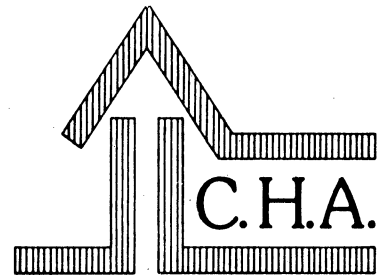


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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

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

August 10, 1976

(617) 864-3020

Ms. Kathleen Dasso
81A Winchester Street
Brookline, Mass. 02146

Dear Ms. Dasso:

I received a copy of your letter to Governor Dukakis expressing your shock and concern about conditions at Washington Elms housing development, as related to you by an elderly patient at the Cambridge Hospital.

Tragically, much of what you recount in your letter to Governor Dukakis is substantially true. While many families continue to raise their children in some peace and tranquility at Washington Elms, life for many residents there, especially teenagers, can be violent and fearful. In the last year and a half, since I assumed the responsibilities of Executive Director of this Authority, the Cambridge Housing Authority has undertaken the following steps to improve conditions in Washington Elms and the neighboring housing development of Newtowne Court:

1. We have obtained \$2.5 million in special funding from the federal government for an intensive effort to improve both physical and social conditions in the two developments. While much of this money will be committed to physical renovations, it has permitted us to add a Recreation Coordinator, a Manpower Specialist, and a Security Coordinator to the existing management staff of the two developments. Comprehensive physical improvements and a program of firm rule enforcement, coupled with intensive social services will be carried out over the next two years.
2. A full time vacancy reduction crew was assigned to the development during 1975, to prepare vacant apartments for new occupants. A new crew will begin work there within a month.
3. One entire building of 18 units, which has been abandoned for two years, has been completely rehabilitated and will be re-occupied this month.

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4. A three-member social services team has recently been assigned to the two developments, funded through Block Grant dollars through the City and matching federal funds.

5. A program of breakthroughs, to create large apartments out of more numerous small apartments has been undertaken to reduce the density of the developments.

6. A recycling program has been undertaken with funds obtained from the New England Regional Commission to provide employment for youths and to allow for the eventual closing down of unhealthy incinerators.

7. All elderly residents of Washington Elms and Newtowne Court have been offered an opportunity to transfer to the new elderly housing tower at 237 Franklin Street in Central Square.

These are only the most dramatic of a wide range of efforts undertaken by this Authority at Washington Elms and Newtowne Court to make the 600 units in these two developments a safe and stable environment in which low-income families can raise their children.

Unfortunately, it is much easier to destroy the fabric of a community than to recreate a sense of community once it has fled. We can do much to foster conditions under which residents can re-establish order and tranquility, if they so desire. It is our hope that the decent and stable residents of these two developments will take the opportunity to re-establish the bonds of community in these developments. Our experience in other housing developments, particularly Roosevelt Towers, indicates that residents and Housing Authority staff, by cooperating together, can make public housing a desirable place to live.

While I make no promises, and while the process of revitalization is slow and full of pitfalls, I believe I am not alone in beginning to hope that Washington Elms and Newtowne Court can change for the better.

I thank you for your deep concern.

Sincerely,

CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY


Lewis H. Spence, Executive Director

LHS:vn

cc: Gov. Dukakis, Mayor Vellucci, City Council

73.5-375

Comm. from Cambridge Housing Authority in
response to letter from Ms. Kathleen Dasso
re: to Washington Elms Housing Development.

In City Council,
Sept. 13, 1976

Placed on File