brooke amendment; and

WHEREAS the Housing Authority has not yet expended substantial sums of money available to it under the Modernization Program that could directly and indirectly defray operating costs thereby reducing the need for increased rental revenue; and

WHEREAS the Housing Authority has increased rents on apartments that do not conform to the standards of the Health and Safety Code of the City of Cambridge; and

WHEREAS the Cambridge Housing Authority is a public body duly bound by standards of legality, fairness, and accountability,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

That the Cambridge City Council hereby fully supports the investigation by the Cambridge Tenant Senate of the issues raised by the rent increase and urges its legal task force to proceed vigorously to clarify and resolve these issues

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That the Cambridge City Council hereby petitions the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to instruct the Department of Community Affairs to give its approval to those parts of the public housing Modernization Program that are pending before it

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That the Cambridge City Council hereby orders the department of Health and Hospital to immediately undertake a house-by-house inspection of public housing units within the city to determine if conditions therein violate the standards of the Health and Safety Code.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That the Cambridge City Council hereby orders the Cambridge Housing Authority to report publicly on the financial and policy justifications that make the rent increase necessary, and further account for the reasons it has not yet implemented the \$1,900,000 public housing Modernization Program.

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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MASSACHUSETTS

SUPPLEMENTARY CALENDAR
FOR RECESSED MEETING OF
JULY 27, 1970

at seven o'clock P. M.
on August 3, 1970.

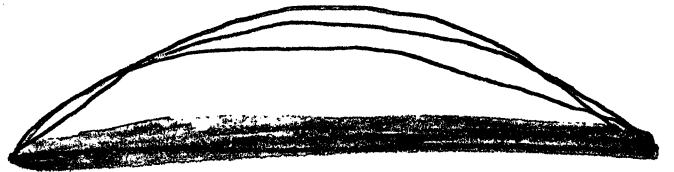
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1. Amendment to Zoning Ordinance - Petition of Miriam Kramer for zoning change from Residence C-3 to Residence C-2 in the area bounded by Trowbridge, Harvard and Ellery Streets and the business district facing Mass. Ave.
2. Amendment to Zoning Ordinance - Petition of Wasserman Development Corporation for zoning change for permission to erect a third apartment housing tower on Rindge Ave.
3. Ordinance - Community Schools

List of people to address Council on Tent

John Zagarella - Newtowne Court. ✓
 Mrs. Mary Carbone - Wash. Elms ✓
 Mrs. Shirley Scimone - Newtowne Ct. ✓
 " Charlotte Dotson - Jeff. Park. ✓
 Mr. Ed. Bernier - Roosevelt Turs. ✓
 " Bill Holland - Donnelly Fld. Plng Team
 " Frank Camirand Roosevelt Turs.
 " George Gaspa - Newtowne Ct. #500
 " Bushenette - Corcoran Pk.
 Mrs. Dillon - Newtowne Ct.

Mrs. Santiago
 Mr. Mansfull



Res - C³ //
 to C² //

2. ~~bed - 300~~
 1. ~~bed - 225~~
 Studio - 175

CAMBRIDGE TENANT SENATE

STATEMENT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

August 3, 1970

The Honorable Cambridge City Council:

One week ago the Cambridge Housing Authority decreed substantial rent increases on a large number of working families living in public housing. The Tenant Senate comes before you tonight in behalf of all public housing residents to solicit your support in remedying what we believe is an unfair, unjust and probably illegal action on the part of the Authority.

We are not here to protest the right of the Cambridge Housing Authority to raise rents. But we are saying that that right must be exercised reasonably according to standards of fairness and legality that bind the Authority as a public body. It is our contention that the recent rent increases by the Authority violate those standards.

The Housing Authority collects rents in order to meet its operating expenses. As a public non-profit institution it only needs to produce enough rental revenue to meet its costs. It does not collect rents to make a profit. Therefore, it seems reasonable to us that the Housing Authority should justify rent increases on the basis of increasing operating costs. Yet in the present case, we have heard no such justification.

In deed, the Tenant Senate was amazed to learn at the Board Meeting of the Authority last Tuesday that the Authority justified these increases as necessary to meet the legal

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requirements of the Brooke Amendment. The amendment, enacted as a part of the Public Housing Law in March of 1969, was intended to require Housing Authorities to reduce rents, not to raise them. It was directed towards reducing the rents of marginally low income families and elderly to a maximum of 25% of their income. On the word of Senator Brooke's office, "in no case is the amendment a justification for increasing rents."

Standards of fairness dictate that when the Housing Authority seeks to substantially increase rents of a large number of tenants, it should first define a uniform set of guidelines against which these increases can be evaluated. This would assure those families affected that the rent increase policy was an equitable one, uniformly administered. The fact that in the case at hand the Housing Authority has failed to do this has lent substance to the allegations of favoritism and intimidation that are rife among the residents of public housing.

If rent increases of the magnitude contemplated by the Authority are necessary, it is reasonable to expect that the Authority explain how these increases are related to improvements in services and living conditions in public housing. We, of course, have had no such explanation from the Authority.

The failure of the Authority to make any commitment of this nature only serves to convince tenants that they are the creatures of an unfeeling management interested only in monthly rent receipts and totally unconcerned with the quality of life in public housing.

It is this lack of concern on the part of the Authority that raises one of the most serious issues on our minds with respect

to these rent increases. The Cambridge Tenant Senate was organized, became involved with the Authority, and was duly recognized as the advocate for public housing tenants in the Winter of 1968. At that time, tenants participated in drafting and submitting with the Housing Authority the Public Housing Modernization Program to federal officials. This program was approved for \$1,900,000 at that time. Since then, we as a group have continually sought to have the program of physical rehabilitation implemented. Eighteen months later we stand before you protesting rent increases to tenants while the Housing Authority sits on a \$300,000 operating reserve and has yet to implement any significant part of the \$1,900,000 modernization program.

This situation exists in spite of the fact that a large number of public housing apartments do not meet the city's own standards of health and safety described in the Building Code.

I respectfully ask thas City Council "What standards of justice and fairness allow the Cambridge Housing Authority to raise rents on tenants living in apartments that VIOLATE the health and safety code of our city while at the same time the Authority has adequate financial means available through the Modernization Program to completely remedy the situation?"

By way of comparison, the City of Boston during this same time period has implemented an \$8,000,000 federally funded Modernization Program and is now applying for an additional \$37,000,000. It is fair to say that public housing tenants in the City of Cambridge could be benefitting in a similar way

if the Cambridge Housing Authority took seriously its responsibilities to the physical welfare of its tenants. If this were the case, Modernization funds could now be spent to reduce directly and indirectly the operating costs of the Authority and thereby make rent increases unnecessary.

In these times we often hear quite a bit of rhetoric about law and order. We assume this rhetoric applies to our public officials. We are here tonight to petition for the support of you, the City Council, in affirming the standards of justice, fairness, and legality that do apply to the conduct of public bodies such as the Cambridge Housing Authority.

It is the belief of the Cambridge Tenant Senate that your support for the resolutions we have placed before you will insure that law and order and justice and fairness will prevail when the rights of public housing tenants are at stake.

Sincerely,

Eilean Henry
Chairlady

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Communication from Cambridge Tenant Senate

Rent Increases

August 3, 1970