

ADDRESS TO THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL JUNE 10, 1991

BY CHARLES CHRISTENSON

JUN -5 PM 4:31
CAMBRIDGE MA

I wonder who you people imagine you are kidding? You talk constantly of decent and affordable housing for persons of low and moderate income but a study made by Abt Associates, a Cambridge based company that specializes in surveys, showed that 70% of those rent controlled units intended for people having low to moderate incomes are occupied by people having substantially greater incomes. No better example could serve than yourself Councilor Reeves, an attorney with an income over \$50,000 who lives, it is common knowledge, in a \$400 per month rent controlled flat. I'm curious Councilor Reeves would you be willing to give up your \$400 a month flat to a family having low to moderate income. Quite frankly gentlemen, I don't think you enable the democratic process. I think you prostituted it for the sake of your own political ambitions.

You recently appointed a compliance officer, a position within the rent control department, when the rent control department already has an abundant staff of hearing examiners who are themselves compliance officers empowered by all the forces of law not to mention the Health & Building Departments with a staff of inspectors vastly better schooled in Health & Building codes than anyone from the Rent Control Department could be. You people seem to thrive on redundancy, verbiage and playing with words. I refer particularly to regulation series number 78 petition for rent adjustment for capital improvements, steps 1,

(2)

2, 3 and 4. This is typical of the sort of loan Cambridge rent control offers landlords. The wording of the loan proceeding is unbelievably torturous and confusing. The results, if any, are minimal. Basically the proceedings are designed to beat the owner to death with paperwork and proceedings. The city council calendar of 4/22 is typical with regards to the council's ability to play with words. I cite page 18, page 19, page 25, page 26, page 12 and page 29.

Councilor Reeves, what seems to recommend you to political office is that you are an artist of the cheap shot. I remember, in the recent past, that a Mr. Chester Cooper came before the city council and commented "because I own rental property everyone thinks I'm a millionaire". While I personally wouldn't use that language, my own experience corroborates that statement entirely. If you own rental property every one thinks you're rich. The human mind often functions in bizarre fashions. Mr. Cooper is well known to the Cambridge community at large because of the large number of signs displaying anti-rent control slogans he has posted on the front of his property. One of those signs mentions you Councilor Reeves. After Mr. Cooper made his comment, you then made the observation "Well then Mr. Cooper if my name is on your sign, the I must be a millionaire too". I find your logic fascinating Councilor. How in the name of God can your name on one of his signs make you a millionaire?

(3)

Councilor Myers you should consider having a violinist accompany you to city council meetings. At one point in the recent past, the city council meeting of 4/22 to be exact, you made a remark about tenants living in apartments so dilapidated because of landlord negligence that snow and rain were falling into them. Any landlord that allowed his tenants to be subjected to such conditions would be in jail. The Building & Health Department would be all over him like fleas on a dog's back. He'd be slapped with so many subpoenas he could use them for wallpaper. I remember Councilor Myers, on 4/8 you commenting, in support of one of the 18 amendments to Rent Board Regulations, about landlords and tenants getting together and deciding on rents, "This is a joke, a vicious manipulative joke". One thing I learned as a landlord is that you do not discuss rents with tenants. There is nothing to say. I tried at first, I quickly learned a simple hard fact that there is nothing for landlords and tenants to discuss. You occupy a rental unit in my property and you pay a monthly rent. If you don't pay the rent then you can't live there anymore.

Councilor Myers, you love to talk about a desperate shortage of housing and a recovery of illegal units. It makes you sound like a hero, it is basically a cheap trick to keep you in office. Years ago Harvard and MIT reached an agreement with the City of Cambridge wherein Harvard and MIT housing would be exempted from rent control. Harvard and MIT pay the City of Cambridge enormous

(4)

amounts yearly in property taxes, water and sewer taxes, etc., etc. It was simply good business that Harvard and MIT said look, we have our portfolio of expenses, so do you. We want the right to charge the rates for the housing we provide to meet our expenses.

With regards to the matter of housing shortages, there is something you pro rent control Councilors neglected. SPAA has an underground. We even have an underground guerilla. His name is Chester Cooper. An interesting play on words don't you think City Councilors? Because that's where Chester Cooper spends most of his time, underground reading water meters. Perforce, he knows the name and address of every person or institution that owns a building with a water meter in it in Cambridge. One day he took me on a tour and showed me that in the last 20 years, 25,000 new apartments have been created in Cambridge. He showed me 15 large apartment complexes that have been built in the last 15 years in Cambridge. The idea of a desperate housing shortage is a farce.

