



City of Cambridge

CR #4

IN CITY COUNCIL

August 3, 1992

COUNCILLOR MYERS
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY
COUNCILLOR WALSH

- WHEREAS: The problem of the deterioration of the Housing stock in the rent controlled buildings with the lowest rent structure in the City has been commonly acknowledged as one of the most serious conditions relating to the City's capacity to provide safe and affordable housing; and
- WHEREAS: A major part of the problem is defined by a combination of very low rents, unsafe living conditions and a lack of attention or resources to make the necessary repairs to the building; and
- WHEREAS: Current rent control records indicate that there are approximately 300 units in the City which are not rooming house units or owner occupied units where the rent is less than \$200/month; and
- WHEREAS: The Rent Control Department's Field Study on Low Rents has indicated that many of these units are in very serious condition with a serious need for repair. This information is borne out by the experience of rehab specialists such as CDD, HRI and Just-A-Start who are involved in doing housing rehab in the City; and
- WHEREAS: This situation calls out for an immediate response on the part of the City to improve the living conditions in these units for the benefit of the tenants, landlords and the housing itself; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That the City Council establish as a real priority the survey and rehabilitation of these 300 units which are those with the lowest rents in the City and seriously deteriorated living conditions and that a major piece in city housing policy be geared to the restoration of the housing which is in need of repair; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council call for the development of a comprehensive program which addresses the need for rehabilitation and that this policy be set forth as articulated by the Rent Control Committee in consultation with other committees and in coordination with the City Manager and the Housing Cabinet; and be it further

RESOLVED: That a key component of this program will be affordable financing to make this approach work and that the Chair and members of the Rent Control Committee, in conjunction with the Mayor and the City Manager, work to establish a dialogue with members of the banking community for the purposes of presentation and to request their involvement to assist in addressing this housing issue in the City of Cambridge; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council request the City Manager and the Housing Cabinet to develop a program which addresses needs in the following areas:

1. A full report on the number of units by address, area and owner in this category.
2. An approach to survey these units aimed to work with owners to assess the condition of these units and to establish minimum standards for acceptable level of repair for these units.
3. Technical support aimed to outreach and work with owners to guide them through the process.
4. A pre-approval process involving a rehab specialist, the tenant and the landlord to attempt to agree on the projected work and the rent increase. If no agreement can be reached, a clear and efficient process for the rent increase must be established for units in this category.
5. A process aimed to preserve the affordability of these units; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council calls on the City Manager to return back to the City Council with the outline for such a program by the end of October of 1992.

In City Council August 3, 1992.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, Temporary City Clerk.

A true copy; *D. Margaret Drury*

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury
Temporary City Clerk

Order proposed by M. Turk
Become part of
Committee report

Draft Working Order for Discussion

by City Council Rent Control Committee

WHEREAS: The City of Cambridge requires sensible, adequately funded programs which will help to maintain rental housing in habitable condition; and

WHEREAS: The need for such programs may be especially acute where units are found to be significantly deteriorated and where the landlord demonstrates a lack of resources to make the necessary repairs; and

WHEREAS: Such programs must be based on good data, must be effective, must be easy to use by the landlords who need them when they need them, and must, where the rental housing is under rent control, achieve affordability consistent with the Cambridge Rent Control Act; and

WHEREAS: Cambridge banks and banks with branches in Cambridge have an important role to play in such programs, in assisting landlords with financing, and in assuring that rental housing in Cambridge does not deteriorate simply due to a banking impediment to a credit-worthy landlord's ability to secure, when necessary, funding for capital improvements, repairs and maintenance of his/her rental housing; now therefore be it

ORDERED: That the city manager be and hereby is requested to have the Cambridge Rent Control Board provide, within two weeks of this order or sooner if practical, a computer-generated printout showing the owner, address, number of units in the building, rent, and rent adjustment history -- or, if that history is not in the computer database, the General Adjustment class -- for rent-controlled each unit, not including rooming house units, with a current rent of \$200 or less; and be it further

