

City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council

3/27

1995

KT Table Ch KT #4

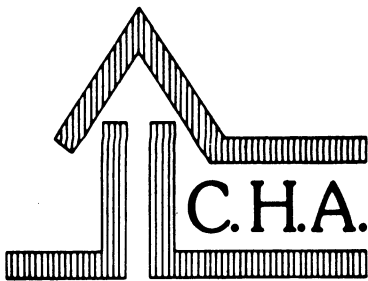
YEA	NAY	ABSENT	PRESENT	
✓				Ms. Kathleen L. Born
	✓			Mr. Francis H. Duehay
✓				Mr. Anthony Galluccio
✓				Mr. Jonathan S. Myers
✓				Mrs. Sheila T. Russell
✓				Mr. Michael A. Sullivan
	✓			Mr. Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.
✓				Ms. Katherine Triantafillou
		✓		Mayor Kenneth E. Reeves

6

2

1

0



CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY

270 GREEN ST., CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

(617) 864-3020

March 16, 1995

To The Honorable, The City Council
City Hall
Cambridge, MA 02139

RE: 26 - 32 Worcester Street

Dear Mr. Mayor and City Councillors:

We received your correspondence dated March 8, 1995, regarding the Cambridge Housing Authority's (CHA's) plans to develop 5 - 7 apartments for low-income families on Worcester Street in Area 4. Given the Council's action and concerns expressed by the immediate Worcester Street neighborhood and the Area 4 Coalition, I have directed our staff to stop processing and to re-evaluate the proposal in hopes that we can define a program more acceptable to the community.

At the same time, while we obviously want to proceed as much as possible in concert with the Council's wishes, your recent communication regarding the CHA's Worcester Street proposal leaves us somewhat confused, disappointed and concerned.

We are confused because we believe that the Council's wish is to support the limited affordable housing opportunities that are possible within the City, especially in light of the loss of rent control. We are also confused and disappointed because the Council's communication comes at a point when the process, or "colloquy", if you will, between the CHA and the neighborhood is far from concluded ----at least so far as CHA would wish. We are concerned that the Council has seemingly and uncharacteristically inserted itself at this juncture in a process, which contrary to some apparent beliefs among councillors, has spanned 12 weeks and 3 meetings, several of which were held on Saturdays to accommodate as many working households as possible. Such City Council intervention gives rise to our concern not only with respect to our Worcester Street proposal, but for any others which may follow. Obviously, when the Council votes on an issue in mid-process, the side which is the beneficiary of that vote gains an enormous if not unfair advantage in any negotiation. Hence, we hope the Council will reconsider its action of March 6th and see it as premature.

RECEIVED BY
OFFICE OF CITY CLERK
1995 MAR 16 AM 10:49
CAMBRIDGE MA.

To The Honorable, The City Council

March 16, 1995

Page Two

We ask that you see the March 6th vote as premature because, although it may not sway your vote, we think you should know (in addition to the correction concerning process mentioned above) the following information when assessing **any** CHA development proposal:

- * The CHA has a proven track record in the development and management of affordable housing. The four unit building at 15 Inman Street (behind City Hall) and 12 - 18 Hingham Street stand in testament to our ability to work effectively with abutters and neighborhood groups. Other recent examples include the renovation of the former St. Paul's Rectory in Harvard Square and the development of community residences on Hammond Street in the Agassiz neighborhood and Aberdeen Avenue in West Cambridge.
- * CHA's proposal for Worcester Street was predicated upon our long history in Area 4. The CHA's two largest developments, Washington Elms and Newtowne Court are in the neighborhood and we have been involved in community activities for many years, such as the Area 4 Crime Task Force (which we have supported functionally and financially) and the Cambridge Arts Center. Our efforts to date have been directed at improving the area for our residents and the wider community. We felt that a modest number of new affordable apartments, if accomplished with help and input from our neighbors, would positively impact Worcester Street.
- * The CHA's Worcester Street proposal was for a 5 - 7 unit building which would house approximately 14 - 23 people. The future residents would be selected from the pool of current CHA residents in need of larger or smaller apartments. All residents would have a proven track record with the CHA. We have heard speculation at recent meetings that these families would somehow bring drug activity and crime to the area. This concern is clearly unfounded and has not been the case at 15 Inman Street or 12 - 18 Hingham Street. On the contrary, the CHA families residing in these buildings have been model tenants and have contributed to the stability of their respective neighborhoods. They deserve better consideration.
- * As a result of CHA redevelopment actions over the last fifteen years, there has been a significant loss of affordable units in Area 4: 140 units at Washington Elms, and 14 units at Newtowne Court (currently under construction). The proposed construction of 5 - 7 new units on Worcester Street is a seemingly modest proposal in light of this diminution of apartments.

