

**OPENING REMARKS: December 17, 2014 Housing Committee Meeting**

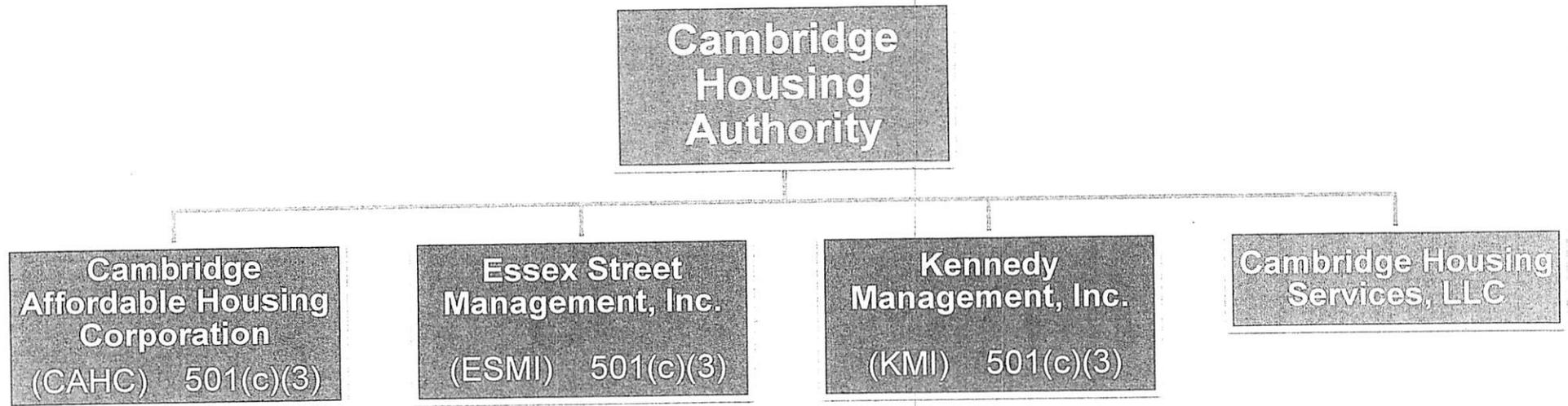
Attachment A

Good afternoon. We have a very tight schedule today, so I want to get right down to business in thanking the CHA administrators, and all of you, for coming to this meeting. The Housing Committee has been holding a series of meetings this year to help us all get a better sense of the affordable housing issues facing the City, and to help the City Council ultimately create responsive policies to these issues. Today, we are hearing from the largest provider of public housing, the Cambridge Housing Authority. I want to note up-front that the CHA administrators had a previously scheduled meeting at 6 pm today, so they will be forced to exit this meeting before we conclude – but I hope to schedule a follow-up meeting in January, and we will make every effort to publicize that meeting ahead of time.

This year, there have been many rumors circulating around developments with the CHA, and my office – and those of my colleagues – has been receiving MANY panicked phone calls from CHA residents and applicants, worried that they'll either lose their housing, or that they'll never reach the top of the waiting lists and be housed. So some of the most important questions I'm hoping we can answer today are: what is happening, in layman's terms, with the CHA's housing stock? How many current residents will be impacted by any upcoming changes, and HOW? How will people on the waiting lists be impacted by these changes? What will we all do, TOGETHER, to assist those who come to us desperately seeking affordable housing in a timely manner, in 2015 and beyond?

I have posed a series of more specific questions to the CHA that I'm hoping we can touch on today, and anything we do not get to, we will hold that follow-up meeting. But the questions I just listed are, I think, the most fundamental questions on peoples' minds, and certainly on MY mind. With that, I will ask Greg Russ, Executive Director of the CHA, to open his remarks.

# CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY AND AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS



Owns: 84 Units

26 Condo units  
6 Ashton Place - 6 units  
217 Western Ave. - 6 units  
195 Prospect St. - 20 units  
78-80 Porter Road - 26 units

*Acts as mgr./developer of:*  
New Temple Place, LLC - 40 units  
New Temple Place Manager, LLC

CAHC YWCA, LLC  
Friendly entity for historic Y  
(Non-managing member of CYW  
Properties, LLC)

Owns: 22 Units

14 Condo units  
22 Lopez Avenue - 8 units

*Acts as mgr./developer of:*  
Cambridge Affordable Presidential  
Apt, LLC - 115 units  
Presidential Manager, LLC

Lyndon B. Johnson Apts., LLC - 177  
units  
Lyndon B. Johnson Manager, LLC

*Special Member of (during const):*  
New Temple Place, LLC

*Acts as manager of:*

Lancaster St. Apartments, LLC - 65 units  
JFK Apartments, LLC - 69 units

**Summaries of Questions and Comments From Attendees of the Tenant Town Meeting  
held October 21, 2014**

**DEFINITIONS**

- What is the difference between federal and state affordable housing? Which properties in Cambridge fall under these different categories?
- Many of us are confused over what project-based vouchers are – what does that term mean?
- We never get definitions of the various terms, of which buildings may be sold, of what RAD and 40T mean. For many elderly people, these terms can be confusing and it is alarming to hear them all tossed into conversation. Why can't the housing agencies explain things in clear English?

**CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY**

- Who can explain the regulations for mobile vouchers, and who makes these decisions?
- Please explain what oversight exists for the Cambridge Housing Authority. Who is in charge, who can people complain to if we see problems with how the CHA operates or treats residents?
- It feels like the CHA just wants to get rid of us.
- The CHA needs to respect its tenants and its workers.
- The CHA has had issues with its emergency night crews being under-staffed, and the emergency night dispatch services needs improvement.
- Who sets the guidelines, policies, and practices of the CHA?
- We all appreciate that the City Council doesn't have authority over the CHA – and if that's the case, then what *can* the Council do to help with issues with the CHA?
- The housing agencies should be more social and more honest with their tenants. Many of us feel like we are talked down to, or like our opinions do not matter. When we had to sign the new leases, we weren't allowed to take them home and study them first – we were forced to sign first, and ask questions later.
- Who is in charge of disseminating information to the tenants?

**RENT INCREASES AND GENTRIFICATION**

- It seems like increasing the hi-tech feel of Cambridge, and inviting in all the companies to Kendall Square, has forced up the rent across the city. Rents are increasing too much, too fast. Seniors are being driven out of our city.
- We cannot separate job development from the housing – if we bring in hundreds of new scientists who earn top dollar, then it stands to reason that this will impact rental prices. If you don't control rent prices, then we are talking about a city in retreat.
- Affordable housing is disappearing, and it ties into gentrification. Cambridge turning into a biotech-hub has led to mega-corporations hiking up the value of rentals in this area, beyond what the market could bear. Rent control could be put into effect almost immediately. If Cambridge pressed the State Legislature to put a regional rent freeze into place, this could have a huge impact.

## **INCLUSIONARY ZONING AND UNITS**

- **Inclusionary Zoning Question:** are these units intended for Section 8 tenants, or for “moderate income” people? There are rumors that CDD wants to focus on the middle income bracket. Also, the CHA mistreats voucher tenants. When you are going in for recertification, etc, there needs to be more dignity and respect shown to people, rather than a resentful and condescending attitude.
- Inclusionary policies should be changed to compel better units, better public computers, etc.
- There is a severe lack of addressing the needs of inclusionary zoning tenants – they aren’t near affordable grocery stores, there are not enough computer rooms, the community rooms are cramped, and there is a sense of isolation – especially near Kendall.

## **GENERAL AND UNCATEGORIZED COMMENTS**

- Change the laws so that hoarding is recognized as a mental illness, rather than treated as a crime.
- We should note that immigrant households will have greater difficulty finding housing under HUD’s new guidelines. The City Council should examine this, especially since Cambridge is a sanctuary city.
- It is frustrating that there is a lack of networking, information distribution, and broadcasting of upcoming city meetings. What are people supposed to do if they are not online?
- Rent Control is needed again!
- Condo Conversion Law is something that the City Council should strengthen.
- We need MORE affordable housing, period.
- Everybody needs to keep their areas clean. The housing agencies AND the tenants need to take responsibility.
- What is going to happen to the George Close Building?
- Why do we call it “affordable” housing when it isn’t truly affordable?
- Having a safe, affordable roof over your head isn’t a privilege – it is a right!
- What are there no housing co-ops? This seems feasible.