ORDERED: That the city manager be and hereby is requested to ensure that this computer listing from the Cambridge Rent Control Board is provided in timely fashion to the chair of the City Council Committee on Rent Control and, after screening by the Council Rent Control Committee, is forwarded to the Inspectional Services Department (ISD), and that the ISD be requested to provide, within three weeks after receipt, or sooner if practical, a report of all Housing and Sanitary Code

Draft Order

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citations, for which the ISD has records in at least the past three years, for each unit on said edited computer listing; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the Chair and members of the Rent control Committee and the city manager work with local banks to determine and secure the means for better access to bank financing from local lending institutions for landlords who need such financing to maintain and repair their rental housing; and be it further

RESOLVED: That when the data are available from the Rent Control Board and from the ISD and when the views of local banks on lending to repair rental property have been solicited, the Rent Control Committee shall convene a meeting of representatives of the interested groups -- tenants, landlords, banks, city officials -- to hammer out guidelines for a good and workable program to assist landlords, who need financing, with the repair and maintenance of their rental housing.

COUNCILLOR MYERS
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY
COUNCILLOR WALSH

- WHEREAS: The problem of the deterioration of the Housing stock in the rent controlled buildings with the lowest rent structure in the City has been commonly acknowledged as one of the most serious conditions relating to the City's capacity to provide safe and affordable housing; and
- WHEREAS: A major part of the problem is defined by a combination of very low rents, unsafe living conditions and a lack of attention or resources to make the necessary repairs to the building; and
- WHEREAS: Current rent control records indicate that there are approximately 300 units in the City which are not rooming house units or owner occupied units where the rent is less than \$200/month; and
- WHEREAS: The Rent Control Department's Field Study on Low Rents has indicated that many of these units are in very serious condition with a serious need for repair. This information is borne out by the experience of rehab specialists such as CDD, HRI and Just-A-Start who are involved in doing housing rehab in the City; and
- WHEREAS: This situation calls out for an immediate response on the part of the City to improve the living conditions in these units for the benefit of the tenants, landlords and the housing itself; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That the City Council establish as a real priority the survey and rehabilitation of these 300 units which are those with the lowest rents in the City and seriously deteriorated living conditions and that a major piece in city housing policy be geared to the restoration of the housing which is in need of repair; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the City Council call for the development of a comprehensive program which addresses the need for rehabilitation and that this policy be set forth as articulated by the Rent Control Committee in consultation with other committees and in coordination with the City Manager and the Housing Cabinet; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That a key component of this program will be affordable financing to make this approach work and that the Chair and members of the Rent Control Committee, in conjunction with the Mayor and the City Manager, work to establish a dialogue with members of the banking community for the purposes of presentation and to request their involvement to assist in addressing this housing issue in the City of Cambridge; and be it further

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5. A process aimed to preserve the affordability of these units; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council calls on the City Manger to return back to the City Council with the outline for such a program by the end of October of 1992.

City of Cambridge

The Rent Control Committee conducted a public hearing on Thursday, June 25, 1992 beginning at 5:55 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber, City Hall.

Councillor Jonathan S. Myers, Chair of the above referenced Committee, convened the hearing and stated that the purpose of this date's proceedings was to consider and discuss a resolution to be transmitted to the City Council and the City Manager calling for the development of a comprehensive program to address the rehabilitation of the 300 units that have been identified with the lowest rents in the City of Cambridge. Present at the hearing were: Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr., Councillor Sheila T. Russell, Councillor William H. Walsh and Deputy City Clerk John E. Flynn.

Councillor Myers, in beginning the discussions, noted that the proceedings were being cablecast live over Municipal Channel 37 and presented a brief summary of the issues at hand regarding these 300 units. The Chair further stated his desire to develop and build a consensus within the committee framework to address the issue of rehabilitation and would work closely with tenants and property owners throughout the process. He also stated that the process would also include the financial and banking community.

At this time Councillor Myers requested Deputy City Clerk Flynn to read into the record and order sponsored by the Chair and late co-sponsored by Councillors Toomey and Walsh regarding the development of a comprehensive program in this area. (A copy of the Order is attached).

Upon completion of the reading of the Order, Councillor Toomey was recognized for his comments. He called the Order an important one and characterized it as an attempt to reach-out to all the affected parties and he expressed the hope that all will benefit through this program.

