

11 Ware Street  
Apartment 19  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
February 21, 2013

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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Cambridge City Council  
City Hall  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
  
c/o Cambridge City Clerk

To the Honorable; the City Council:

I would like to draw the attention of the City Council to a significant and dramatic loss of rental housing in Harvard Square and the adjacent neighborhood of Mid-Cambridge as a result of Harvard University's plans to renovate its undergraduate Houses.

In 2011 Harvard appropriated three residential buildings it owns in Harvard Square for use as "swing space" for undergraduates displaced by the renovation work. 8 Plympton Street, 1306 Massachusetts Avenue, and 65 Mt. Auburn Street account for over 130 apartments. In November 2012 tenants at 20-20A Prescott Street and 22-24 Prescott Street were notified that their apartments were going 'off-line' and would be closed as of January 31, 2014, again to accommodate displaced undergraduates. (See Exhibit A.) These two buildings account for an additional 80 apartments.

Many of the current residents of these buildings are Harvard graduate students, but there are also a substantial number of older, long-term tenants for whom these apartments constitute their permanent home. As for this latter group of residents, it is important to note that those living in the Prescott Street/Ware Street area were assured of their right to remain in their apartments in an agreement reached between the City of Cambridge and Harvard University in 1996.

At the same time, all of those displaced from the buildings that are or will be closed, including Harvard's graduate students, have been or will be compelled to seek housing elsewhere, most likely in Cambridge, further squeezing the city's rental housing market and thus potentially creating further upward pressure on rents in the city.

Harvard's failure to communicate and evident lack of transparency have only complicated matters further. Harvard's 2012 Town-Gown Report provides ample detail about the plans to renovate the Harvard Houses, including a discussion of the problems facing

displaced undergraduates, but makes no mention whatsoever of the fact that Harvard has already closed the three apartment buildings listed above—and is the process of closing two other ones. An outside observer, I suspect, might well see the closing of such buildings and displacement of their residents as one of the most pertinent aspects of the renovation from the perspective of town-gown relations. Moreover, tenants in the affected buildings, as noted above, learned about Harvard's plans only as a fait accompli. At the meeting on the town-gown reports held on February 5, 2013, I was able to bring this serious omission to the attention of the Cambridge Planning Board.

### Significant Inconsistencies

Furthermore, Harvard's public statements about the renovations and the use of "swing space" present significant inconsistencies. On July 12, 2012, the Harvard Crimson reported that two of Harvard's top administrators, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Michael D. Smith and Dean of the College Evelyn M. Hammonds had announced that "Dunster House will be the first full House to be renovated . . . during the 2014-2015 academic year."

The article then goes on to state:

"During this time, Dunster House residents will be housed at 1201 Mass. Ave., a University-owned building that current houses the Inn at Harvard, and three University-owned apartment buildings in the Square [i.e., 8 Plympton St., 1306 Mass. Ave., and 65 Mt. Auburn St.]"

Later on the article notes:

"During the 2015-2016 academic year, Hammonds and Smith announced, administrators will pause to assess their progress before moving on to the renewal of the next House in 2016-2017." (See Exhibit B.)

Yet, little more than four months later, tenants at 20-20A Prescott Street and 22-24 Prescott Street were told that their building would close at the end of January 2014. If Deans Smith and Hammonds were correct, what then is the actual purpose in closing the Prescott Street buildings?

Moreover, at the town-gown meeting on February 5<sup>th</sup> the representative from Harvard Planning and Project Management stated that Harvard had already explored all alternatives and found that their plan built around the conversion of the Inn at Harvard into a 'swing house' had been deemed "the most effective". What, then, is the point of taking a full year in 2015-2016 to "assess" how the plan in working, as the deans had announced last July?

### Conditions of the 1996 Agreement

There are other matters of concern raised by Harvard's renovation plan in relation to the 1996 agreement. In his remarks at the town-gown meeting, Thomas Lucey, Harvard's Director of Government Relations, stated that Harvard was "very proud" of its 1996 agreement with the City of Cambridge, and that long-term tenants residing in any of the affected residential properties would be fully protected as they were being relocated to other Harvard properties. Among other considerations he indicated that they would be protected by continuing to pay "the same rent" and would be assisted in their moving expenses. To date, though, it appears that some long-term tenants who have been compelled to relocate by Harvard have also been compelled to pay substantially higher rents. There have also been on occasion difficulties associated with moving assistance.