To The Honorable, The City Council

March 16, 1995

Page Three

- * Area 4 is the second densest neighborhood in the City and as such, we agree with residents that open space is an important issue. However, we feel that the CHA's proposal was modest enough in scale that the open feel of the lot and a large number of the trees could be retained. Those that would be lost, could be replaced, tree for tree. In addition, Worcester Street enjoys an excellent location in relation to available open space. It is 1 - 2 blocks from Sennott Park and 2 - 3 blocks from Columbia Park. We recently learned tha the City is planning over \$380,000 in park and open space improvements for Area 4.

We agree with area residents that Worcester Street is a sound, stable community and believe it would be an excellent environment for a few of our residents to raise their families.

While the discussion staff have had with neighbors about the need to renovate vacant buildings on Washington Street is important (and the CHA has agreed to work with the Area 4 Coalition to try to find solutions for these properties), the level of funding available will not cover acquisition costs nor the higher costs associated with renovation, without additional funding from the City or some other source. Timing is also a critical factor. The time required to achieve site control through negotiations with current owners or through eminent domain as suggested may be too long to salvage existing funding. It is important to stress that our current funding allocation from HUD is likely to be the last funding available for affordable housing development for many years to come. This funding may also be subject to recapture, given the present direction of the Congress. Finally, we think that the argument that full or partial operating support may be withdrawn by the federal government, hence we should not proceed with new development is counterproductive and ultimately unwise. We would urge that any reasonable opportunity to create affordable apartments with funds in hand for those development costs should be pursued.

In closing, we felt that this letter was necessary not just to be certain that you were fully informed from CHA's viewpoint concerning Worcester Street, but because of larger implications. If Area IV is to be considered a last priority for future affordable housing development, then a commensurate high or higher priority should be assigned to other areas of the City. And the assignment of such priority should realistically be supported with both site assistance and increased financing to offset higher costs. These concerns and suggestions, however, are probably best first addressed to the Council's Housing and Community Development Committee, where we would welcome such an opportunity.

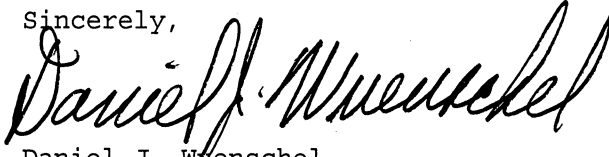
To The Honorable, The City Council

March 16, 1995

Page Four

In the meantime we will continue to work with the City Council, Area 4 Coalition and the Community Development Department to develop a strategy which will address the needs and concerns of the neighborhood while meeting the CHA's goals for affordable housing development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel J. Wenschel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Daniel" and last name "Wenschel" clearly distinguishable.

Daniel J. Wenschel
Executive Director

DJW/ss

cc: Robert Healy, City Manager
Susan Schlesinger, Community Development Department
Area 4 Coalition
Worcester Street Mailing

S-131

Communication and Reports from City Officers #2

Communication received from Cambridge
Housing Authority regarding the
proposal to develop a low-income
housing on 26-32 Worcester Street.

In City Council March 20, 1995

*Charter Right exercised
by Councillor
Triantafyllou.*

*3/21/95 - Tabled on motion
of Councillor Triantafyllou*

*6-2-1.
4/3/95 - Placed on file on
motion of Councillor Triantafyllou*