At this time City Manager Robert W. Healy offered his comments to the Committee regarding the content of the Order. He stated that at the joint City Council/Affordable Housing Trust meeting of June 25, 1992 he outlined the dilemmas facing the City due to limited resources. He stated that the Order outlines the goals and provides for a framework. He further stated that financing will be difficult and expressed the hope that the federal government would return to this area. He also stated his desire to work with the Committee in achieving its stated policy goals.

At this time Councillor Myers opened the floor for public comment on the Order.

Mr. Michael Turk, 24 Prescott Street, Co-Chair, Cambridge Tenants Union, stated that the Order contained a good positive goal regarding the banking community but it also contained several areas that are problematic:

- 1.) Information regarding the 300 units not clear what the conditions are or in what tracking system was:
 - a.) Owners that lack resources; or
 - b.) neglected properties.
- 2.) Field study - ascertain the number of units not up to code; and
- 3.) Time line could be tight. He further stated that the goal embodied in the Order needed to reframe the conceptualization of the Order.

Ms. Denise Jillson, 5 Chester Street, Co-Chair, Small Property Owners Association, read a prepared statement into the record. (A copy of which is attached).

Councillor Myers, in response to Ms. Jillson's statement, stated that he understood her frustration and that the City Council is working towards a comprehensive package regarding a rehabilitation program. He also stated that everyone is free to participate in the workings of this Committee or not to participate.

Ms. Aline Sullivan, 287 Huron Avenue, stated that her apartment does not fit into this Order. She outlined to the Committee the long period of time (June 1987 - February 1989) she had to wait for a rent adjustment for improvements made to the apartment.

Councillor Myers in response stated that the Committee is trying to address the issues and is trying to get a plan of action in place to benefit both owner and tenant.

Mr. Skip Schloming, 102 Inman Street, stated to the Committee that the survey is an extreme waste of money and that the City needs to begin a dialogue. He questioned why the focus is being placed on these 300 units and what about the 1,000 units at \$225.00 per month. He also stated that he favored a Study Committee to look at six specific cases regarding the conditions of the units to see if there is an area of agreement regarding facts versus images. He also spoke critically of the recently enacted amendment to the Cambridge Municipal Code in Chapter 8.60 entitled Enforcement of State Sanitary Code.

Mr. Charles Christensen stated his criticism of the Order.

Ms. Lenore Schloming, 102R Inman Street, stated that for owners of rent controlled properties to participate that positive incentives be included.

Mr. William Noble, 188 Franklin Street, Cambridge Tenants Union, stated that fundamental agreement exists between the CTU and SPOA and that it is taking too long. He also stated that a dialogue was needed and that he was puzzled why the Order focused on the rehabilitation of units. He also noted that the Survey would face access problems and that the CTU has expressed concern with the Executive Director of Rent Control sitting on the City Manager's Housing Cabinet.

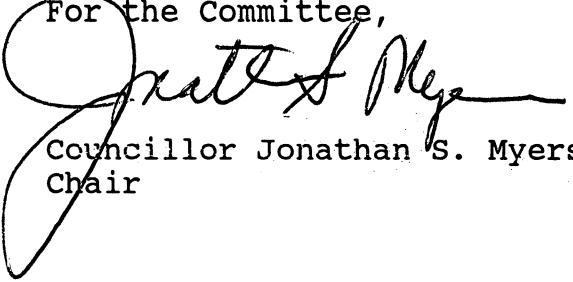
Councillor Walsh stated his willingness to work with the Committee Chair in the future and expressed his support of the proposed order and called it a beginning.

Councillor Myers then moved the Question and the adoption of the Order.

On a voice vote, the Order was adopted by the affirmative vote of three members.

The hearing was adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

For the Committee,


Councillor Jonathan S. Myers
Chair

Rent Control Committee Report for a hearing held on Thursday, June 25, 1992 relative a resolution calling for the development of a comprehensive program to address the rehabilitation of the 300 units that have been identified with the lowest rents in the city.

In City Council,

Aug. 3, 1992

Report Accepted.
Order Adopted.