Councilor Cyr, I see you on a rather regular basis don't I? We bank at the same bank, we both train at the YMCA in the morning and we meet on the street frequently. I remember one morning we met at the Y running on the indoor track. I asked you about these 18 amendments to the rent board regulations being considered by the City Council at that time. You said you didn't know, you hadn't read them. I find this assertion to be

(5)

ridiculous on its face. While you did not sit on the rent control subcommittee you are in frequent contact with the City Councilors who are. When I asked if we could meet some other place than the Y you suggested City Hall. When you met me at City Hall before a City Council meeting you avoided me at all costs. May I suggest Councilor Cyr that you have a lot in common with Councilor Myers. You both are word wizards. You both have that ability to use the meaning of the English language to your own advantage.

Of the 18 reform proposals made by the four freshman city councilors, not one benefits the landlord. Rent Control has prevailed in Cambridge for 21 years, and for 21 years rent control has given homeowners nothing but abuse. In the 20 years Cambridge has been under rent control there has been no pro-rent control city councilor that has owned rent controlled property.

The principle advocates of rent control in Cambridge are the leading figures of the CTU, Messers Turk, Gardner, Rohr and Noble. I have taken the trouble to consult the Cambridge Election Commission record and determined what these people do for a living. The records seem to indicate that these people considering the average free market rent in Cambridge are economically rather marginal. The records seem to indicate that these people could not possibly afford to live in Cambridge were it not for rent control.

(6)

I'm wondering when the Cambridge Electorate will realize that the General Adjustment is a joke. It offers nickels and dimes when owners need dollars. It is a pittance, a token to delude owners that they are being given something.

What ever housing shortage there remains will never be resolved because big developers won't touch Cambridge Housing contracts because of rent control. What remains at the end, is the consideration that rent control is a crime, a deliberately contrived bureaucratic crime that allows councilors like Cyr, Myers, Reeves and Toomey to keep themselves in office by saying whatever the tenants want to hear in order to get their vote.

C. C. 106

City of Cambridge

RECEIVED BY
CITY CLERK
JUL 17 - 5 PM 4:31
CAMBRIDGE MA.

(41)

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ON THE CALENDAR

7. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: Affordable Housing Preservation Fund.
8. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: survey and inventory of the rent controlled dwelling units.
9. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: development of a City Housing Department.
10. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: development of a Small Owner Program.
11. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: eviction process.
12. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: amendment to Ordinance Number 966 re: master deed.



City of Cambridge

#2

Calendar Item # 8
AMENDED ORDER
IN CITY COUNCIL

Compliance officer

April 8, 1991
April 29, 1991

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

WHEREAS: This City Council believes that the laws as they pertain to rent control and its administration of a high priority; and

WHEREAS: The position of compliance officer will be of value to the city in the efforts to enforce and adhere to the law with regard to rent control; and

WHEREAS: There exists a need to prioritize areas for the compliance officer to expand energies on and focus on such as:

1. enforcement of life threatening and safety matters;
2. units vacant more than 120 days; and
3. alleged overcharge; now therefore be it

3 steps, 24 hr. dial, head first, ruling

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommend to the City Manager and Rent Control Board that the position of compliance officer be institutionalize as a position within the rent control staff and said position not to be filled by either a tenant or property owner in the City of Cambridge.

In City Council April 29, 1991.

Adopted as amended by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- John E. Flynn, Deputy City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

John E. Flynn

John E. Flynn, Deputy City Clerk

RECONSIDERATION HAS BEEN FILED BY COUNCILLOR CYR
ON THIS MATTER.



City of Cambridge

ORIGINAL ORDER
Calendar Item # 8

-15-

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

WHEREAS: This City Council believes that the laws as they pertain to rent control and its administration of a high priority; and

WHEREAS: The position of compliance officer will be of value to the city in the efforts to enforce and adhere to the law with regard to rent control; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommend to the City Manager and Rent Control Board that the position of compliance officer be institutionalize as a position within the rent control staff.

*Compliance
officer, rent
control staff?*



City of Cambridge

4

*General
Adjustment
a pittance*

Calendar Item # 11

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

April 29, 1991

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

WHEREAS: A General Adjustment that is reasonable, fair and predictable would be beneficial to landlords and tenants alike; and

WHEREAS: Concern has been raised with recent General Adjustments that the timing of the General Adjustments are unknown and the amount of the rent increases can vary widely; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommend to the City Manager and the Rent Control Board that Rent Control Board takes steps to ensure that the General Adjustment is more predictable and less erratic in its impact on tenants; and be it further

RESOLVED: That to accomplish the goals of a more predictable and livable General Adjustment the City Council recommends that the Rent Control Board begin to schedule the General Adjustment at regular annual points in the year; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommends to the City Manager and the Rent Control Board that efforts be made to make the rate of the rent increase more predictable by tying the rate of the increase to costs actually incurred, and to work to produce a General Adjustment which does not produce major swings or jumps in the rate of increase or decrease from one year to the next.

*harassing
the landlord
to death*

TABLED BY COUNCILLOR MYERS.