Mr. Lucey intimated that the affiliates living in the affected buildings were essentially transient, so that their search for alternate housing space was not especially concerning, but the overall reduction in the number of available housing units in the city, especially in Harvard Square area, evokes all the problems attendant upon a real-life version of the game of musical chairs.

Moreover, if one looks more closely at the documents surrounding the 1996 agreement, the maintenance of the Prescott/Ware Streets area as part of a neighborhood was paramount, raising a substantial bar—it would appear—to even the temporary use of residential buildings on those streets as dormitories, which is now evident in the 'swing space' plan underway.

In a letter dated June 6, 1996, Kathy Spiegelman, then Associate Vice President for Planning and Real Estate at Harvard, made the following representation to Councilor Francis Duehay:

"In the Prescott/Ware area, we will market units to faculty, staff, and to students of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, who typically stay at Harvard for 7 to 10 years. These longer-term affiliates are more appropriately housed in a neighborhood setting and are most likely to benefit from and contribute to a stable community." (See Exhibit C.)

### Pressing Questions

In light of all this, I would respectfully request that the Cambridge City Council hold a public hearing to establish the full scope of Harvard's plans and their implications for the city.

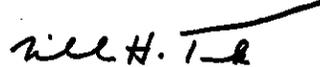
Among the questions that I believe ought to be taken up are the following:

- (1) For how long will these apartment buildings be used as 'swing space'?
- (2) Will others be appropriated for such use as well? Does Harvard intend to transform such buildings into dormitories after the renovations are completed?

- (3) What is the full scope of the protections for long-term residents to retain their homes?
- (4) What is the current and likely future impact of the loss of these apartments on the rental housing market in the city?
- (5) Might Harvard enter into discussions with the City of Cambridge about alternatives to the current plans along which they are proceeding?

These are matters of some urgency. The tenants at 20-20A Prescott Street and 22-24 Prescott Street are in the process of planning to move out of their apartments. Thus, I hope the City Council will act upon my request expeditiously.

Respectfully submitted,

Handwritten signature of Michael Turk in black ink, consisting of a stylized cursive 'M' followed by 'H. Turk'.

Michael Turk

cc: Brian Murphy, Asst. City Manager for Community Development  
Thomas Lucey, Director of Government Relations, Harvard University  
Katherine Lapp, Executive Vice President, Harvard University/  
President, Harvard Real Estate  
Hugh Russell, Chair, Cambridge Planning Board



## HARVARD UNIVERSITY HOUSING

**TO:** Residents of 20-20A Prescott Street and 22-24 Prescott Street  
**FROM:** Harvard University Housing  
**SUBJECT:** Lease renewals beyond 1/31/2014  
**DATE:** November 29, 2012

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We are writing to inform you that 20-20A Prescott Street and 22-24 Prescott Street will be taken off-line on February 1, 2014. We are unable, therefore, to renew current leases in 20-20A and 22-24 Prescott Street beyond 1/31/2014.

As you may be aware, Harvard University has begun a comprehensive renewal project for the University's twelve undergraduate Houses. The project is described in more detail in the attached sheet and more information can be found on [www.osl.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.osl.fas.harvard.edu).

The House renewal project will require housing for undergraduates displaced during renovations at several buildings in Harvard Square, including 20-20A and 22-24 Prescott Street.

To assist your planning, we wanted to let you know in advance of the spring 2013 lease renewal period that if you request a lease extension for your current apartment, all leases in these buildings must end on 1/31/2014 and cannot be extended beyond this date. We ask that you take this into consideration during the upcoming renewal period and recognize that these buildings must be vacated prior to 2/1/2014.

If you would like to continue to rent from Harvard University Housing, we would be pleased to work with you to identify other housing options within the Harvard University Housing portfolio. Providing that you meet all eligibility requirements, Harvard University Housing Leasing Coordinators will work with you to find alternative comparable housing within the portfolio to the extent available. As you know, unit availability will in most cases not be finalized until the lease renewal season commencing in March. We strongly encourage you to contact us as soon as possible so we can work with you to identify alternative apartments and ensure that you have an opportunity to consider any units that may become available in the interim. Working with you as early as possible will increase our ability to identify desirable alternatives. If you have any questions please contact Susie Recinos at 617-495-1051 or email [susie\\_recinos@harvard.edu](mailto:susie_recinos@harvard.edu). Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Harvard University Housing

## House Renewal

House Renewal is a long-term initiative to renovate, programmatically and physically, Harvard's residential Houses. Renewal of the Houses is a cornerstone of the University's overall effort to closely examine, renew, and reinvest in the Harvard undergraduate experience. In April 2008, the University announced the beginning of the planning stages of House Renewal, anticipating that the entire process will stretch a decade or more. Harvard's ambitious plans to renew the residential Houses will happen in three stages: planning and program review, design and development, and construction and renovation.

In 1929, President Lowell envisioned a House system that would serve students of different backgrounds, resulting in learning that extended beyond the classroom. Indeed, that core mission continues in today's Houses. Many of the Houses are nearly 80 years old, and understandably their original infrastructure is deteriorating. Further, the Houses were built at a time when building standards and the needs of the student body were different. In recognition of these realities, a comprehensive physical assessment of the House system was completed over a year ago. The study's findings indicated that, while the Houses have been well-maintained over the years, the buildings require renovation.

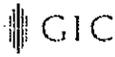
With the opportunity created by the need for this impending renovation, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Michael D. Smith created the House Program Planning Committee (HPPC), whose charge it was to examine all aspects of an "ideal" House and present recommendations for renewing House life so that it continues to meet the needs of future generations of Harvard students. HPPC members assessed and discussed academic, social, and residential needs. The committee's findings can be accessed in the "Report on Harvard House Renewal" section below.

For more information on House Renewal, please visit the Houses at Harvard College webpage at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/home/content/houses-harvard-college>.

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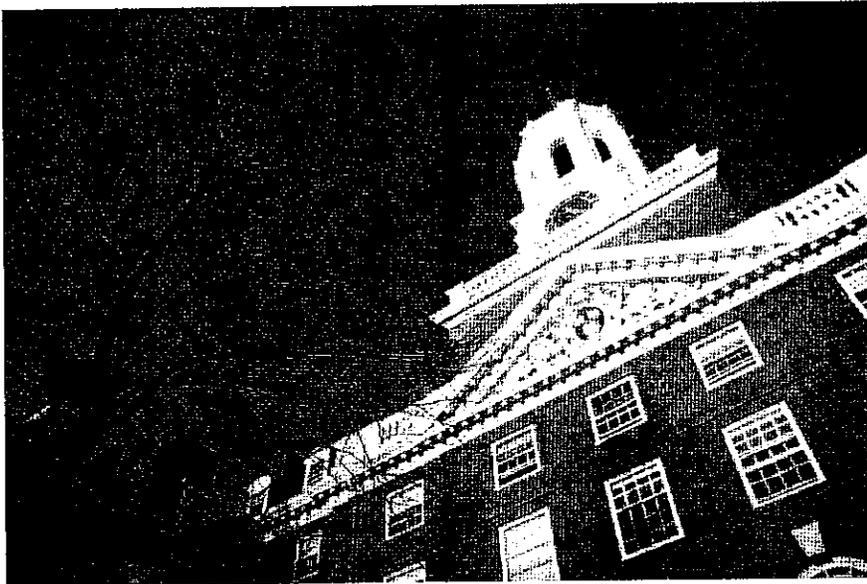
# Dunster House To Be Renewed in 2014-2015

## The Inn at Harvard Will Serve as Swing House

By REBECCA D. ROBBINS, CRIMSON STAFF WRITER  
Published: Thursday, July 12, 2012

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KEREN E. ROHE

Dunster House will be the first full House to be renovated as part of the University's House Renewal project during the 2014-2015 academic year, Harvard administrators announced on Thursday.

During this time, Dunster House residents will be housed at 1201 Mass. Ave, a University-owned building that currently houses the Inn at Harvard, and three University-owned apartment buildings in the Square.

Dunster will be the third dormitory to be renovated as part of the project, following Quincy House's Old Quincy, which is currently under construction, and Leverett House's McKimlock Hall, which will be renewed in the 2013-2014 school year.