COUNCILLOR CYR RECORDED IN THE NEGATIVE.



City of Cambridge

#6

26.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

VICE MAYOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR MYERS

*app. process
complicated
money minimal
V.A. loan*

Tenant tax neg. #78

WHEREAS: It is clear that the City of Cambridge must have a program and policies which support affordable rents and habitable living conditions; and

WHEREAS: It is further clear that the issue of habitability is in a sphere extending beyond traditional debate regarding affordable rents. It is therefore recommended that the City policy focus upon the long term serviceability of the affordable housing stock and use an integrated resource approach to achieve this goal; and

WHEREAS: As part of an integrated housing policy to assure affordability, preserve available housing, and spur new construction, it is the sense of this City Council that an Affordable Housing Preservation Fund be established for the purpose of providing loan and grant funds for rent controlled buildings which are "at risk" and which principally house low-income tenants; and

Loan programs

mutually exclusive

WHEREAS: The establishment of such a fund requires additional conceptualization with respect to its precise mechanics, the following framework is proposed for review and implementation by the Cambridge Rent Control Board, and final development and referral back to the City Council for final approval and the development of home rule legislation:

Tenant tax

1. Annual funding shall be in the amount of approximately one million dollars.
2. A surcharge, fee or other levy shall be paid by non-exempt rent control tenants based upon a percentage of monthly rent, and paid monthly to the landlord, along with the tenant's rent.
3. The percentage of rent which is to be charged shall be determined by the Rent Control Board based upon a review of the existing profiles of tenants per data available to the Rent Control Board, and other City agencies.
4. Exemptions are to be granted to those tenants whose ability to pay the fee is administratively determined to be limited. Proposed exemptions include: a) Those tenants living on fixed incomes, such as persons receiving public assistance, the elderly, and the disabled; b) In addition, it is proposed that exempt income classifications be developed for various family sizes.



City of Cambridge

28.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

VICE MAYOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR MYERS

*Strengthen
inspection efforts*

*Singing
this same
song
10 years
ago*

WHEREAS: The Cambridge City Council's Rent Control Sub-Committee was made aware that there are concerns and weaknesses with the City's current inspection efforts, especially highlighted by literal "sagas" which have followed the filing of an "Affidavit of Conditions," and evidence of lack of follow through on the inspection of housing units in the City; and

WHEREAS: The total reorganization of the City's current housing inspection efforts would appear to benefit both the administration of the City's efforts in this regard and those assigned inspection tasks by the various City departments; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommend to the City Manager that he develop a City Housing Department and include within its structure the City's current inspection efforts; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Manager focus upon inspection training initiatives, time management, comprehensive inspection forms, and re-vamped enforcement efforts as he devises the responsibilities of the newly initiated department to ensure consistency of inspections in efforts to provide for the decent living conditions of Cambridge residents.

City of Cambridge

JUN -5 PM 4:31
CAMBRIDGE MA.
- 2 -

4/22

ON THE CALENDAR

4. Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves expansion of the use of a pre-approval program for capital improvements.
5. *reg #78 V A loan tenants say*
Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: development of a mediation program by the Rent Control Dept.
6. *reg #78 step #3 & #4*
Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: creation of a Housing Access Office. *rent control can get*
7. *reg #78 compliance officer rent cont. board*
Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: compliance officer be a position within the Rent Control staff.
8. *#12*
Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: informational brochures highlighting the changes made to the rent control system.
9. Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: establishment of a revolving loan fund program.
10. Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: General Adjustment.
#4 play with words
11. Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: Community Reinvestment Act.
12. Order by Councillor Myers and Vice Mayor Reeves re: affiliate housing exemption.
13. Order by Vice Mayor Reeves and Councillor Myers re: limit rent increases to a maximum of 30%.



City of Cambridge

26.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

VICE MAYOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR MYERS

WHEREAS: It is clear that the City of Cambridge must have a program and policies which support affordable rents and habitable living conditions; and

WHEREAS: It is further clear that the issue of habitability is in a sphere extending beyond traditional debate regarding affordable rents. It is therefore recommended that the City policy focus upon the long term serviceability of the affordable housing stock and use an integrated resource approach to achieve this goal; and

WHEREAS: As part of an integrated housing policy to assure affordability, preserve available housing, and spur new construction, it is the sense of this City Council that an Affordable Housing Preservation Fund be established for the purpose of providing loan and grant funds for rent controlled buildings which are "at risk" and which principally house low-income tenants; and

WHEREAS: The establishment of such a fund requires additional conceptualization with respect to its precise mechanics, the following framework is proposed for review and implementation by the Cambridge Rent Control Board, and final development and referral back to the City Council for final approval and the development of home rule legislation:

1. Annual funding shall be in the amount of approximately one million dollars.
2. A surcharge, fee or other levy shall be paid by non-exempt rent control tenants based upon a percentage of monthly rent, and paid monthly to the landlord, along with the tenant's rent.
3. The percentage of rent which is to be charged shall be determined by the Rent Control Board based upon a review of the existing profiles of tenants per data available to the Rent Control Board, and other City agencies.
4. Exemptions are to be granted to those tenants whose ability to pay the fee is administratively determined to be limited. Proposed exemptions include: a) Those tenants living on fixed incomes, such as persons receiving public assistance, the elderly, and the disabled; b) In addition, it is proposed that exempt income classifications be developed for various family sizes.
5. It is proposed that any model adopted by the Rent Control Board be one which



City of Cambridge

25.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

VICE MAYOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR MYERS

WHEREAS: City policy should strongly support efforts to rehabilitate and improve rent controlled buildings; and

WHEREAS: The affordability of various improvements is a significant issue of existing tenants are not to be displaced due to their inability to pay significant increase as they are allowed; and

WHEREAS: A number of institutional and commercial landlords are able to sustain a sequence of increases which when combined with general adjustments can nearly double rents; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: It is the recommendation of this City Council to both the City Manager and the Rent Control Board that a policy be adopted which limits rent increases from any and all sources to a maximum of 30% over any two year period.



City of Cambridge

24.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

Recovery Illegal unit

WHEREAS: There currently exists a loophole in the Rent Control Act which allows for exemptions due to affiliate housing status; and

WHEREAS: This exemption has led to a loss in the number of rent controlled units; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That an amendment to the Removal Ordinance be drafted that closes the affiliate housing exemption to prevent conversion of rent controlled units.



City of Cambridge

19.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

WHEREAS: The City Council has recommended the creation of a city revolving loan fund; and

WHEREAS: This fund will be of great benefit to landlords in their efforts to repair and restore their buildings; and

WHEREAS: The rehabilitation of the city's housing stock is in everyone's mutual interest; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council request that the City Manager bring together a consortium of the leading bankers in the city, particularly those with which the city does business, and other banks with a commitment to the Community Reinvestment Act, along with members of the City Council, and representatives from the major universities to discuss leading practices which will help city housing efforts; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council calls upon members of the Cambridge banking community to join in a partnership with the city to play a role in the maintenance and restoration of the city's housing stock.

1000 000 £ per annum

Landlord's No rent return



City of Cambridge

18.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 8, 1991

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

GA

WHEREAS: A General Adjustment that is reasonable, fair, and predictable would be beneficial to landlords and tenants alike; and

WHEREAS: Concern has been raised with recent General Adjustments that the timing of the General Adjustments are unknown and the amount of the rent increases can vary widely; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommend to the City Manager and the Rent Control Board that Rent Control Board takes steps to ensure that the General Adjustment is more predictable and less erratic in its impact on tenants; and be it further

RESOLVED: That to accomplish the goals of a more predictable and livable General Adjustment the City Council recommends that the Rent Control Board begin to schedule the General Adjustment at regular annual points in the year; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommends to the City Manager and the Rent Control Board that efforts be made to make the rate of the rent increase more predictable by tying the rate of the increase to costs actually incurred, and to work to produce a General Adjustment which does not produce major swings or jumps in the rate of increase or decrease from one year to the next.



City of Cambridge

12.

IN CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MYERS
VICE MAYOR REEVES

WHEREAS: There will be substantial benefit to the rent control system, landlord and tenant alike to establish and emphasize an approval system for capital improvements which is predictable, efficient, and non-controversial; and

WHEREAS: It is in the best interest of all parties to bring parties together and not apart; and

WHEREAS: Within current rent control laws there is a regulation which encourages the use of a pre-approval process; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Cambridge City Council recommend that the Rent Control Board develop mechanisms which strongly recommend the expansion of the use of a pre-approval program for capital improvements; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the program should ensure that the following measures are met including, 1) landlord and tenant agreement; 2) a rent control staff person who is assigned to facilitate the process, including ensuring that there is agreement on the scope of work, and letting both parties know what the new rent will be; 3) a complete inspection after the work is completed by the rent control staff person to assure that the work is done before any rent increase is granted; and, 4) repairs undertaken to bring the unit up to code; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council recommends to the Rent Control Board that a process be clearly outlined and determined which will allow tenants living in substandard conditions or desiring certain repairs to initiate the pre-approval process. In these cases a rent control staff person would be assigned to facilitate collaboration between the tenant and the landlord in these type of cases; and be it further

RESOLVED: That it be noted that such a program is voluntary for both landlord and tenant, but may serve as a substantial benefit to each in making the rent adjustment process less time-consuming and more predictable.

10.S-770
CONSENT COMMUNICATIONS

Communication received from Charles Christenson relative to the issue of rent control in the City.

In City Council,

June 10, 1991

Placed on file