The announcement marks a step in the University's transition out of the "test" phase of the project—in which individual buildings will be renovated—toward a more ambitious plan to fully renovate all 12 undergraduate Houses, a program that administrators estimate will cost between \$1 billion and \$1.3 billion.

"It is time to move ahead with plans to renew a full House," Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Michael D. Smith said in a statement. "Dunster House is one of the smallest and oldest neo-Georgian river Houses, which makes it the perfect candidate to be first for renewal."

To prepare 1201 Mass. Ave. to serve as a central hub for students displaced by House Renewal, administrators will close the Inn at Harvard by July 2013 and alter the building to install a dining hall, beds, and social spaces, according to Smith and Dean of the College Evelyn M. Hammonds. The Inn at Harvard building will serve as swing space, or temporary housing, for all future House renewal projects, Hammonds and Smith said.

### MOST READ

1. With Investigation Complete, Harvard Plans a Cheating Scandal Announcement
2. 'The End of Courtship' at Harvard?
3. Those 'Happy Homos'
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Residents of Quincy and Leverett displaced by construction on their Houses live in apartment buildings at Hampden Hall at 8 Plympton St., Fairfax Hall at 1306 Mass. Ave., and Ridgely Hall at 65 Mt. Auburn St. during the 2012-2013 and the 2013-2014 academic year, respectively. These same apartment buildings will house some Dunster residents during the 2014-2015 school year.

Renovations will begin on Dunster in June 2014 and will continue throughout the following academic year, with an eye toward reopening the House at the start of the next school year.

“We’re very pleased that Dunster will be the first full House to be renewed,” Dunster House Master Roger B. Porter said in a statement. “This is an exciting development for all of us who love Dunster and want it to remain a vibrant place for students to live and learn for decades to come.”

During the 2015-2016 academic year, Harmons and Smith announced, administrators will pause the project to assess their progress before moving on to the renewal of the next House in 2016-2017.

—Staff writer Rebecca D. Robbins can be reached at [rrobbins@college.harvard.edu](mailto:rrobbins@college.harvard.edu).

**TAGS** House Life, College Administration, House Renewal

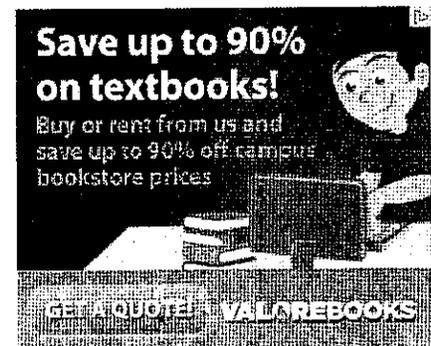
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## HARVARD PLANNING AND REAL ESTATE

June 6, 1996

Councilor Francis Duehay  
City of Cambridge  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Councilor Duehay,

Attached is the information you requested about Harvard's affiliates and the University's plans for housing them in its formerly rent-controlled buildings. The information that we have provided includes:

- Material summarizing Harvard's affordable housing package.
- Data describing the population currently residing in Harvard's affiliate housing as compared to the population expected to locate in the Prescott/Ware area.
- Responses to a variety of issues which have been raised regarding Harvard's plans for housing its affiliates.

As we have discussed in the past, Harvard believes that a portion of its formerly rent-controlled units can be used to accommodate Harvard affiliates in a manner that responds to neighborhood concerns about community stability and diversity. Under the housing proposal submitted to Council on May 16, the units that will eventually change to affiliate use are only about half of Harvard's formerly rent controlled portfolio, and this change will take effect gradually over many years.

Affiliates who will be accommodated within the Prescott/Ware area comprise a very different population than those now served by the majority of Harvard's existing affiliate housing, which is largely designed for and limited to students, and which primarily serves the schools with shorter programs. In the Prescott/Ware area, we will market units to faculty, staff, and to students of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, who typically stay at Harvard for 7 to 10 years. These longer-term affiliates are more appropriately housed in a neighborhood setting and are most likely to benefit from and contribute to a stable community.

We hope that this information will be useful in your consideration of our affordable housing proposal.

Sincerely,

Kathy Spiegelman  
Associate Vice President for Planning and Real Estate

Enclosures

cc: Members of the Housing and Community Development Committee of the City Council